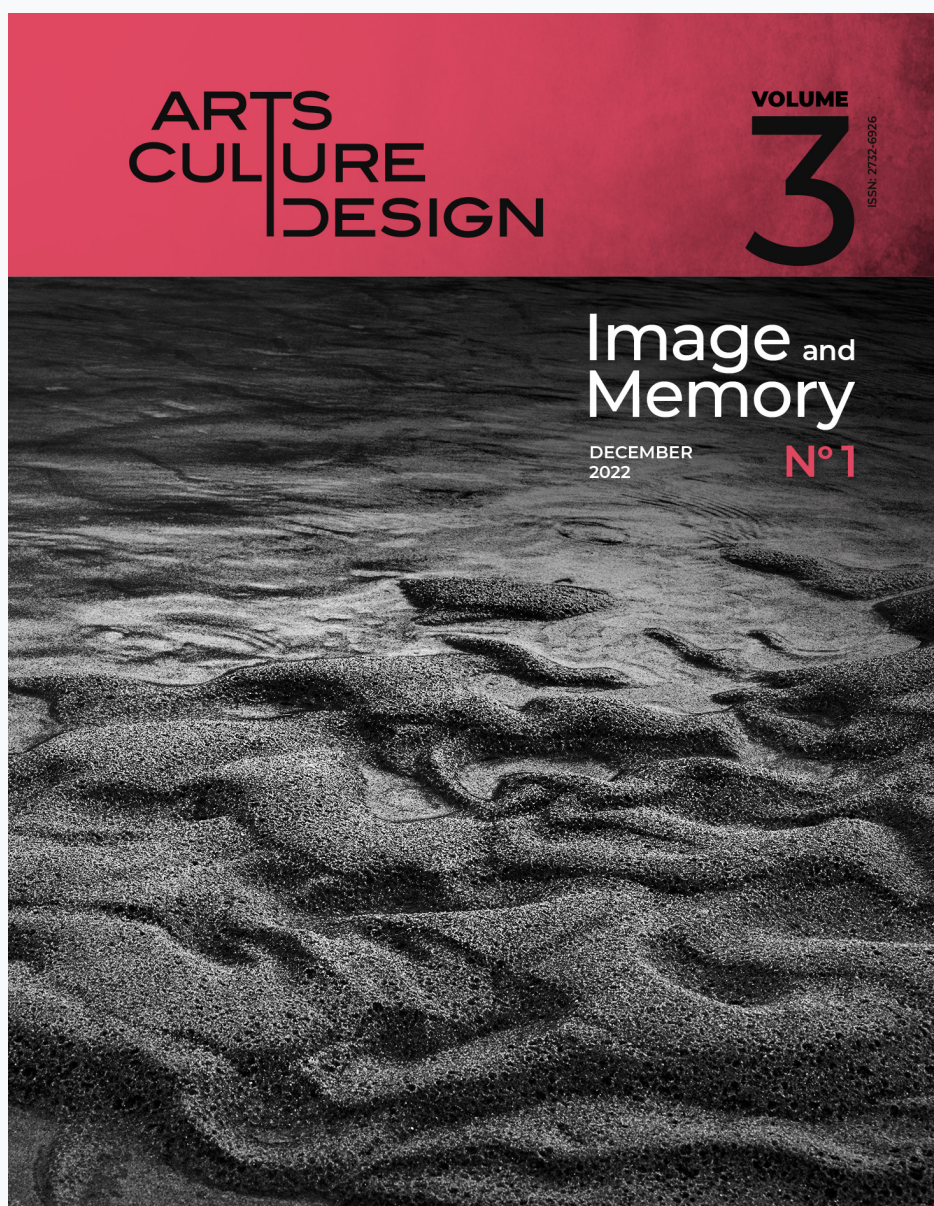


## Design/Arts/Culture

Vol 3, No 1 (2022)

Image and Memory





ARTS  
CULTURE  
DESIGN

VOLUME

3

ISSN: 2732-6926

Image and  
Memory

DECEMBER  
2022

N°1





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## About the Journal

The International Journal **Design | Arts | Culture** is a digital open access and peer-reviewed multi-disciplinary journal, published by "Design, Interior Architecture and Audiovisual Documentation" laboratory of the Faculty of Applied Arts and Culture of the **University of West Attica Greece** in cooperation with the **Doctoral Studies** of the **National University of Arts Bucharest Romania**, **University of Nicosia Cyprus**, **ESAD Porto Portugal**, and the **Academy of Fine Arts Gdańsk Poland**.

**DAC Journal** is biannual (regular and special issues) and publishes research articles, projects, and portfolios, as well as book reviews and student works. It aims to provide an academic forum for sharing and connecting ideas, projects, practices, and findings about design, applied arts and culture. **DAC Journal** provides immediate open access to its content on the principle that making research freely available to the public supports a greater global exchange of knowledge.

The journal does not charge submission or publication fees.

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The journal aims to be broadly inclusive and interdisciplinary, publishing research articles, projects, portfolios, student works and book reviews with a particular focus on:

Theory addressing current dialogue in conceptual design strategies and philosophical frameworks in interior architecture, product design, graphic visualization, environmental design, and art.

Practice models and new alternative perspectives in building methods, materials research, cultural studies, sustainable approaches.

Portfolio presentations of original artwork projects, installations, film, photography etc.

Education that integrates research with design and culture as well as pedagogies that explore alternative approaches to the delivery of history and theory in design research, studio projects, theoretical investigations of teaching practices.

Applied research investigating design and culture ideologies supported by the development of theoretical frameworks in design research, case studies.

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## Submissions

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**DAC Journal** accepts submissions of original research articles including all the topics described below, but not limited to them: Aesthetics | Semantics | History | Continuity of Cultural Heritage | Methodological Approaches | Social-Cultural Aspects of Design | Visual Studies Culture | Design and Material Culture | Identity and Heritage | Criticism | Creativity | Innovation | Arts | Audiovisual Sequences | Sustainability | Learning Strategies and Pedagogy | Expertise in Design | Visual Techniques in the Design Process | Design Tools and Experiential Approaches concerning Interior Architecture | Furniture Design | Product Design | Graphic Design | Illustration | Animation | Visual Communication Design | Photography | New Media and Digital Imaging | Technologies in Art and Design | Creative and Innovative Media Arts Concepts | Preservation of Cultural Heritage | Conservation and Restoration.

The articles should be relevant to a broad audience of researchers, teachers, and practitioners, according to the topics described above. All submissions are double-blind peer-reviewed.

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## Submissions

### PORTFOLIO & PROJECTS

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We are mainly interested in artwork that addresses the broad concept of space, both as a cultural convention and as encapsulating the physical environment and the formative role of the art media and processes within. Submissions can be either by the artists themselves or by an art critic or curator. All submissions are double-blind peer-reviewed.

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**DAC Journal** accepts submissions of student works, such as essays and final projects, including portfolios related but not limited to the fields and topics covered by the journal's scope and content. All submissions are double-blind peer-reviewed.

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DAC Journal  
Vol. 3

Image and  
Memory

DECEMBER  
2022

Nº 1

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(IOSUD)**

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Design | Arts | Culture Vol. 3 | ISSN: 2732-6926

# EDITORIAL NOTE

Ruxandra Demetrescu

Dragoş Gheorghiu

“History breaks down into images, not into stories.”

“Our image of happiness is indissolubly bound up with the  
image of the past.”

Walter Benjamin



## EDITOR

**Ruxandra Demetrescu**

Ruxandra Demetrescu (b. 1954), art historian, professor of Art History and Theory at the Department of Doctoral Studies of the National University of Arts Bucharest, Romania, where she teaches art theory, museum studies and modern Romanian art. She was the Rector of the National University of Arts in Bucharest (2006–2012) and the first Director of the Romanian Cultural Institute in Berlin, Germany (1999–2003). Her research focuses are the history of art theories in German-speaking space (Konrad Fiedler, Alois Riegl, Aby Warburg, Walter Benjamin) and Romanian interwar artistic modernity. She held the Arnheim Professur at the Humboldt University in the fall of 2012. She coordinated research projects and curated solo shows of contemporary Romanian artists. Published numerous texts in Romanian contemporary visual artists' exhibition catalogues.

## EDITOR

**Dragoş Gheorghiu**

Professor Dragoş Gheorghiu (BA Architecture; BA/MA Design; PhD Archaeology/History), Director of Doctoral Studies at the National University of Arts Bucharest, Romania, is a cultural anthropologist, archaeologist-experimentalist and professional visual artist, with an extensive list of publications on prehistoric technology, semiotics of material culture and Augmented Reality art. He is a researcher at the Instituto Terra e Memória, Maçao, and at the Centro de Geociências – University of Coimbra, and Paul Mellon Fellow at CASVA, National Gallery in Washington, D.C. Gheorghiu began to produce works of art-and-archaeology as soon as 1980, a trend he continued over time with the concept of artchaeology. He works as land-artist to reveal prehistoric monuments in Wales, Portugal, Sardinia and Romania.

**EDITORIAL  
NOTE**

Starting from some fundamental questions posed many decades ago: “What do we mean by «image»? Is it in our mind or on the screen or both? If both, what are some of the similarities and differences between the projected image and the mental image? More importantly, how fundamental and instrumental is the picture in your mind to your cognitive processes perception, memory, thought, creativity? What are the effects of imagery on memory? Can relatively abstract concepts and thoughts involve imagery?” (Fleming, 1977, p. 43); this is the question answered by the third volume of DAC Journal (Design | Arts | Culture) dedicated to “Image and Memory”.

Memory is not an instrument for exploring the past but its “theatre”. The cultural, symbolic world, the world of going beyond the material, the ultimate, the transcendent, constitutes an understanding of the concept of “place of memory” in Pierre Nora. Collective memory exists due to “places of memory”, as they are manifested in material, functional and symbolic forms: monuments, memorials, and images.

In this context, we should remember Theodor Adorno’s critical view of Walter Benjamin’s philosophical imagination (philosophische Phantasie) that makes of the singular ‘image’ (Bild) the very crystal ‘eye’ – of history. Commenting Adorno, Georges Didi-Huberman claimed “the paradoxical power and fragility of images.

On the one hand, they are unsuited to the generality of the concept, since they are always singular: local, incomplete, in short, insubstantial [...]. On the other hand, they are universally open: never entirely sealed off, never completed [...]. According to the French philosopher of art, “There is no critical theory without a critique of images. But nor is there any such theory without a critique – of discourse and image – by images themselves. [...] Images are themselves capable of becoming critical tools. They are, as Jean-Paul Sartre long ago said, acts not things, active confrontations on the battlefield of ‘culture’. They do not merely illustrate ideas: they produce ideas or produce effects critical of ideas.” (Didi-Huberman, 2017, p. 260).



If images are embodied in pictures, we should also acknowledge that “a picture is worth a thousand words”. This commonplace quotation suggests that images contain more information than texts and that the pieces of information provided by images are more easily processed and understood by any observer. Otherwise, a picture can trigger a buried memory and recall a precise moment in time much more rapidly than words.

Quoting Walter Benjamin, “the true picture of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again.”

Image and memory are indelibly linked by the contemporary urges as the coagulation of the concept of “public image” due to Paul Virilio. Images are “fabricated” on different levels in different techniques mobilising the individual and the collective memory.

The connection between image and memory can be seen from the beginning of history, the images of individual or collective experience being present in material culture (Jones, 2007). These images representing a type of external memory (Donald, 1998), fixed on a material medium, allowed the remembrance process (Gibbons, 2019) to encompass an enormous area of topics, from images of the deceased to images of memorable events.

Visual artists, art historians and theoreticians, historians, and archaeologists contributed with essays (both textual and visual) thematising various aspects regarding the mnemonic, individual and collective memories.

## ARTICLES

Commenting Walter Benjamin’s thesis on the concept of history, **Luiz Oosterbeek** analysed the tension between history and memory outlining a process where history builds from memories, by overcoming their narratives and preserving basic units of information that may be recombined, to create novel images of the past, but also of the present and the future.

In such process, history considers memory oblivion and an indicator of reliability or not of those memories. The author discussed how material culture is the backbone of mental images and why it has a much more plastic and transformative nature than intangible narratives, which are expressions of the consolidation (and conservation) of understandings.

**Theodor Barth** presented an extensive research portfolio, composed of an online archive and an index from 2020-22, presenting its outcomes in a memory-theatre. The design needed for this theatre was modelled on Baruch Spinoza’s *Ethica*, in which the order of a geometrical demonstration hosts a philosophical investigation. The article is split in the two issues of DAC.

**Nayeli Fabiola Moctezuma Moreno** analyzed the relationship between memory, aesthetics, and politics in Gustavo Germano’s *Ausencias* (*Absences*) series.

Starting from the fundamental question: “Is it possible to represent the unrepresentable?”, the author examined the political power of images in the context of the post-dictatorship Argentina, but also photography as artistic creation and memory builder, concluding that images inexorably have a powerful capacity to dis-cover the real.

In spite of the commun knowledge that the invention of photography was inextricably linked to memory as a more effective and direct way than painting, **Fotis Kangelaris** argued that the innermost reason for the invention and use of photography was never related to memory, and if it was related, the reason was to make us forget what we were aiming to remember.

Thus, the author examined three major goals relating photography to human history and art: creating the contact with the invisible by going beyond reality, offering a sense of reality to the structural void on which the human psyche is composed and making us forget through mechanisms related to magic, because the photographer and the viewer have the potential to surpass reality’s flow through amnesia.

**Nina Kotamanidou** investigated the evolution of photographic imagery from snapshot to networked within a branch of personal, self-produced representations that have affected both our autobiographical referencing and collective remembrance. Underlining the difference between snapshots as a genre satisfying the need to handle privately the visual documentation of our past and allegedly keeping time frozen and networked photograph which establishes memory in fluidity as remembrance of the present moment just-turned-into-past, the author formulated an analysis by answering two questions: **1.** Do networked photographs support memory on a personal and collective level in ways similar to snapshot culture? and: **2.** In the advent of changes has the flow of memory been altered?

**Loukia Martha** explored the concept of memory as a compositional tool employed in the architectural spatialization process, focusing on residential interior architecture of the work of Greek architect Takis Marthas. Underlining the significance of Takis Marthas as a major representative of the 1930s generation, in which the demand for a Greek identity or Greekness through a revival of the past, was of paramount importance, the author analysed the conjunction between tradition and Modernism captured in his architectural oeuvre, where the space of memory is a space of myth, laden with the residues of his childhood and nostalgia.

Using references of theoretical works of Roland Barthes, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Karen Barad and Tim Ingold, **Danica Dimitrijević** examined how we have produced camera images through time and how camera images have been producing us. The author scrutinised how the camera transformed from a separate room or device to a prosthetic/inherent part of the body, without which the body is not fully functional, thematising the marginalised position of a person without a phone camera and the sensual deprivation, and discrepancy in identity as a result of the deficit of not having an image-generating tool.

## PORTFOLIOS

The portfolios of this DAC Issue 1 journal have as their common theme “The Archaeology of Memory”. The subjects are varied and bring together established European artists as well as doctoral students from the Doctoral Studies of the National University of Arts in Bucharest. They all use art as an archaeological method to discover and preserve Memory, using different tools, from pencils to performance, from the camera to modelling.

For **Nicolae Coşnicheru**, the landscape is a subject of study of the transformation of Nature’s forms, the photograph memorizing the changes in the seashores due to erosion and Modernity. The clay cliffs eroded by the sea and urban planning have turned into a plastic material that has dissolved or turned into dust. Places, picturesque decades ago, have remained so only in the memory of the photographic image.

The memory of the place can therefore be glorified through photography, but also through other artistic means that involve the entire human sensorium, such as film, drawing, sound, or writing. Memory and the power of a place are the subjects of analysis by the visual artist **Elizabeth Poraj-Wilczynska**, who creates a holistic approach to capture the ineffable of the past.

For the visual artist **Geir Harald Samuelsen**, photography is the tool that captures the ineffable of the moment, the change of the light on a landscape or the fluid flow movement of a human body sliding over a rock. His visual research focuses on the relationship between matter, gestures, and soul.

The memory of bodily movement transposed into the matter, the collection of ancient gestures from an extremely distant past, represented for the architect-artist **Giulio Calegari** the elements of an “archaeology of beauty”, a beauty of gesture that created tools carved from prehistoric stone.



The human body represents a form of memory for the visual artist **Adriana Lucaciu**, corporeality being transferred through drawing in archetypal forms. The drawing is seen as a continuous movement, a product of the memory of corporeality.

The human body is also a depository of ancestral memory, and its discovery is realized through an archaeology of the senses that connects the real world with the imaginary world of altered perception experiences. Environmental architect **Elin Tanding Sørensen** uses re-enactment to create a sensory and spiritual journey that connects the contemporary imaginary worlds with those of the past.

Although material forms can disappear over time, as the clay cliffs mentioned at the beginning of this text, the same material under the action of fire can cross centuries in the form of ceramics. Wet clay, a plastic material, can be a support for Memory, allowing it to be printed. Ceramicist **Vlad Basarab** creates ceramic books in the form of metaphors of Memory that preserves human action in time.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to Mr Radu Lilea, Ms Ioana Bianca Condruz, and Ms Zenovia Popa for editorial help.



“The death of fire is the birth of air, and the death of air is the birth of water.”

Heraclitus

## MATTER, MEMORY, FLOW

According to Heraclitus's theory “everything flows” (πάντα ῥεῖ / panta rhei), everything that surrounds us is in permanent movement. The natural sciences of ancient Greece were based on the principle that the world of nature is permeated by mind, thus Nature is a world not only of ceaseless motion and therefore alive, but also intelligent and rational, like a being that possesses a mind of its own (Collingwood 1945, p. 3). Ionian philosophers believed that nature was ‘one’ and they also believed “that the thing which in its relation to behaviour was called nature was in itself substance or matter” (Collingwood 1945, p. 46).

In this perspective, the world of physical and mental phenomena was the basis for designing the third volume of DAC Journal, Image and Memory, N° 1. The cover of the journal and the concept of this issue were created by Mihaela Moțăianu, PhD Candidate at the National University of Arts Bucharest, who proposes a series of her photographs inserted between the journal's sections, a kaleidoscope of moments that capture the flow of Matter and Memory, viewed as a transformation of the materiality of the World.

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DAC Journal  
Vol. 3

Image and  
Memory  
N°1

| ARTICLES



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ARTICLE

# MEMORY AND OBLIVION: TANGIBLE IMAGES AND UTOPIA

Luiz Oosterbeek





### Luiz Oosterbeek

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## MEMORY AND OBLIVION: TANGIBLE IMAGES AND UTOPIA

### Abstract

The thesis of W. Benjamin on the concept of History echoes as almost an anti-postmodernism manifesto: the approach to the past is structured through images, not narratives.

Indeed, in the tension between history (the universal past rooted in agreed replicable methodologies for a human archetype) and memory (the ego or sociocentric past rooted in individual experiences), egos design narratives and try to fit evidence into them, whereas the historical past is constantly reconstructed through zooming in details that generate new images.

The image in history, as the mental image in individuals, is not a layer of arrival, nor even a point of departure, but a vehicle of transformation of how space is perceived (as Kant argued) or constructed (following Bachelard), the phenomenological process of performing tasks in space being the driver of such construction (as argued by Ingold).

The design of history through images is, in this sense, the process of social construction of cultural landscapes, i.e., of the poetics of space.

This is a process that encompasses four mechanisms of change: identification (based on senses and, primarily, on touch and sound), adaptation (the Kantian perception of the space as the scenario of human aptitude), transformation (the poetics of the making, creating new landscapes by changing their core images) and method (namely the dialectics of tangible and intangible dimensions).

The tension between image and narrative is, ultimately, the root of the tension between ego/socio-centered memories and the anthropic-rational history. In such a process, history builds from memories, by overcoming their narratives and preserving basic units of information that may be recombined, to create novel images of the past, but also of the present and the future. In such a process, history considers memory oblivion and an indicator of reliability or not of those memories.

In this paper we discuss how material culture is the backbone of mental images and why it has a much more plastic and transformative nature than intangible narratives, which are expressions of the consolidation (and conservation) of understandings.

The keyword in such a memory process is oblivion: images allow us to forget fossil narratives and to move into new utopias.

### Keywords

history  
memory  
oblivion  
adaptation  
transformation

## HISTORY BEYOND MEMORIES

The thesis of W. Benjamin on the concept of History (Benjamin, 1940) echoes as almost an anti-postmodernism manifesto: the approach to the past is structured through images, not narratives. Benjamin reaches to this assessment through a series of parallel reflections.

First (thesis II), the notion that the present (where one lives) does not 'envy' either the past (because it feels like being the accomplishment of past expectations, so nothing to envy because lesser than the present), nor the future (which is the present's redemption, so nothing to envy but to wish for).

Then (thesis III), by explaining that redemption is, in the end, assuming the whole of the past, in all its details and contradictions (an idea that converges with the UNESCO utopia of a 'World Heritage' or the notion of 'inscription of the past' proposed by José Gil, 2007).

Thirdly (thesis IV), and most essentially, by explaining that the present (i.e., the future of the past) is not a redemption of the past because it corresponds to the past's utopia, but because it inscribes the past materialities into an explanatory framework that renders them to become triggers of the present.

As a result, the past is not a narrative of events, but a syncretic image that encapsulates all those events. This is also the sense of thesis V: "The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again." and thesis VI, arguing that the past is not "what it really was" but a response to critical moments (dangers).

This is further explained in thesis VIII: history dissolves "unexpected surprises", by framing them within a long term assessment of the past that builds from the present, the same way the understanding of causality builds from the consequences to enquire about causes, rather than the other way around.

In Benjamin's reference to the Angelus Novus (thesis IX), that inspires this volume, the present is fundamentally about moving into the future without any clear agenda (the future will never be what is imagined in the present) but animated by a comprehensive image of the past.

The whole approach of Benjamin, clearly influenced by Hegel (1837) and Marx (1858), is to focus on past materialities as items that may either become part of an integral understanding of the present through a comprehensive image of the past or, alternatively, a collection of loose items that become, in a sense, reified, i.e., considered as the essence of the real but, in fact, are extracted from the flow of time that can only be approached from the present. This, one could read, is the distinction between History (a logical assessment of the past building a comprehensive image – Febvre, 1952) and Memory (a collection of scattered fragments of past features and events, allegedly disconnected, or reconnected through a narrative – Pérez Baquero, 2020).

Indeed, in the tension between history (the universal past rooted in agreed replicable methodologies for a human archetype) and memory (the ego or sociocentric past rooted in individual experiences), memories design narratives and try to fit evidence into them, whereas the historical past is constantly reconstructed through zooming in details that generate new images. This is why Benjamin's concept of history directly challenges postmodern relativist and memorialist histories.

But, beyond this important distinction, Benjamin's thesis brings forth an important argument: the past, i.e., the present understandings of it, is not a tale (a narrative, or a story), but a global image from which its future (the present) may be read. In this, Benjamin's approach offers an important contribution for prehistoric art, and for art history in general: how do 'artistic' features (paintings, carvings, sculpture, literature) interfere with the creation of a mental image of a society in the past? Are they mere indicators of a mindset or actors of it? And what does "contextual study of past evidences" mean, once the context, itself, is part of the present construction of the past, through the methods of History?

This relates to the notion of mental image, its drivers and how it relates to sociocultural performance and transformation.



## IMAGE AND IDENTIFICATION

The image in history, as the mental image in individuals (Piaget & Inhelder, 1966), is not a layer of arrival, nor even a point of departure, but a vehicle of transformation of how space is perceived (as Kant, 1802, argued) or constructed (following Bachelard, 1958), the phenomenological process of performing tasks in space being the driver of such construction (as argued by Ingold, 1993), this leading to the notions of time (through continuities, discontinuities and transformation) and causality (through logically connecting items that, otherwise, would remain a loose collection of isolated features, or memories – Oosterbeek, 2019). The design of history through images is, in this sense, the process of social construction of cultural landscapes, i.e., of the poetics of space.

This is a process that encompasses four mechanisms of change: identification (based on senses and, primarily, on touch and sound - Tarçın & Tunçok, 2022), adaptation (the Kantian perception of the space as the scenario of human aptitude – Kant, 1802), transformation (the poetics of the making, creating new landscapes by changing their core images) and method (namely the dialectics of tangible and intangible dimensions).

The mechanism of identification, i.e., of assigning diverse identities, clustering and ranking some units of information, in order to build the grounds of a mental image, goes far beyond sight. It first builds from sound, which sits at the ontogenesis of space, allowing for a first framework of reference: composition (the unity of the image), diversity (the specificities or details of the image), intensity (the understanding that not all features within the space have the same relevance or impact) and cycle (the notion that discontinuities are succeeded by stages resuming past equilibrium – a notion that triggers the idea of an eternal return – Eliade, 1949). The experience of hearing allows, in any case, to formulate the abstract notion of landscape as a web of materialities that, even when unknown, generate sounds (Francl & McDermott, 2022).

To touch is, in the ontogenesis, the second major sensitive source of space, as it no longer builds from the global (sound – one mental image, based on listening as a deductive form of reasoning), but from the particularities: each touch considering a limited surface – several isolated surfaces and materials that then trigger, through inductive reasoning, the creation of more complex notions, both tangible (e.g., the identification of resources, techniques and their manipulation) and intangible (accumulated knowledge, or traditions, and procedures to use it in a creative way). Touching simultaneously disaggregates space into a set of places and reconstructs its unity (image) through the materiality of rituals and the intangible web of beliefs and performances related to them (Lévi-Strauss, 1971). One illustration of this is human motricity, which exposes bodies to new sets of tangible interactions, but also creates new logical trans-border frameworks of reference (Brender, 2017). Smell is a crucial sense for constructing space, as it brings to the mental image shaped through the previous notions of unity (sound) and diversity (touch), the radical dimensions of exclusion and appropriation (Bierling et al., 2021), through the notions of identification/identity/otherness, belonging and key-resources (relating these to the logistics of bridging the gap between perceived needs and available resources).

The mental image, once predominantly anchored in materiality (through sound) and then to intangible processes (through touch), resumes its predominantly material ground, using senses to exclude features that provoke discomfort to individuals. And it is within the tangible web of connections that taste becomes such a relevant sense: it is also limited in space distances, but it builds from the close interactions between cultural entities that eat together or eat each other (sometimes literally – Højlund, 2015). Initially experienced as an individual performance (just like smell), it rapidly evolves into a tangible, abstract and shared ground for appropriation, domestication and transformation (eating becoming a digestion of cultural diversity – Nadeau, 2010). These four senses are the basic foundations of a mental image of the world, and its past, which is primarily perceived through materialities. In this sense, they promote a network of related notions that are tested against material evidences and then proven true or false. This is not the case of sight, which integrates the capacities to observe (at distance), interpret (through the unique capacity of zooming in and out, thus integrating the global and the particularisms), represent (through visual images), predict (imagining futures) and transform (deforming existing images or designing new ones).

Sight offers such plasticity, namely in integrating objects, places and landscapes (Gheorghiu, 2020), but this is also its weakness, as it is the one sense that sits more apart from materialities. In doing so, sight generates less flexible images (because it shares images through the form of pictures, not concepts) and opens the path for anchoring interpretation not in history (a never ending reconstruction of the past through shared methodologies) but in memories (a series of reified pictures). Paradoxically, in this process, sight tends to replace the construction of a mental image by the building of a narrative.

The tension between image and narrative is, ultimately, the root of the tension between ego/socio-centered memories and the anthropic-rational history (Poole, 2008). In such process, history builds from memories, i.e., perceptions of the past informed by present mindsets and interests, but overcomes their narratives by taking them as basic units of information that may be recombined through set rational, i.e., abstract, methods, to then create novel images of the past, but also of the present and the future. In such a process, history makes extensive use of memories oblivion as an indicator of reliability, or not, of those memories. Such tension directly relates to the second mechanism of change: adaptation and its ground, the perception of space.

## IMAGE AND ADAPTATION

Senses provide a wide range of information on context, but they are insufficient to properly build an interpretative matrix. This will be the result of framing them through human performance, namely adaptation (Moran, 2013). It is behavior, the interaction with the context mediated by senses but performed through gesture and the whole body, that triggers the cognitive construction of space as 'the stage' of existence. It is by doing, i.e., by experimenting the interaction of the body with the context and related changes in terms of distance and orientation, that the notion of space is structured, including the dichotomy between metaphoric concepts and images on one hand, and interaction of the senses on the other. And, within behavior, it is the movement required to achieve specific objectives and meeting given needs that leads to a perception of space as a landscape or, in the phrasing of Tim Ingold, a set of taskscapes.

The kinesthetic construction of space establishes both the notion of distance and that of scale, structured through a series of dichotomies that will be progressively considered: close and distant, small and big, slow and fast. But, also, gesture and thought shape other dichotomies a step away from senses: physiology and identity, gesture and thought, present and past or future.

As a kinesthetic and rational construct, the perception of space is first informed by the senses and conditioned by cultural tradition (values, priorities), and encompasses several properties: aesthetics (or the appeal of homeostasis – Damásio, 2021), identification (imitation), meaning (narrative), poetics (creation), metaphysics (reason), pragmatics (harmony between needs and resources) and dynamics (assimilation, adaptation and transformation).

These properties are by no means exempt of contradictions and conflicts (Oosterbeek, 2017), from the divide between perceptions informed by contradictory narratives (e.g., in border conflicts) to the clash between different mindsets (e.g., the notion of cultural identities attached to specific spaces). Subjects and societies create specific mental images by administrating these divides and based on their recognition they adapt to contextual changes.

Adaptation implies adjusting behavior to newly identified contextual constraints that cannot or can no longer be assimilated (Piaget, 1957). The adaptation does not imply a change in the perception of space, i.e., on the landscape, but it requires new tasks, thus changing a fundamental dimension of the landscape, even if still perceiving its future as a continuation of the present. Changes in the tasks do aggravate tensions, though, namely between inherited narratives (myths) and new performances (rituals).

This adaptive process is primarily driven by common sense, engaging the majority of a society, or close to that, to acknowledge and empirically describe landscapes. However, description itself is insufficient to fully adapt and to transform mindsets. Specialized knowledge, in terms of science reasoning, allows not only to assimilate contextual changes but to adapt to them. Successful adaptation is fundamentally dependent on a robust analytical capacity, and science offers the best approach in this regard.



Adaptation builds from analysis and combines it with economy (the cultural process of bridging needs and resources) within a logical reasoning; the whole adaptive mechanism proceeds then through verification, confirming or not certain deducted interpretations of data through the observation of consequences of adaptive undertaken strategies. This does not imply any major change in mindset, values or fundamental understandings on how societies can or should run, as the purpose of adaptation is to adjust details to preserve continuity.

## IMAGE, TRANSFORMATION AND OBLIVION

Adaptation is, in turn, insufficient to imagine, i.e., to create a new image of the past, transforming it, this allowing us to anticipate an image of the future (utopia): such a role implies the contribution of humanities and arts (Howels, 2014). The transformation of the past does not strictly relate to retrieved scientific data, even if this is a main driver of it, but from the wider mindset that directs attention and sets an hierarchy of values, which largely depends upon social and cultural interactions in each given moment. Transformation relates rather to a serendipity mechanism, in which we may identify some major components, but from which we may not deduct mechanical consequences. Transformation tends to occur when the tension between observed phenomena and mindset (the image of the present and its past) precludes from inferring a viable future (Redecker, 2021).

Heritage plays a central role in transformative processes, since it corresponds to the fraction of remains from the past that any given society identifies as a reference to preserve, so that everything else be allowed to change without losing a sense of continuity and incorporation. Heritage, hence, illustrates the prevailing mindset in a given moment; for instance, the shift of focus on monuments and sites (second half of the 20th century – Laurent, 2016) towards a focus on landscapes and intangible heritage corresponds to a reassessment of the past, diverting from “achievements” (objects) to privilege ‘performance’ (human agency and territories – Kryder-Reid, 2014), which itself changes the image of the past. The Post-modern Past has emerged as a narrative of traumatic processes affecting communities (each projecting its own image of the Past), rather than an image of Humankind achievements (recognized as a common Past, despite its contradictions).

Tensions in societies are framed within Heritage through this divide between materialities and agency, expressed in the relation with the arts and in the interaction between material and intangible Heritage. Heritage results from the image of the past that a society has, whereas the arts are insights of that society into the future; like Janus, cultures look into these two opposite directions, one influencing the other and conditioning the present. In the second half of the 20th century, the dominance of a “sites and monuments” (immovable) Past compensated a growingly disruptive artistic focus on de-construction, even if it did not consider the whole of contradictions of the past, thus precluding the design of a Future as redemption of the present, in the sense given by W. Benjamin [also because, in the aftermath of WWII, the experience of the traumatic agendas of redemption of previous decades (Hobsbawm, 1994) triggered a rejection in that direction]. Since the turn of the century, though, the prevailing attention to intangible dimensions of Heritage and their related narratives opened the room for questioning the preservation of at least some material remains (e.g., removing or even vandalizing disputed statues in public spaces, as means to destroy the previous image of the Past), which may be perceived as a compensation of the wider attention to conservation for sustainability: such attention is still an adaptive mechanism that refuses transformation, as it extensively uses selected memories, or oblivion, and not the integration of contradictions as an integral image of the Past (Sjursen & Oosterbeek, 2023).

The intangible dimension of Heritage has the unquestionable importance of integrating the diversity of scattered material remains into a cultural, live, coherence. This is its major strength, although also its major risk: as cultures are disparate, intangible Heritage may foster ethnocentric approaches that break the unity of Heritage as a human, rather than only a ethnocentric Heritage.

The image of the past is a construct that also depends on the degree of appropriation/identification with past remains, which is more difficult with living expressions (intangible and performative) than with material remains (observable and more open to reinterpretation).

This is one reason why materialities better serve the purpose of global mindset transformation. The main reason, though, is that the purpose of an image, as of a myth, is to offer a stable background for change and transformation to occur (Fraassen, 1970): the core of the image, as a horizon, is to act as an invariant, not as a changing feature itself. Intangible heritage, as it relates to living performances, does not possess this characteristic.

On the contrary, as it is about preserving a transformative performance, it actually calls for balancing it with ... the rejection of transformation beyond its own. This is an expression of the third action-reaction law of Newton (Watkins, 1997), which actually applies to humans as societies and their expressions do not escape such tangible dimension. The image of the past anchored in its material remains, in this sense, offers not a mere continuity and preservation of inherited knowledge, but the acknowledgement of transformations occurred through time, which allows one to imagine (i.e., to create an image of) a different future, or an utopia. Art often expresses and announces this movement of transformation, as evidenced (Coelen & Lammertse, 2019) in the distance between the bourgeois utopia portrayed in the paintings of Bruegel the elder (anchored in the renaissance image of the past structured around the notion of transformation from praised material remains of classical civilization into rejected medieval society, destined to be overcome in utopia) and those of Hieronymus Bosch (anchored in the image of the past structured around intangible everlasting medieval beliefs, thus incapable of generating a new utopia).

This is also, in Prehistory, the distance between art generated as a moment of a performance (e.g., most of Paleolithic art - Feruglio et al., 2019) and the art conceived to remain as a permanent feature in the landscape (such as megalithic constructions - Scarre et al., 2011): in the former, transformative drives are channeled into the performance and do not require generating a different image of the future; in the later, they express a statement of transformation beyond the performance, shaping new landscapes that encapsulate the utopia of a different future (anchored in the ancestors or any other tangible remain of the past).

Material culture is the backbone of mental images and has a much more plastic and transformative nature than intangible narratives, which are expressions of the consolidation (and conservation) of understandings. The keyword in such a memory process is oblivion, not of features but of interpretations: images allow us to forget fossil narratives and to move into new utopias. In an opposite direction, preserving the intangible dimension of Heritage requires preserving the sequence of gestures, knowledge and beliefs generated in inherited mindsets, thus contributing for their perpetuation without major change, let alone oblivion.

In Benjamin's thesis, the future is anchored in a comprehensive image of the past and offers itself as a redemption utopia. Resuming Saint Augustine's assessment of time (Manning et al., 2013), the key moment is the present and its redemption requires assuming all the past (as in Augustine's Confessions - Rothfield, 1981) and that in each moment a syncretic image of such whole past is built, so that the movement towards the future becomes possible. The expansion of heritage beyond sites and monuments, encompassing whole landscapes and the evidences of their transformations in the past, expresses the building of an image of the Past that calls for a reflection on future different landscapes, i.e., scenarios of transformation of human performance in the territory of the planet (rather than narratives of ethnic local adaptations, that trigger debates on how to resume past patterns of behavior). This is the tension of all societies in transition.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research has been undertaken in the framework of the Geosciences Centre of Coimbra University (contract UIDB/00073/2020 with the Foundation for Science and Technology, Portugal).



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ARTICLE

# PROJECT SPINOZA: RE/MEMBERING SENSORIAL COGENCY

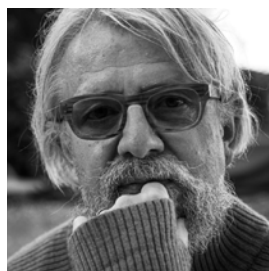
PRESENTATION OF A PORTFOLIO AND  
PROPOSAL OF AN ANTHROPONOMIC  
REFRAMING OF FIELD-RECORDS

Theodor Barth

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**PART ONE**

The second part of the article will be continued  
in DAC Journal Vol.3 | Image and Memory N° 2



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Theodor Barth (PhD Anthropology) is currently a Professor of Theory and Writing at the Oslo National Academy of the Arts (KHIO) and a researcher with a part-time research residency at the National Library of Norway. He holds a Dr. Philos. in social anthropology. Previously he has been a research scientist at the Norwegian Foundation for Research in Science and Technology.

He did his doctoral research at the ARENA program (Advanced Research on the Europeanisation of the Nation-State), based on multi-sited fieldwork in Central/Eastern Europe, with a special focus on the cities of Zagreb and Sarajevo. His professional interest lies in humanities-driven studies of techno-environmental developments, as a lens to social dynamics from a comparative perspective. His current line of research lies with forensic approaches: e.g. photogravure as a forensic approach to photographic materials belonging to a larger corpus of documents. He seeks to explore a cartographic alternative to interpretation.

# PROJECT SPINOZA: RE/MEMBERING SENSORIAL COGENCY

## PRESENTATION OF A PORTFOLIO AND PROPOSAL OF AN ANTHROPONOMIC REFRAMING OF FIELD-RECORDS

### Abstract

The purpose of this article is to present a research portfolio – composed of an online archive and an index from 2020-22 – and perform its outcomes in a *memory-theatre*.

The *design* needed for this theatre is modelled on Baruch Spinoza's *Ethica*, in which the order of a geometrical demonstration *hosts* a philosophical investigation. The non-same rules/ heteronomy of the host and the *guest*, in Spinoza's opus magnum, is an instance of a wider phenomenon which the article seeks to explore and exploit: the *docking* of an investigation, by the means of a contraption that is foreign to it, intercepting images of what the present may have in store (whether past, present, or future). The sensorial cogency that picks up on elements it can comprehend, but never fully contain: the mnemonic slippery nature of the image. On this backdrop, the article discusses different ways of pairing up with the environment, through media that are hosted rather than belonging there: the different terms of populating the present, being together or forming a group, serve to elucidate certain aspects of memory – mnemonic devices with an environmental footprint – in fieldwork, laboratory research, digital culture or presently the electrosphere.

The article thereby seeks to develop and propose some designs to work with the problem of interception – picking up changes in the 'memory of the present' (Bergson, 2021): what it holds and what it has in store. The article seeks to establish a parity between apparatuses with such impact, in view of comparing them: whether they are as simple as **1**) a post in a hole (a datum), or more complex as **2**) a computer docked to a home-office (another *datum*).

In the presentation of the portfolio, a framework for partaking of such changes, compiling the experience prompted by them, is proposed (Benjamin, 1999). The major feature of this framework is then deepened in a situated *case-study*: here, positions coexisting and valued on different terms, in the presence of a cabin in reconstruction, shift as they are logged in a guest book.

In a section on design, the article probes a broader applicability of what has been found in the case-study, based on a wider fieldwork experience. Principle: *repair* also writes re-pair. In the conclusion, a design for a 'contemporary interception' is demonstrated *visually*.

The *anthroponomical* framework is conceived as a scholarly contribution to art, and an artistic contribution to science, through a mnemonic understanding of the technical image.

### Keywords

field research  
memory of the present  
Spinoza's geometry  
experimental  
archaeology  
sense of place  
investigative aesthetics  
anthroponomy  
problem design  
docking contraption  
re/pair  
datum



“By definition archaeological excavations are samples of vast canvasses on which people lived out their lives [...] stratigraphic sequence and spatial disposition are not the only dimensions capable of examination through excavation: formation and construction, visibility and inter-visibility, alignment and context, and landscape setting can also be explored as well as human experience, engagement, and matters such as light/darkness, space, and movement.”

(Timothy Darvill, 2015)

## PRESENTATION

During an archaeological fieldwork, [Timothy Darvill](#) broke the routine of a regular archaeological protocol, by simply inserting a *post* in a hole they had found in the dig. Thereby he changed the perception and the understanding of the site: new insights were gained; the inquiry took on a different direction.

In a different setting the organisation of a nocturnal *get-together* on site with a *bonfire* had the same effect. When lit from the ground and the sky a clay-wall lit up as a light blue disk. We have the choice between looking at such turns as examples of how occasional pattern-breaking can enhance existing routines and augment basic methodology, or alternatively as a case allowing a broader query on how research under immersive conditions – field-research – is docked to the field: how shifts in how we dock our field investigation, changes in the apparatus, is part of the research. Thereby opening an array of subjects that we need to find a way to manage.

Darvill conceived such a type of shift by inventing the notion of rehabilitation. Thereby implying that – in the broader scope – field-research is a form of dwelling. Here research is invented as an element of a cultural life-form that includes research. As such, Darvill's invented notion of *rehabilitation*, also entails a reframing of our present cultural life-form to include *field-research*. That is, scientifically structured digs into the ground to study the past is part of our present life-form.

Here, field-research is an integral part of our contemporary fashion of inhabiting the world; distinct from e.g., laboratory research, owing to its immersive conditions. Within the framework of STS – going back to science in action (Latour, 1988) – laboratory research is reframed as an integral, though specialised, part of our life-form. Thus, it could be seen one further instance of Darvill's rehabilitation. There are other shifts to parallel: with the digital turn we live in an investigative culture.

The global *lockdown* – during the C19 pandemic – was as a *rehabilitation* experiment at a terrestrial scale by the mere fact that the world's population, in large numbers, had to relocate their workplace to the confines of their homes, their business to video-conferencing, and also their bodily and sensorial foothold elsewhere than what routine and habit afforded before the pandemic. Sensorial cogency adrift is suggestive of empirical variations in our way of being in the world.

Today, computing is defined to cover a broad range of usership: it is not confined to scripting and algorithms. Or, rather, algorithms – in Marvin Minsky's definition as an as an 'effective procedure'<sup>1</sup> – would include how and to what, the computer is docked. The shift to video-conferencing and relocation of office facilities to people's homes, features this idea of docking: as an effective procedure it *differs* from computer usership on office-sites with a sparing use of video-cons. So, *docking* simply extends Minsky's definition algorithm to the space in which it is executed and – in some way – applies. In his terms, it is part of a much older problem than the computer *per se*.

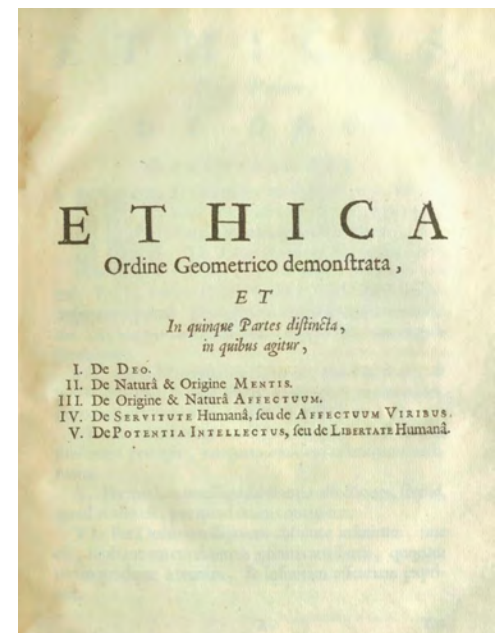


Figure 1. Title Page *Ethica* (Spinoza, 1677)

1. Minsky, Marvin 1967, p.105: "The idea of an algorithm or effective procedure arises whenever we are presented with a set of instructions about how to behave. This happens, in the course of working on a problem, we discover that a certain procedure, if properly carried out, will end up giving us the answer. Once we make such a discovery, the task of finding the solution is reduced from a matter of intellectual discovery to a mere matter of effort; carrying out the discovered procedure obeying the specified instructions."

And, indeed, Darvill's placing act of planting the post-in-the-hole is an act of remembrance rather than interpretation. His intellectual discovery is mnemonic while elaborating interpretation in the wake of this discovery, is a matter of effort. And it is unrelated to the workings of a contraption. If there has been good cause for historical confusion on this point, it is on account of a twilight zone that Henri Bergson – at the beginning of the 20th century – pointed out in his essay (1908) *Memory of the present and false recognition*. Here he delves into the mnemonic structure of the now, and how it is upheld by a certain regimen of images. Two image reels: *actual* and *virtual* images. The former forges ahead to what happens *next*, the other *looks back* to the past.

However, when their smooth working gets out of joint the *virtual* images can take the lead and become *super-imposed*: such occasions when we experience déjà vu, the sense of having had this ongoing experience before; but remaining powerless in recalling exactly which one it was. Leaving in a state of indecision the question of whether we are present at the origin of an *illusion*, or the birth of a *narrative*.

If we move onto computers, and their screens, how would we know?

We can choose. The [Turing Test](#) is based on such as choice: here the machine creating an illusion of a human – to humans that are put to the test – is at call. The alternative test: that a machine can be docked socially, technically and environmentally to realities by which it is marked. In which case the machine does not provide an illusion but becomes the seat of a narrative: a *datum*<sup>2</sup>. It appears that one cannot choose both at the same time. They are therefore not complementary.

An example: in a work by Korean artist Yongseok Oh – Classic 1915 (left)<sup>3</sup> a video of a photography showing expressionist painter Egon Schiele before a mirror surrounded by his works, and a small table with some items, is juxtaposed with what appears to be the *same* table, with the same or *similar* items: below the table is a pair of shoes. The table is docked into the room where the video is shown. Consider the possibility: the shoes under the table are Egon Schiele's shoes. We have the choice between the illusion that Egon Schiele is somehow present in his shoes because we see him mirrored in the video-still. Or, we can opt for a fictional alternative that brings us somewhere else: in this *fiction*, Egon Schiele has just left, or is about to arrive. In both cases the narrative is: now he is somewhere else.

This is true both in the sense that he is in fact long *departed*, and in a more *theatrical* sense (in a play about Egon Schiele and his art). In this narrative take, the table arrangement with shoes and the items on top of it are *marked* by reality: by Egon Schiele's touch, handling, and use. As a datum, the table-installation is docked to *impact* how we receive and perceive the video-still and its contents.

The *illusion* of 'Egon Schiele in the shoes', *doesn't*.

That is, **1)** how we *think* of artefacts and **2)** what artefacts do in the expanded field. Featuring the difference between *thought* and *extension*, defined by 17th century philosopher Baruch Spinoza in the *magnum opus* *Ethica*.

When we have some drawings of houses on a sheet of paper, and we draw a line to connect them – like a road or a landscape – this datum both affects the way we think/scale the houses, and how we will remember them if the drawing is part of a field survey.

This essentially defines **a)** the datum, **b)** its role in designing sensorial cogency from a situation where there is trouble, rather than a defined problem.

Hence the datum enters into the problem design, but also intervenes in the field of *memories*: moving from **i)** *illusion* [defined as emulation, substitution and erasure]; to **ii)** *fiction* [distinguishing itself by the fact that it can be *marked* by the real]. Hence the *datum*, as a variable of sensorial cogency, prompts operation and narration.

<sup>2</sup> Datum (definition): a set starting point for a scale or an operation. Cf. Robin Evans (1995).

<sup>3</sup> Arnd Schneider, 2021.



Figure 2. Classic 1915 (Younsoek Oh)



*Narration and operation* are conjoint iterations of Spinoza's attributes of thought and extension. Here he specifies the activating potential of this distinction: as we develop a narrative framing, we screen the field of operations... by upholding the distinction between them, while also holding them conjointly (as coordinates), we open a third potential: which is *interception*. That is, the capture of insights on turns of events for which there is no provision in the operation/narrative *as such*.

This is essential what happens when Darvill's places the post-in-the-hole and features the point of docking in broader terms: docking is the act of establishing a datum, and in the broadest sense of usership a content ceases to be illusory when it is docked to the real, and shifts to *memory*, because it can then be marked by the real. The pandemic was a disaster at a human scale, but also a large-scale social experiment. As it is marked by the real, fiction hatches sensorial cogency.

Our situation at Oslo National Academy of the Arts – during the pandemic – is as good an example of a disseminated biosphere during C19, as any other. It is where the practices and ideas presented here, happened to be explored. And is likely to be reflected and refracted in similar experiences from the readers' end. As sensorial cogency changes, how do we *keep track*? Do we resort to an empirically informed philosophy? Or, do we perhaps have a design problem?

The sensorial cogency of our daily remembrance changed in its *design-core*. That is, what we do to transform a current situation into a preferred one: here, from trouble to problem. From the trouble of the *pandemic* to the problem of the *lockdown*. How we transformed an unsegmented terrain, into a map of problems that came our way<sup>4</sup>. Which is how we choose to present the portfolio which this presentation is dedicated to: a cartographic project in Latour's sense (2018).



Figure 3. Learning Theatre at KHiO

The contents of Project Spinoza came in the wake of extending computing in this sense, to cover a number of social situations – with the variable geometry of the degrees of confinement – where the use of the digital tablet turned out to be the most flexible alternative: whether docked to a gooseneck as an 'object camera' (above), as a window to digital archives, and on/off video-conferencing. With a number of hybrid designs in which aspects of such variable usership are combined.

By 'variable geometry' we mean the shifting terms of how sensorial cogency has to be constantly re/designed to determine the place of space. In Project Spinoza, partly due to shifts in circumstance, partly owing to a deliberate choice. Though taking its toll, this variation allows ideas and practices to hatch conjointly, on how it would be possible to research changes in the apparatus: how the apparatus is thought to impact subject-object relationships in *new materialism* (Barad, 2007).

That is, to properly consider, how changes, in the way we are docked to reality, can indeed be researched as a *variable* (rather than assumed constant, and only accidentally/exceptionally varied). In an attempt to document these changes, an archive of systematic diary entries was posted on a data-base, where publicly available. An ethnography of the subject matter. One that understands the geometry of the subject matter in the lineage of land-surveys (Kafka, 1998).

Contents that reflected the docking of a tablet as camera, video or window – and thereby were marked by the contingencies of the lockdown – without a hierarchy of importance but, yet, with a sensitivity to recurrences (and the work of time): some topics earned their keep more than others. The postings were done from the beginning to the end of the pandemic: 294 entries in all. Then this small archive was indexed in a query on what had surfaced during the lockdown (49 entries).

4. Barth, Theodor (2011, p. 40): "14. Hertzian space is located between the virtual and the actual, has caught the interest of designers [Dunne, 2005], and defined as an 'electroclimate defined by wavelength, frequency, and field strength arising from the interaction between the natural and artificial landscape [op. cit., 104-105]'. 15. It has a relevance to the above discussion about email, because [op. cit.: 102]: 'The conflict between the conceptual and the perceptual aspects of hertzian space is an appropriate vehicle for investigating the boundaries between the imaginary and the actual.'"

## PORTFOLIO:

[Archive](#) (flyers: ethnographic diary from the lockdown, 49 sets with 6 entries, totalling 294 units);  
[Index](#) (leaflets: the Meantime index, 49 entries in total)

In the terms of the present issue of DAC, it is a record of a troubled memory, in the sense that the terms of remembrance – or the designs of sensorial cogency – went through a number of shifts. Establishing a record of the mnemonic twists and turns on the verge of fragmentation, call for reformulating memories at a new level of mnemonic work. Images, the visual track record of the portfolio (archive and index), are docked to the real, but also serve to mark the written narrative (Barthes, 2010).

The volume is accordingly the equivalent of a book but disseminated in a form closer to a portfolio, of which Walter Benjamin's Arcades project is a historically marked example. Leaving the ensemble in this state raises a similar question as the one belaboured by Susan Buck Morss (1991): what if we consider the Project as complete as it would ever be; a volume in its own right (with its archival ordering into envelopes, as a contraption needed to put Benjamin's memory to work)? It is a similar question as may be asked regarding Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas* – the atlas of memory – (Warburg, 2020): where boards used to pin configurations of photos that are juxtaposed to evoke and elicit a mnemonic architecture of images, are not closed containers (nor frozen categorisations), but arrangements fostering comprehension as a selected image, not included on the board at first/in the original, is then added to it. It is an initiative similar to Timothy Darvill's post-in-the-hole. An act of critical design.

Similar operations – which constantly on our computers – have become mainstreamed by the contemporary repertoire of understanding images. It is not interpretive but investigative. It is an act where *screening*, *framing*, and *intercepting* come together. And is the reason for underscoring the importance and potentials of surfaces in the *Meantime index*. In this way, it is hoped that the compound supports a search and query of what an ethnography of studio critiques could be (Rabinow, Marcus, Faubion & Rees, 2010).

The surfaces in question are *deep* surfaces – or *hyper-surface* – in which the *third* dimension is *time*. Docking images, marking writing and intercepting the real: a triangle which we are forced to take into consideration when there are changes in the terms of how sensorial cogency is set.

By seeking a precision<sup>5</sup> of the variables of how our computer-screens are docked into the environment and also the mnemonic trail of how we *live* under variable environmental conditions.

The contemporary usership of computers invites one step back away from the digital sphere to the *electrosphere* (or, electroclimate in Dunne's terms [footnote 4] where the life with computers – or computing – depends on the cruder level of electro-circuitry and amplification, in the various domains of remembrance that computers can enhance. That is, if the direction of usership is to screen, frame and intercept (*active*) – rather than emulating, substituting and erasing (*passive*).

## SCREEN, DOCK AND DATUM (CASE-STUDY)

If the prerogative of *Ethica* is to exhibit an idea – employing the geometrical order to this effect – rather than to explain and argue, it is better served if docked to a *précis* than an interpretation. In the portfolio-link from the present exposition, an archive of flyers (in sets of 6) features the case-base of *Project Spinoza*; in a field survey from which sensorial cogency is hatched.

The archive is topped by an index, which is devoted to exploring and developing the *datum*, as a mnemonic notion. Since the whole enterprise is the possibility of *designing* – and thereby to explore, learn and teach – *indexes*, it adds an element to the archive which is at once foreign and *immersive*. It is similar to the relation *between* the present account in text to the portfolio as an ensemble (comprising both the archive and the index).

And again, to the internal relation between the sections of the account, and is in this sense transposable: also, to investigations beyond the present (by the reader/s).

5. The concept of precision originated from Arne Naess's eco philosophy (Grimm, 1955/1953).

In the following *précis*, a woman is invited by her partner to a cabin at the seaside. There they will spend a couple of weeks together with members of his family. The private resort is in the middle of a refurbishing project and looks like a construction site.

The process has extended in time, and the lack of completion also features a lack of closure: generating a myriad of tasks and occasions (Barth, 1972). However, the woman is not considered a part of this and is side-lined by proprietary practices.

For instance, she is denied the access to dinner-plans and to cook, and is left to dish-washing (and to make an occasional salad). During the two weeks, the partners sleep in separate rooms. The room allocated to her is the only one to have a basin, which provides her with some autonomy. The space is also marginal in the overall construction of the cabin. It is located in the basement, has a separate exit and two external stair-cases – aside from the interior one – as access/exit.

The one is made of *concrete* on a steep granite slope. The other is made of wood, decrepit and unsafe. The woman decides that *completing* a project on the construction-site could change the situation; *not only* her own but the entire situation (where the construction-site features a rather tight process of reshaping family memories, in the wake of inheritance and new ownership).

Thus, she senses that the refurbishing taking place on the cabin site/resort is indeed a social process. It denotes the day-to-day ways of being together (meals/work) and forming a group (owners). The rebuilding process is selected as datum, capping the family's *être ensemble*: it is with the family – as a vector of togetherness/inclusion – without being as it (since the tasks and occasions are *hands-on* and require some technical knowhow and tools).

The way the woman is thinking about her position in the family is extended by the decrepit stairs in relation to the building. The stairs are also *not* considered as important by the family members, but marginal and adjacent to the tasks and *occasions* that make the cabin into a site of *remembrance* (not only a construction site). But it busies her with a project that can fill her time, while the other family members are busy with open-ended errands. She calculates that by completing her work with the stairs, she will contribute – in unexpected ways – to the situation. But she lacks the knowhow.

So, she goes to the neighbours in quest of the knowledge and equipment: as the cabin only has a store of piecemeal tools – that always seem to be in lack of a piece or a function – and no store of adequate materials. One neighbour informs her on the adequacy of a metal-steel post-shoe to straighten up the staircase (that actually is more of a ladder than a staircase, owing to its steepness), and fasten it to the granite. To do this, the woman needs a powerful and sturdy drill that is made for that purpose. This she gets to borrow from another neighbour, who also gives her some instruction.

Both neighbours are experienced – one of them a professional – and they provide her with a bit of friendly advice and supervision before she is left to her own means. The needed pieces she gets at a local hardware store about 2 km from the cabin. In the performance of her act she realized that it is a risky project: the moss-clad granite terrain is *steep* and the wooden elements *twisted*. The drill is huge and heavy, it bounces a couple of times off the rock, and the drilling process requires constant attention not to go sideways and cost injuries.

She is struck by the attention her activity is getting from the family: why is she putting this amount of concentration and energy into this?

A mix of wonder and irritation, perhaps. She has to disassemble a large part of the stairs, attach it to the post-shoe and straighten it up, as much as possible. But the parts are awkward. The measures of the regular elements vary, and there seems no record as to why. But in the end the flooring came out OK.

And, above all, the staircase now appeared to be stable and safe. To complete her mission, she wrote some words in the *guest-book* an adequate thing to do for a person in her position – where the project was described in more/less the same terms as the ones given here. In her partner's entry the project was *then* integrated into the account of other current jobs. The stair was subsequently varnished with a dark brown wood-stain that gave it a *new* appearance compared to the rest of the house, where the same stain was used. And contributed with a *finished* element on a façade where new planks were still unvarnished.



Figure 4. Post shoe



All that happened on-site, could of course have taken place only in the mind of the woman: a spectacular case of an *illusion*. However, even if illusory, the content of her trouble found an operational problem and a *narrative*. As her entry in the guestbook was co-opted by her partner, in a larger account of this stay – including both social events and what had been done on the construction site – thereby became part of a narrative. It had found its place and was not lived in denial. This kind of field-response is a key to how illusory mental constructs pass a threshold and are transformed into a memory of a *trail* that can be picked up and triangulate with other *marks* of a similar kind. Which is the birth of a narrative: *fiction* is distinguished from *illusion* by the fact that it can be *marked* by the real. By going into the detail of rebuilding the staircase she found evidence of other claims on irregularities in how the entire cabin had been constructed.

As the attention to her activities rose, and she had ventured to write her entry in the guestbook, she asked herself by *which right* she had ventured this compound initiative (because she had done the right thing and done it right). She had intervened into the *être ensemble* of the family – and her part in it – by doing something with the *être ensemble* of the cabin.

Through an action she had made a statement that would otherwise have been difficult to put into words. The work also comprised a bit of violence. Since it came from an uncharted terrain, and nobody had asked her to take on the project. In other words, she had defined herself somewhat into the family's *être ensemble* and changed the odds a bit.

What is the relation between such odds having changed – the sequence of events – and embodied memory? You can't count it, yet it counts. It is relatively independent on whether the attendance liked it/not. It still counts. And in the *précis* it was logged in the guestbook on three terms: **1)** the woman's entry on the note of *being together*; **2)** her partner's entry, who included her into the *group formation*; **3)** being part of the construction-memory of the cabin itself, and the habitat. With its branching unto the construction-memory of the cabin, it also connects with the acquisition and settlement of the property. The history of the previous landowners – who were farmers and fishermen – the more recent turns where new money and enormous fortunes are making their way into the landscape in Porsches, Rolls-Royces, Ferraris, Teslas and Bentleys. Loud concert events. Glaring light-posts illuminating by night the villas replacing the cabins. Incursions into the habitat. Or, so it seems to the *old-timers*: cabin owners that have been around from the 60s onwards and in some cases earlier: as seasonal summer-guests of local pensions, eventually renting houses for a more private experience. In some sense, the settlement of recent wealth in the area is in continuation of the previous trend. Changes grazing a growing area of the local time-scape, in an area famous for its coastal commons with its geological park with a 300-million-year recent history. The point being that when the events grazing off the time-scape intervenes into an environment which it took far longer to make, they can *no longer* be seen as disconnected.

Returning to Spinoza, the scope of the geometrical order that caps his philosophical treatise cannot be seen in isolation from his work as a *lens-grinder* for commissioners like the Dutch astronomer Huygens. Just as Spinoza's Jewish and Huygens' aristocratic background marked their *être ensemble*<sup>6</sup>. To Spinoza freedom was a *collective* achievement and acquired from how we live together. It was not something inborn: i.e., freedom can be born of emancipated collectives (as the researchers and philosophers at his time). While happiness results from fulfilment at an *individual* level, when turning away from passivity and hatching a potential for activity. Which is how Spinoza's *être ensemble* departs from individual freedom (*liberalism*) and collective happiness (*socialism*). In the *précis* the woman's status as a guest of the family endowed her with an impossible freedom at the price of a collective happiness that defined the norm in the life of the cabin. By engaging with more than one stratum of the timescape – the family, the building and the natural habitat – a triangulation occurred that placed her intervention beyond timeliness and occurred with a similar effect as Darvill's post-in-the-hole. What she had docked became also a mnemonic mark.

6. "A person should always teach his son a pure and simple craft! 4 For they knew well that, in the end, only Torah accompanied by a craft will endure. So, too, did the sage Baruch de Spinoza, with all his vast understanding and surpassing greatness, study the craft of grinding lenses for instruments of vision, both small and great. He did this so that by means of this occupation of his, he might obtain the life of his hand and his daily bread, nourishing his soul in faith and without deceit, without being disturbed by worry from watching over the gates of wisdom day after day. And it turned out just as he planned." F.n. 4 Mishnah Kiddushin 4:14. Excerpt from: Letteris, Meir HaLevi. (2019/1845). Open the gates, both 1) to refugees/immigrants and 2) to the parliament of things.

At this point, we can already anticipate that Bruno Latour's turn to the *terrestrial* attractor (2021), abandoning global modernism, is to reorient and organise the political right and left, in terms that may resemble Spinoza's. That is, an extended right of citizenship to the entire gamut of the *être ensemble*.

Accepting and integrating the *multiple* at the level of things – as matter of *fact*, matter of *care* – and people. This comes out quite clearly from Latour's two latest books. Also, his venture is cartographic. A tessellation of surfaces at the level of people and things conjointly.

The subtitles in French are revealing:

1. *Où atterrir? Comment s'orienter en politique* (2017, Where to land? How to orient oneself in politics [2018, Eng. Down to earth: politics in the new climatic regime]).
2. *Où suis-je? Leçons du confinement à l'usage des terrestres* (Eng. Where am I? Lessons from the lockdown for terrestrial usage [2021, Eng. After lockdown – A metamorphosis]). Message: open the gates!<sup>7</sup>

Rather than presently underscoring the *pros* and *cons* of Latour's radical propositions, our focus here is on the alternative/terrestrial line-up of factors where human survival, emancipation and freedom are only within a *collective* reach (if at all). So that the basic idea of ethics as living a good life and seek happiness by partaking of the life in the city, is cast on an idea of freedom capping the collective: that is, the *être ensemble* as the idea of wanting to live together.

What this has to do with memory, the gesture of docking images and images as marks hereby is clarified: in *Ethica*, freedom is beyond the scope of memory, because humans are innately determined by emotions. They are not born free. Happiness, on the other hand, is not beyond the scope of memory: to the extent that freedom is won collectively, it is remembered by the happiness we derived from it. While happiness is remembered, freedom remains a pledge<sup>8</sup>.

In the flyer archive of the adjoined portfolio, an early query came with the C19 lockdown and conversations with philosopher Bojana Cvejic and composer Daniel Bíro in 2020, prompted the idea of conceiving the entries to the flyer-archive as part of Project Spinoza, flagged on the KHiODA database. Working on the index – called the [Meantime index](#)<sup>9</sup> – in reference to the present exposé that was expected to come after it, the interest of Spinoza returned with the query on the datum.

<sup>7</sup> Open the gates, both 1) to refugees/immigrants, and 2) to the parliament of things.

<sup>8</sup> For the foundation of these discussions (cf. Aristotle 2002).

<sup>9</sup> The Meantime index contains a Links document to the flyer-archive. The project and its organisation is explained in the web-page's blurb.



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ARTICLE

# PHOTOGRAPHY AND MEMORY

THE REPRESENTATION OF THE  
UNREPRESENTABLE IN GUSTAVO  
GERMANO'S *ABSENCES*

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## PHOTOGRAPHY AND MEMORY

### THE REPRESENTATION OF THE UNREPRESENTABLE IN GUSTAVO GERMANO'S *ABSENCES*

#### Abstract

This paper intends to analyze the relationship between memory, aesthetics, and politics in Gustavo Germano *Ausencias's* (Absences) series. The text will consist of three parts.

In the first section, it is presented a brief journey from photography as a "mirror with memory" to photography as art.

The second section reviews the political power of the image during the post-dictatorship.

The third section makes a brief analysis of photography as artistic creation and memory builder, as well as its political function, through Gustavo Germano's photographic essay *Ausencias* (Absences).

#### INTRODUCTION

More than 46 years ago, Argentina experienced a violent dictatorship that has been considered a milestone in regional history. This process did not end with the disappeared, murdered, and exiles that emerged during the dictatorial process, because as the years went by, information continued to emerge. Gradually, a vast bibliography, government documents, documentaries, photographs, iconographic material, films, and testimonies came to light and provided new data. Therefore, the (re)construction of the dictatorship cannot be considered finished, we are still trying to unveil what happened in those years and above all, we are constantly redefining the impact it has had on Argentine and Latin American society.

Thus, little by little, the symbolic weight (to the point of mythification) assigned to such a process has been accentuated, considering it as part of "our history" as a fragment of a past that constitutes and identifies us, where social memories containing representations of the dictatorship are constantly being shaped.

These memories do not only imply transporting part of that past to the present (not to mention that the resignifications of the past materialize in the present) but also entail future expectations.

#### Keywords

photography  
 memory  
 disappeared  
 Argentina

In the context of the transition to democracy, some photographs were recovered by Víctor Basterra<sup>1</sup>, who was the last detainee-disappeared released. During his captivity, he recovered negatives that testified to the clandestine detention, the perpetrators, and the marks of torture of some of the disappeared (Figure 1), images that represent the abyss of representation, of political and symbolic representation: of representation as the general way in which the modern is established as “the epoch of the image of the world” (García, 2009).

Photographs in this context functioned not only as a support to imagine the unimaginable and/or the untestimoniable as Didi-Huberman (2008) puts it in his criticism of other authors who bet on the unspeakable. These photographs function in this sense, not only as an image that allows us to go beyond itself, but also as a symbol that contains multiple representations.



**Figure 1.** Víctor Basterra Report  
(Centro de Estudios Legales y  
Sociales - CELS)

documentation (Castillo, 2004), since the context in which the photograph is inserted gives us much more information about it; for example, in which newspaper, magazine, exhibition or museum the image is shown, with which written elements, captions or articles on the side with small plates that guide the interpretation of the photographs in a certain direction etc.

From the above, we can elucidate that the analysis of the photographs can offer us a sample of some event, a memory of something that for some circumstance was thought to deserve to be remembered, and an interpretation of the reality that later appeared fixed. This aspect is very important in the photographs that we propose to analyze since the actors who use them are playing with this testimonial role of the image of the dictatorship, with the veracity of what is portrayed and with the impact of a supposed irrefutable proof.

## CONSIDERATIONS OF PHOTOGRAPHY AND PHOTOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

It is almost evident that photography is not only a chemical process of image fixation. It is, above all, a social product that, when observed properly, can reveal structures of meaning, values, hierarchies, and cultural models (Suárez, 2007), consequently, it can be analyzed not only from its testimonial dimension – as a record of the event – but also from its uses.

The first dimension assumes that the photograph shows a specific object or situation, that is, it presumes “what is really seen” (of course only in the temporal and geographical space photographed). This type of photographic analysis seeks in the image a “testimony” that shows us what it was<sup>2</sup>: the *spectrum*<sup>3</sup> (Barthes, 1981), which is what is photographed.

The second possible dimension of analysis focuses on a visual analysis of the messages that require analytical reading, followed by the interpretation of the visual language, comparing the images with all kinds of written and unwritten

1. Víctor Melchor Basterra was kidnapped along with his wife and daughter and taken to the ESMA, where he remained as a detainee-disappeared for more than four years, from 1979 until 1983 weeks before the beginning of the democratic transition, however, he remained under surveillance until 1984. He was a graphic designer and Peronist activist. During his captivity in ESMA, he was forced to forge documents (passports, identity cards, weapons licenses) for officers and people close to the Military Forces. During his captivity, he made copies of copies of the photos and documents requested, and hid them in a box of photosensitive paper, as he discovered that every time they searched the place, they did not open the boxes for fear of veiling and rendering the photographic paper useless.

Finally, when they began to give out the exit signs, he began to take out the material, first hiding photos between the testicles and the penis. Then he took the courage to take out several of them, taped to his ribs or legs with adhesive tape. When he arrived home, he hid them in a hole in a wall and told a colleague who had already been released about it in case he was “transferred” at some point.

See: <https://proyectoidis.org/victor-basterra/>

2. This should not be confused with the veracity of the meaning of what is shown in the photograph, since images can be biased, however, it is an indication of the existence of something. I take these theoretical principles from Hugo José Suárez, (Suárez, 2007, p. 448).

3. That is to say, the photograph labelled with a word that “retains, through its root, a relation to “spectacle” and adds to it that something terrible is in every photograph: the return of the dead.” (Barthes, 1981, p.9).



However, as Alberto del Castillo rightly states – concerning photojournalism in the case of the student movement in Mexico, and which can be applied to other regions and subsequent periods – the attitude of the photographer is not innocent, the reproductions he makes are not incidental, on the contrary, they contain a visual strategy that has to do with the social, cultural, and political environment to which he belongs.

Such a strategy is not the exclusive work of photographers but must be understood from the tension generated between the author of the image and the place and space it occupies within the corresponding journalistic publication, which gives it a specific ideological orientation, among other things, from the caption (Castillo, 2004).

That is to say – resorting to Angenot (2010), in each society, the accumulation of signs and models (discursive memory) produced in the past for previous states of the social order, produce the dominance of certain semiotic facts that overdetermine (condition) what can be enunciated and deprive of means of enunciation the unthinkable “not yet said”.

Thus, if we understand that photography has two messages, one without code (reality) and the other with code – the content and meaning of the image (Barthes, 1981), where denotation is the analysis that concerns the first type of message, it is the closeness to reality, objectivity, the fidelity of the image, taking the information in the photo as a faithful reflection of reality -inventing places, objects, characters, etc. (Suárez, 2007) – and then, the connotative and semiotic analysis (from visual and linguistic anthropology) that belongs to the second type of message, that is, messages that are read and understood by a particular collective.

Therefore, we can see that the photographs of the dictatorship, both those owned by the official newspapers, as well as those of the newspapers and magazines critical of the government, the books that contain these images in their pages, and the Memorial, were published with the clear message of the dictatorship; they published them with the clear message of making the population notice something about the dictatorship, highlighting certain points and integrating them within a narrative that marks a path of interpretation, with the intention of molding in their favor the social memories regarding the social mobilization from a discursive hegemony, where the set of ‘repertoires’ and the rules and topology of ‘statuses’ that confer to these discursive entities positions of influence and prestige, procure them styles, forms, micro-narratives, and arguments that contribute to their acceptability, that is, to a regulatory system that predetermines the production of concrete discursive forms (Angenot, 2010).

## REPRESENTING THE UNREPRESENTABLE

As a consequence of the dictatorial experience, various strategies of artistic resistance emerged in the public space, trying to dislocate the discourse of authoritarianism through the creation of new aesthetic proposals, which showed the urgency of re-politicizing art, that is, to sharpen the insurgent cut of forms and concepts that sought to undermine the social and cultural representations of the authoritarian discourse (Richard, 2007).

After the transition to democracy, a close relationship was consolidated between images and socio-cultural processes around the recovery of the recent past. In this emergence, photography emerged as a support for the narration of the violent processes in the region and photographic essays began to be developed from the images of some of the disappeared. These essays generated multiple questions about representation and the ways of constructing a visual memory, playing not only with the construction of history but also with autobiographical and identity narratives, for from where to look at and think about these photos? What to do with them?

In this sense, the new artistic production tried to counterpose a poetic contest to the militarized structure of the city, because the dictatorship transformed the space into a guarded territory where the traffic of everyday life was emptied of meaning, retreating into zones of silence and invisibility. In the face of this symbolic emptying, the irruption of diverse artistic practices was not only configured as an expansion or overflow of conventional supports but essentially as a way of re-symbolizing the space of the social and contending with the unequivocal and unshakeable meanings of the dictatorial order. But is it possible to represent the unrepresentable? Is it possible for the materiality of the images to return a little of the absence of the bodies?

## ABSENCES

In post-dictatorship Argentina, and a few years after the foundation, in 1995, of the organization H.I.J.O.S. (Hijos por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio), a series of cultural products created by descendants of the disappeared and their generational contemporaries began to emerge in the artistic, literary, and cinematographic spheres. These projects have made it possible to represent and reread a history that – in many cases – had been veiled from them. Within the framework of these productions, several works emerged that addressed not only the need to search for those who disappeared during the dictatorship but also questioned the emptiness of absence and its symbolic significance in order to reconstruct the present. Photographer Gustavo Germano, whose brother was arrested and disappeared in 1976, generated a photographic essay entitled *Absences*, where he seeks to make visible, from old and new photographs, the gaps caused by the disappearance of people [Figure 2].

The narrative that Germano intends to make through photographs, bursts into the studies of memory and the representation of violence that have abused the condition of impossibility, as Rancière (2003) warns when he mentions that there is:

“L’usage inflationniste de la notion d’irreprésentable et de la constellation des notions voisines: l’imprévisible, l’impensable, l’intraitable, l’irrachetable. Cet usage inflationniste fait en effet tomber sous un même concept et entoure d’une même aura de terreur sacrée toutes sortes de phénomènes, de processus et de notions, qui vont de l’interdit mosaïque de la représentation à la Shoah, en passant par le sublime kantien, la scène primitive freudienne, le Grand Verre de Duchamp ou le Carré blanc sur fond blanc de Malevitch.” (Rancière, 2003)

Germano’s work with photographs starts from the visual construction of memory, he uses photography as a narrative or a trace of what is no longer and still (Richard, 2000), which determines materiality and a presence, since its corporeality testifies the trace of a being that is not only past and otherness, not only a “having been”, but still an insistence on becoming. The use of photography in this essay is important since it refers to something that really existed, something that has been (Barthes, 1981). Perhaps from Barthes’ point of view, the punctum of this essay lies not only in that arrow that comes out of the image, without having sought it, to hurt and shock us but in the coexistence between the impossibility of time and desire.

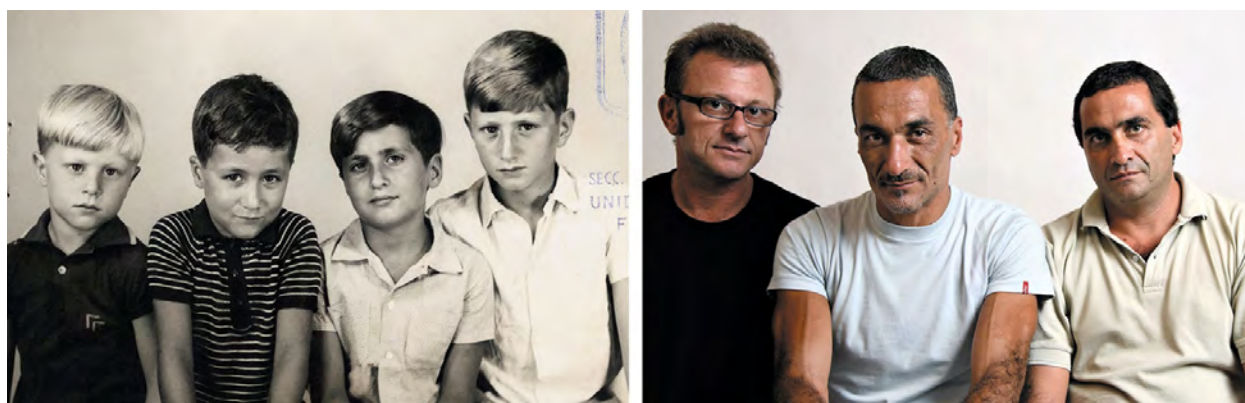


Figure 2. Germano brothers<sup>4</sup>. (Gustavo Germano Archive).

*Ausencias* consists of a series of fifteen pairs of photographs that present different images referring to the disappeared detainees of the province of Entre Ríos. The first [old] photograph in each pair was taken from family albums. The second image [the new one] is a reconstruction of the first one more than thirty years later. The scenarios are repeated, the actors, perhaps the gestures, but in each of the photos, there is someone missing, that is, the actors now coexist with the empty space of someone who is not there. The past and present are violently opposed, emotionally and sensitively, as they are aware of the absence of empty space.

<sup>4</sup>. In the picture [top]: Gustavo Germano, Guillermo Germano, Diego Germano, Eduardo Germano. In the picture [below]: Gustavo Germano, Guillermo Germano, Diego Germano.



Figure 3. "La Tortuga Alegre" Río Uruguay, Entre Ríos<sup>5</sup>. (Gustavo Germano Archive).



Figure 4. Snapshot by Roberto Ismael Sorba<sup>6</sup>. (Gustavo Germano Archive)

Under each of the first photos, Germano indicates the year it was taken and the names of those who appear in the images, in the second ones a dot is what refers to the disappearance (Figures 3 and 4).

Finally, returning to the question that led us to rethink the photographic essay *Absences*, is it possible to represent the unrepresentable? It is perhaps from this reflection that we can clarify that the visual narration of what happened during the last Argentine dictatorship is neither in the realm of the decipherable nor in the unspeakable, neither in the representable nor in the unrepresentable, but always in the gap that separates them, and that keeps them together in that separation (García, 2009).

Perhaps the path lies in pointing out, as Didi-Huberman enunciated, that images inexorably have a powerful capacity to dis-cover the real.

5. En la foto [arriba]: Orlando René Méndez y Leticia Margarita Oliva. En la foto [abajo]: [La playa]

6. In the picture [top]: Roberto Ismael Sorba, Jorge Cresta, Azucena Sorba. In the picture [below]: Jorge Cresta, Azucena Sorba. Roberto Ismael was born on October 12, 1949, in Chiqueros District, Nogoyá (Entre Ríos). In his childhood, due to the economic situation of the family (his mother was a widow with nine children), he had to work in a kiosk and take care of an elderly couple. He attended high school as a commercial expert, standing out for his ability, intelligence, and responsibility. A handsome young man, when he was a child, he was called "El Lindo", and later he was nicknamed "Pilunchi". In 1968 he moved to Santa Fe to enter the university and study Chemical Engineering. It is in this city where he starts to join the Partido Revolucionario de los trabajadores-Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (PRT-ERP). He is married and has two children. He is kidnapped on January 21, 1976, at 4.265 Hernandarias Street in the city of Santa Fe. The snapshot is taken by Roberto Ismael himself - a great amateur photographer - with the automatic shutter of his camera, which he places on top of the refrigerator in the house. He is accompanied by his childhood friend Jorge Cresta and his sister Azucena Sorba. In March 2009, Roberto Ismael is still detained and disappeared. See: Room card of the Ausencias exhibition. Available at: [http://conti.derhuman.jus.gov.ar/2010/09/f\\_ausencias.pdf](http://conti.derhuman.jus.gov.ar/2010/09/f_ausencias.pdf)



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Design | Arts | Culture Vol. 3 | ISSN: 2732-6926

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ARTICLE

# PHOTOGRAPHY AS ANTI-MEMORY

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## PHOTOGRAPHY AS ANTI-MEMORY

"The photographic lens reveals unconscious optics, the same way that psychoanalysis reveals unconscious causes."

(Benjamin, 2013, p. 52)

### Abstract

It is widely known that photography is related to memory. The invention of photography was inextricably linked to memory, as a more effective and direct way than painting.

A more effective and direct way to depict the object to be remembered such as the rulers' portraits or the painted depictions of animals and plants that navigators met while discovering the world, always having a painter with them.

However, in the present study, we attempt to show that the innermost reason for the invention and use of photography was never related to memory, and if it was related, the reason was to make us forget what we were aiming to remember.

### Keywords

Romanticism  
the invisible  
alterity  
structure  
the void  
symbolic mirror  
magic  
memory  
remembrance  
photography

The inner cause of photography's position in human history and art was:

- 1) To bring us into contact with the invisible: to that, photography is analysed through philosophy's prism and especially as Romanticism's offspring that attempts to go beyond reality and connect us with alterity and the invisible which dictates the visible.
- 2) To offer a sense of reality to the structural void on which the human psyche is composed: to that, photography is analysed through the prism of psychoanalysis as a symbolic mirror of the photographer's and viewer's psyche, a process based on the "mirror stage" (Lacan, 1966).
- 3) To make us forget: to that, photography is analysed through an anthropological regard where, via common mechanisms which are related to Magic, the photographer and the viewer have the potential to surpass reality's flow through amnesia.



## PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH: A RUPTURE IN THE VISIBLE

Photography is Romanticism's offspring. It is born in the same era as the great movement of Romanticism, the most radical search that human history, art, and life ever met.

Romanticism was the ideal hunter of the absolute, the birthplace of anything and everything, the most ground-breaking and contradictory movement that humanity ever came across. Romanticism is the expression of the impossible and futile absolute, where we should be at the meeting of Don Quixote with Vienna's Actionists who express the rage for the transcendence of life's futility, answering to futile with explosive futility, knowing that the human is a useless passion, as Sartre (2008) would say. Romanticism is the rebellion against the settlement of the Enlightenment and Rationalism, which supported that all the questions are true answers and all the answers can be combined with each other into a whole, otherwise, the world would be chaotic: Newton's theory on gravity could be applied on politics and ethics. The Enlightenment, however, which led the human away from the darkness of the Middle Ages into the light of Rationalism, is a victory of humanity in seeing the world through science, social self-determination, psychological free will and the interpretation of nature based on physics (Kepler, Galileo, Copernicus, Newton) and not based on the Old Testament. Foucault (2003) equals the fight against the Enlightenment to patricide.

Romanticism comes to reject exactly the human's victory of the spirit against darkness, not wanting to bring the human back to the Middle Ages, but to side-line logic into the human to leave space for the other nature of the human to emerge, human's real nature, desire. Desire was exiled from the social forefront as not contributing to social cohesion, not contributing to ethics, science's progress, and human's logical side. Romanticism is also the womb of two completely different movements: Socialism and Fascism, since both pursue the absolute as a social state. The slogan of May '68 itself, "Be realistic, demand the impossible!", is nothing but a later post-romantic slogan.

Romanticism is a search for alterity in its most absolute form, a plea towards 'thereafter' so that it can become part of our life again, after being excluded by Rationalism. It becomes a way to penetrate the collective imagination as a reaction to science's and reality's desert, into the predefined meaning and life. It is, at the same time, what Pinel did when he took off the chains from the mad, the society recognises that the mad people have a human status, and accepts the complete alterity of madness as a constituent of human nature. Romanticism's main slogan was: "I don't want any more truth, I want more magic".

A complete opposition to science, to conventions, to Rationalism and a complete reinforcement of the exotic, of the non-conventional. But, as far as art is concerned, Modernism's main pillar, Surrealism, which paved the way to 20th-century's art, is Romanticism, as Breton (1946) said. Romanticism is concurrently the complete prominence of subjectivity, of individuality, of singularity. It is, therefore, the prominence of desire. The desire, as the main component of the human state, because of the social conventions, cultural censorship, and religious prohibitions, remained the exiled voice, coming from the place of the conscience which acted secretly, creating symptoms whether they were social expressed with the French Revolution of 1789 or the movement of 1848, or psychological with the manifestation of psychosomatic symptoms or organised disorders such as neurosis and psychosis. Freud, a little later, calls for the desire to speak, to express itself and to stop acting in a censored and forbidden way. We would say that the previous centuries were sick of lack of speech and ingestion of desire.

Until the Romanticism era – with a few exceptions such as Goya, Rubens, Manet, and Gericault – in terms of its topics and expression, art was completely subdued to social conventions and religious laws so as to present the human in the image and likeness of God, which made Foucault (Régis, 2001) say that art was the servant of the system. Everything that follows in human and art history has its origin from that era. From Hegel and Fichte to Breton and Tzara, from Gropius and Tschumi to Situationists, Actionists, Abramović and Stockhausen (press-conference, NDR, Hamburg, 2001), who claims that the events of 9/11 were "the greatest work of art imaginable for the whole cosmos". It is then when the long trips to the East begin and the European Romantics, such as Byron, Chateaubriand, Hugo etc., participate in the Greek Revolution of '21. Myths such as the nation, the admiration for minorities, exoticism, collections, the point that the absolute reaches, the impossible, the futile, and the encounter with alterity emerge.

Orientalism, which emerges at the time, is a prologue of Primitivism and Art Brut, which will bring to the foreground the Modernism and “Les Femmes d’Alger” (Olivier, 1907), so that the 20th century can welcome art and life. In essence, what comes to the foreground is the most absolute form of alterity. And the most absolute forms of alterity are death and madness. But death and madness are the absolute forms of life and desire.

The world is undergoing a change. The world is not content with the church’s doctrine and social puritanism. It asks for liberation from ethics, from society and from prohibition. It asks to see the world in a ‘different’ state. However, this ‘see’ means to see the other side of the things which were diligently hidden within art and social ethics. The world, which everyone knew was also daemonic, had to be presented as angel-made. This is the era that photography was invented. In that breeding ground, photography blossoms, demanding the absolute as a genuine offspring of Romanticism.

Photography aims to be able to express, present, to depict human’s inner nature, the one that the human eye is unable to capture, in contrast to the photographic eye, ‘*oculus mentis*’, which would be able to depict the image of the hidden. The photography, Romanticism’s blossom, is trying to trap what cannot be trapped, to truly be where it doesn’t exist, though knowing it beforehand. In fact, to be able to illusionary immobilise the perpetual wave of the universe, according to Romanticism, the Whole, into a previously hopeless and for that reason acceptable attempt to cut reality into pieces, as an irony against the fact that we cannot conceive things. A conscious and, at the same time, futile attempt of self-transcendence. We know that the definition through reality does not dwell there, but we insist on a last attempt of definition.

Photography becomes, thus, one of the contemporary myths of the human imaginary. Since all the old myths have died during the Enlightenment, the world has been disenchanted, as Weber (2009), Benjamin (2013) and Adorno (2000) would say. New myths are called by Romanticism for a re-enchantment of the world, a return to the “sacred” (Weber, 2009) and to “aura” (Benjamin, 2013) so as to substitute the lost places, to ‘narrate’ as a reaction to the scientific Newtonian and partly Leibnizian reality. Photography, away from being identified with reality, aims to show us, to drag from the depths of the human nature, those strands that lie into the darkness of prohibition, censorship, guilt, which, however, only in the 20th century could systematically be done, the century of a complete dispute of the social, philosophical, cultural and individual values, having as main representatives in the field of photography, just to name a few, Molinier, Arbus, Mapplethorpe, Sherman and naturally the greatest anatomist of the human soul, Witkin.

The advent of photography offers us the magic machine so that we can see the other side of things. Photography does not come to depict a known reality. What would be the point of that? One atrocious reality is enough, as Danto (2004) would say. It comes to make us see the world in a different way, to reveal to the glance what the glance, because of its training, had learnt to see in a particular way, the way which dictates the glance to see something as correct. If we analyse the history of photography, we will see that photography never depicted reality or if it did, it was in order to show something else. In the movements in photography’s history, the image is not related to reality, although is making use of it. This is best shown as a point of view in the slogan of Situationists, which we could say expresses the whole of the movements through which photography existed: “The Earth will celebrate when art is freed from the value of the result” which slogan, in an unexpected way, meets Kant’s (2013) austere definition about art.

In the question of whether the pursuit of being able to see the other side of things, applies to simple photographs as well; family photos, landscape, travel photos etc. the answer is ‘yes’. In a family photo the pursued is not the people’s images, but to show that they are present, they laugh, and they compose a whole body against decline, loss and death. In other words, what they are not. The family photo is the acceptance of lack with images of wholeness. A sunset is the definition of the border between life and death, two mathematical sets which intersect into a subset, the one that is neither day nor night, but captures in an instant way the hovering moment when the human is light and darkness, the verge between existence and non-existence. It captures Artemis’ image as a deity of borders. Concerning travel photography, it is not so much to take something with me from this place, its images, although Sontag (1993) says that it is proof that the trip, as a strategy of accumulating photos, happened.

It is to leave something from me, my glance which will continue to exist at that place even when I will have left from that place, from the earth, from life. We realise that photography, although an image itself, seeks what is not an image, to see something else through the image. The same applies to art in general. As if the human seeks through art to see 'behind' it. What is there 'behind' the image? Behind the surface of the 'things'? Can the image reveal what there is 'behind' itself? Or is it, that only through the image I can see, even though the image itself conceals what I would be able to see, saying "if you want to see something, see this". As if we are trying to pass through the image, to see what? We would say that, although the relation between photography and reality is given, photography cannot exist without 'something out there'.

However, its intention was, from the beginning, something else: To see what dictates reality, it becomes an image. In essence, to visualise the invisible. Photography comes to cover the human's desire to see 'beyond' what one sees, 'beyond' what one is told that the world is, to see the world in a different way, behind the surfaces even though, and we can see the contradiction here, it is the surfaces that one takes pictures of. Photography, the essence and soul of Romanticism, becomes a philosophical theory and the camera becomes a psychoanalytical mechanism to discover 'thereafter', the invisible, the ineffable, what is not represented, alterity, the 'other side' of ourselves.

### PSYCHOANALYTICAL APPROACH: PHOTOGRAPHY AS A SYMBOLIC MIRROR

Why do we like photos? Why does photography, ever since it was invented, attract so much the human psyche, having as a result of the photographic act, contributed by the affordable cost, to concern the whole of the planet? It may be the most common act in the globe along with driving, navigating the Net and mobile telephony.

We have, at times, already connected photography to death: Photography as a victory over death, since the subject's image remains even after the disappearance of the body's physical dimension. We have connected photography to time: Immobilisation of the moment, intervening in life, and detachment of the phase we desire. We have also connected photography to remembrance: Photography is the imprint of a remembrance of our memory the way we believe we met a person, a moment or a place. We have connected photography with travel: Travelling, nowadays, means photographing and the opposite, photographing means travelling. We have all seen the crowds of tourists photographing and not travelling though being on a trip. We have also connected photography with art: exquisite works of art are the photos of Man Ray, László Moholy-Nagy, Henri Cartier-Bresson etc. We have connected photography as a synonym of reality: Photography captures reality as an image, even though the camera does not see reality as it is. We have connected reality with truth although it can support lies. And, of course, we have connected photography with advertising, architecture, cinema, the press, politics, science, biology, medicine, astronomy... In general, photography has been connected with the whole of our life, it is the framework within which our life moves. As Sontag (1993) said, what has not been photographed, simply does not exist. Or, as Baudrillard (1991) said, it doesn't matter whether 'The Gulf War' happened or not, what matters are the images which tell us that it happened.

Although photography defines our life – photography makes us exist, not the other way round – we could wonder: Is there a common place, a common denominator which dictates photography to exist within the manifestations we just mentioned? In terms of semiotics, if we consider photography as a Saussurean sign whose signifier is image, is there a common signified in every photographic act, in every photo?

The sense we have for ourselves, who we are or who we think we are, who we would like to be, how the other sees us, if he sees us the way we want to show him we are or that we are afraid whether he sees something we do not want him to see, something concerning our relation to the truth and the lie, the relation to ourselves and the other, the relation to our sex, all these are dictated by an elementary and fundamental composition which happens at the early stages of the human's life, the "mirror stage" which was introduced to psychoanalysis by J. Lacan (1966). The "mirror stage" (Lacan, 1966) is a universal procedure during which the young child discovers the image of their body and, by extension, the image of oneself in front of a mirror or in front of a child similar to them.



They know that this image is his/hers, this body is his/hers, acknowledging their existence as real. However, this sense of oneself's reality is based, formed on the basis of an image, the one that the child sees in the mirror. The image might be the equivalent of reality, but it is not reality. It is the depiction of reality, it is the representation of reality, it is a capture of reality, an interpretation maybe, but not reality itself, even though the image as a fact is real. This means that the sense of reality to the human is formed without reality. We would say that the alienation by the image is the only way for someone to feel that they exist, that they have and are a body on which, later on, the sex is going to be structured and, by extension, social transaction. The fact that the sense of reality, the sense of existence, is formed while reality is absent has consequences concerning human psychology.

We would say that the psyche is structured on the basis of a lack, the lack of reality having as a result for the human to be in a perpetual search for reality so as to fill the void which does not happen in a random way: The human pursues the reality with which he wants to identify, according to the image that he has in his thought for him, that is the image as it was formed in the mirror completed with ideal-'objective' reality. This search is nothing but the procedure of desire. The human desire is nothing but the thirst for reality which comes from the void of reality and at the same time, the procedure itself, the target, sometimes the existential plan to conquer the ideal image of ourselves, the way it has been dictated by the image in the mirror.

For this reason, the search for reality doesn't happen randomly. We will seek for the companion who promises our completeness, the ideal image of ourselves through the mirror our companion becomes, so as to find our image. We will seek for our children to fulfil our desires, so that we can find our own ideal image through our children. God is made in the image and likeness of the human and the opposite. Our friends make us see an image of ourselves which reinforces, sometimes cures what we want to be, what we believe we deserve to be. But, also, what we do in our life in general, to work, to travel, to just desire something, are ways to cover the void, we would say actually to find a meaning of life.

It is obvious from what is said that our desires are the symbolic mirrors through which we search for the ideal image of ourselves, the ideal reality of ourselves, the way that we did not have it when we formed our image in the mirror. The dreams of our life and the dreams of our sleep, sometimes as a nightmare, are close representations of the image of ourselves.

Art is the perfect symbolic mirror in which the artist can mirror, see oneself, be a narcissus of oneself, be, possibly, freed from what one considers bad elements of oneself because the viewer's glance judges and acquits them. The artist can be freed from his internal confrontations, he can create bridges of communication between his loneliness and the other, he can avoid madness or suicide, although these two are not certain at all. But, even in the case of the mad artist (Art Brut), what is asked is for the work of art, as a symbolic mirror, to picture the image that the mad artist seeks for, or wants to express for himself.

Photography, because of its relation to reality, as an equivalent and substitute of reality, as representation and reproduction of reality, therefore of the 'truth', promises, in the most emphatic way, that it is going to be the perfect symbolic mirror, an – as good as reality – mirror, the one which does not lie and the one which, through reality, is going to picture the ideal image of ourselves, exactly as we would like to be, in the most persuasive for us way.

We would say, at this point, that the photographer is always in front of his lens (Kangelaris, 2020). And, as Benjamin (2013) points out, if the soul and photography are mechanisms of producing images, what is produced is not any image, but an image of ourselves. We would also say that every photo, and not just portrait photography, becomes a magic mirror, which pictures the reality we have in our heads for us. In that sense, photography, as a sign, always has a constant signified: the photographer's ego which dictates the variability of the signifier, that is, the different topics he will capture and picture into image. Yet, the reality into an image is never complete. However, many selfies that we take are never enough. We photograph in order to exist. And in that sense, a selfie is an agonising cry for existence.

No image, no photo, no work of art can be complete, because no work of art, no photo can picture the reality of ourselves (since this reality is only inside our head). So much the better. Because, that way, we will continue to take photos, to desire, to live.

Maybe, the perfect work of art is an invitation to death. On the contrary, the agony for the perfect work of art might be the possibility of meaning and the management of time from birth to death.

### **ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACH: THERE IS NO SOUVENIR PHOTOGRAPHY**

If the most widespread aim of photography is to maintain remembrance, a fact which means credit of time, does the cancelation of time cancel, concurrently, the meaning of photography?

If a photo as image is not proof of reality, whose the photo makes use of so as to exist, meaning that if the image is not part of the pre-existent reality, then maybe photography does not exist so as to make us remember – since the image does not picture the alleged reality – but exactly because the image owes its existence to the cancelation of reality, then maybe the aim of photography is not to remember but to forget? And if so, what? And forgetting to which desire of the human could it be related?

Frazer (2009), Mauss and Hubert (2003), Lévi-Strauss (Mauss, 1999) – studying the width of manifestations of magic thought in everyday life, in the feeling, in the reasoning, actually make us contemplate that magic thought is not the exclusive capability of the primitive, as Lévy-Bruhl (2010) claims, or the children's and mentally ill people's capability, as the psychiatry of the '30s claimed. It is not a pre-logic state of the human mind, but it continues to co-exist with the Aristotelian, the dialectical and psychoanalytical logic, if not as a structural element of the contemporary human's psychology, at least as a powerful remnant of the archaic structure of the psyche at the dawn of the thinking human.

Nowadays, magic as thought is ignored. It is ignored, on one hand, at a social level as driven away by religion, whose, according to Frazer (2009) and Mauss and Hubert (2003), magic constitutes a continuation. And, on the other hand, involved with the symbolic order in the human's psyche, it is hidden concerning its procedures: The human is a ritual being, the social structure is a world of symbolic relationships and culture is the whole of the symbolic relationships over which the meanings of magic continue to secretly act.

If we search for common elements between magic and photography, we see, in the first place, that concerning magic, ritual as well as the photographic act, there is no distance between desire and its realisation, in other words the magician's practical, verbal, figurative act: say it and it will happen. As a consequence, the "laws" that according to Mauss and Hubert (2003) rule magic or give magic the possibility to exist, are common to the ones that rule the production of the image since the image owes its existence:

1. To the absence of reality or to an unwanted reality;
2. It tends to substitute reality;
3. It creates reality;
4. The new reality is an equivalent of the replaced one;
5. The new reality occupies the place of the old one, Sontag (1993) would say, at such a level that the way we perceive reality is not the way the world exists, but the way it is imprinted;
6. The new reality of the image acts in the place of the old one:  
"The pictures", Avedon (no date) says, "have a reality for me that the people don't", fact which has as a result to completely change the perception and investment of the signifier, object and feeling are related to the image and not to reality;
7. Driving wheel for this mechanism is desire.

In that way, we are not surprised when, looking ourselves in a photo, we say: Here I am, we are not surprised that in the mirror in the morning we see ourselves and not our image, we are not surprised by the interest in television heroes, we should not be surprised by the faith to optical illusions, to the delirium, to humans' visions. Let's not be surprised that the world is no longer the one that derives from the mechanism of vision, but also, and maybe more powerfully, the world which derives from the world of the images. The Otherworld, the invented and at the same time alienating, since it imposes irrevocably its imprint on our psyche.

"Photography", Winogrand (no date) says, "is not about the thing photographed. It is about how that thing looks photographed". The image is not a certificate, a proof of reality, a Barthes' evidence of "existed" (Barthes, 2008), that I was there, but, on the contrary, it is a certificate of death, reality's death certificate (Kangelaris, 2020). Image is what is absent. The film becomes the philosopher's stone which achieves the transformation of reality's metal into the valuable metal of desire.

The photographer becomes the contemporary magician who invents a reality which is not questioned as real, the studio or the open space becomes the temple of the ritual, the camera becomes the magic medium, the order and the photographer's movements become the magic 'abracadabra' for the transition to the image's reality. Having a surplus of meaning, Lévi-Strauss (Mauss, 1999) would say, the definition of the objects' truth becomes infinitely more powerful through the image than through reality itself. Photography, having forgotten its origin, which is that the offspring of the dead-during-labour mother-reality, becomes the charm, the haunt, the credential and the passport, so that someone can inhabit their world with reality. Through photography, the human achieves what was sought after by alchemy and medicinal magic at the same time. What is that?

If the desire is the creation of a new reality through the motivation of either the supernatural powers, concerning magic, or the natural-technical powers, concerning photography, then the image is not the medium through which we remember, but it is the complete opposite. It is the medium through which we forget 'what it was' and we perpetually find ourselves within a 'what it is'. Through photography, we don't remember who we were, but we are who we are, through the present moment of looking at it. Photography becomes the negation of remembrance, the deactivation of the then-reality, it becomes the substitute, here and now, of a constant reality perpetually invariable. It becomes the reality itself, where the time component has been completely repealed so that the image of the person who sees, immovable in time, can exist in its place. That is, immortal. Thus, photography becomes the mirror of immortality, where the human captures and is alienated by his image as a fact of the reality that he has invented and circumvents the meaning of time, he constantly dwells in the present.

The love for photography is not a testament to remembrance but to the fact that the human is indebted to death, that he is possessed by unsurpassed mourning for the fact of life which he tries to rescue with images. The photography is the radiography of an existential depression. Photography is not a way to remember, but to forget. To forget not who we were, but who we will be. That is, dead. It is a memory mobilisation so as to trigger its own repeal. It is a way to be 'magically' and constantly present through the confusion of the pictured person's image and the person himself. In that sense, souvenir photography doesn't exist. Souvenir photography as such, is nothing but the thought's obedience to the "laws" of magic (Mauss and Hubert, 2003), where the human creates time, with his own means, as an image imprint. So, we photograph not to remember but to forget, and through this to constantly 'be'. The 'through the glance' fact becomes photography's magic moment where the time's hand is forever immobilised. Photography becomes a complete 'magic image', a 'magic mirror', a magic portrait, affirming for the immortality of the moment and, therefore, for 'eternally'.

However, it is widely believed that photography was invented so as to protect memory, that the role and the meaning of photography is to remember. There is also the conviction that photography operates as memory's hard disk. Academics on photography and image beyond the English Channel are categorical when they talk about photography as memory's hard disk, a view over which the philosophical background clearly emerges [James (2006), Dewey (1950)]. View which, though beyond the English Channel, does not include Rorty's (2001), Quine's (2008) or Ayer's (1994) view on what we would call reality as a variable. But what is memory?

Memory is a psychic mechanism to forget what is not useful to remember, no matter whether the outcome of this mechanism is always successful as a complete repression or the opposite: inability of repression, as in the case of post-traumatic syndrome. What we remember is the superficial, the material to form a conscience of being with a time constant. Memory – let's remember Lacan (2005) and Lituraterre – is the litter of the conscience, the psyche's litter. In that sense, we would say that we are what we have forgotten, subject of the 'thing' and not only subject of the signifier.

So, if we want to say that photography is a memory's hard disk, it is a memory that does not concern us, that is not us, that we were not there, it is photography's memory.



We are in front of a signifier without the signified [Hjelmslev (1991), Eco (1988)]. And although the world does not exist without photography, the world appears only after its death, Kracauer (2014) said. Photography announces our absence, as Cadava (2014) said, reminding us Barthes (2008) who called photographers agents of death. In the best-case scenario, we would say that photography is an equivalent of translation, thus, continuous presence of the prototype's death, exactly what happens with speaking and writing, what happens with writing and printing (Derrida, 1990). I photograph means I lose.

Photography helps us forget, it is a hard disk of what we have forgotten, helping the repression mechanism of an unbearable or traumatic reality, feeling or imagination. As Carrera (1986) said, photography was not invented because of appeal to the things, nor to retain memories but from the mere human's desire to live without a glance and without thought. Photography nails our memory to what is not our memory, but to what is the photography's memory. We take photos so as to forget. Souvenir photography does not exist, even though we believe that this was the cause of photography's invention.

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ARTICLE

# THE BALANCE OF PRIVATE PHOTOGRAPH AND MEMORY

FROM SNAPSHOT CULTURE TO  
NETWORKED IMAGE

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Nina Kotamanidou's work focuses on everyday life and the representation of socially instigated, informal circumstances drenched in the feel-good indulgence of common culture. Within this context she looks for associations that give vent to privately nurtured emotions and autobiographical narratives, as DIY manifestations of contemporary selfhood. Accordingly, her academic research explores the field of informal, quotidian uses of visual culture and its meaning-making procedures. She works on a variety of media, such as painting, video and installation. She has participated in many exhibitions and has curated collective shows in Greece. Initially she studied painting in Aristotle University, Greece and then earned a PhD in Art (Wimbledon College of Art// UAL) specializing in video as a mode of self-presentation within pop culture. She works as an Academic Fellow in the Department of Interior Architecture, IHU.

## THE BALANCE OF PRIVATE PHOTOGRAPH AND MEMORY

### FROM SNAPSHOT CULTURE TO NETWORKED IMAGE

#### Abstract

The invention of photography was followed by its extensive usage as visual documentation of any possible scene, by nature, human, object or event. The watchful eye of the camera was hailed as an impassive observer of facts, a witness that tells no lies entrusted with the preservation of public and personal histories.

Under these assumptions it was connected with the crystallization of collective memory as well as the wide initiation of private archiving in the form of the family album, especially when easy-to-use camera technology became commercially affordable. In this short essay, accepting a line of continuity between snapshots and networked photographs despite technological and cultural ruptures, their attributes and uses will be held accountable for providing a mediated, visual shelter to notions of personal and collective memory.

Although this kind of imagery is deemed non-art, my approach is conducted as an art-fuelled investigation, with a mind to set a field of potent exchanges between memory function and images for cultural negotiation.

For that, using interdisciplinary discursive analysis I will look at the evolution of photographic imagery from snapshot to networked within a branch of personal, self-produced representations that have affected both our autobiographical referencing and collective remembrance.

The notion of memory, as the performative interaction between person, technology, media and narrative will be seen against snapshot and networked photography as an informal, meaning-making tactic.

In particular, network photography is acknowledged mainly through its manifestations on visual posts on Facebook or Instagram.

While snapshots as a genre satisfied the need to handle privately the visual documentation of our past and allegedly keep time frozen, networked photographs establish memory in fluidity as remembrance of the present moment just-turned-into-past.

The above positioning prompts a bipartite question: (a) do networked photographs support memory on a personal and collective level in ways similar to snapshot culture, and (b) in the advent of changes has the flow of memory been altered?

#### Keywords

vernacular photography  
snapshot  
networked photograph  
networked memory

## INTRODUCTION

Quite recently I came across a picture on the frontpage of a Greek newspaper. This is what I saw: someone – perhaps a soldier, sitting atop of the cannon of a rather battered tank, was taking a photo of himself while two more fellow soldiers, with guns in their hands, looked at him doing it. The caption read “Ukrainian police officers take a selfie on a destroyed Russian tank in the liberated town of Izyum in the Kharkiv region on September 14”. From this I deduced that it was a documentation of a selfie in the aftermath of a hellish situation – another proof that even war selfies should not come as a surprise anymore. I was flooded with questions concerning not the documentary photo in the paper (which I searched and found on the internet with no difficulty), but the photograph which was being taken in the photograph, the selfie as the caption called it. A stranger’s snap is usually perceived tacky or boring so I had no curiosity to actually see the image, but I was curious about who was going to see it anyway.



**Figure 1.** Ukrainian police officers take a selfie on a destroyed Russian tank in the town of Izyum, recently liberated by Ukrainian Armed Forces, in Kharkiv region, Ukraine on September 14, 2022. Image: Gleb Garanich/Reuters, Caption: Al Jazeera

How would it circulate? Was it shot for personal use only? Would it be sent as a private photo message to family and friends or would it be instantly uploaded to Social Network Sites (SNS here-on), such as Facebook or Instagram, as a post? Would it ever be printed and mounted on a wall? Maybe an ephemeral scroll on Facebook could be the only wall this photo would end up showing. Vernacular photography becomes easily pointless (Chalfren, 1981).

How does this picture work for memory’s sake? Does it keep private memory preserved or updated? Will it reach and enrich collective memory? Is this a digital snap? A selfie? A post? A visual mnemonic ruse? A memory-to-be? Does it do the trick? In accordance with these thoughts, I look at snapshot photography more as an agent of personal lore rather than an aesthetic formulation.

Thus, in this text the relation of autobiographical remembrance to images is handled through a snapshot-turning-to-networked memory debate based on attitudes and uses, as shaped through changes in technological affordances. Consequently, the discussion here follows the changes happening to snapshots as cultural artifacts and memory capsules due to their advancement from analogue to digital to networked photos observing their personal uses as mediated images. As the secluded photo album was superseded by the ubiquitous flow of online photographs, the text observes whether

private remembrance shifted accordingly towards an extrovert version of remembering, analogous to the current incessant processing of published images.

## METHODOLOGICAL CONCERNS

In tackling the ways that autobiographical memory has been infused and is supported in personal photographs, I have considered the current debates on vernacular photography, networked imagery and autobiographical memory using interdisciplinary discursive analysis from photography, media, psychology and art discourses. Although I draw information from the writing of scholars in these disciplines, my interest is not sparked by social studies or media and communications studies, anthropological studies or an ethnographical approach. Being both a practicing artist and a trained scholar I probe these notions with a mind to underpin potent pictorial uses and probable meanings in art discourses. In that, I am not interested in technological details about apparatuses, systems of circulation, conditions of usage in any other way than to delineate the dynamic framework for the relations pertinent to my question. Moreover, the thought that while snapshot imagery has the plain goal to bear witness it “aims always beyond what it presents” underlines this text (Rancière, 2007). In order to define vernacular photography, I take into consideration three terms used to characterize behaviours and traits of everyday life photography, all initiated in the pre-digital era and addressing “specific junctures” of the debate (Cobley & Haeffner, 2009).

The term snapshot, originally denoting “a quick repeated shot of a gun with no deliberate aim” was coined in 1860 by British theorist and scientist John Frederick William Herschel (D’Aloia & Parisi, 2016). It was connected to the marketing of Kodak#1 in 1888 by Eastman and the introduction to the market of simple, affordable cameras. Soon, cheaper technology allowed casual picture-taking and signalled the turn to popular subjects as leisure activities and family-life (Raz-Russo, 2011). Still, it took years for the term to set into its present meaning: a quick, impulsive, untrained take, characterized by “practicality, informality, speed and immediacy” (D’Aloia & Parisi, 2016). Vernacular photography, “a genre that is at once deeply moving and intensely banal” (Zuromskis, 2008a), despite its vast area of production, has remained persistently ignored in official discourses, probably because it refuses to conform to any “formalist art-historical narrative” (Batchen, 2001). Although vernacular photos can take on many appearances they definitely are seen as one thing: non-art photography. This suggests that aesthetic criteria should remain out of any conversation and the genre should be ascribed to the realm of “common usage and communication” (Whalen, 2009).

The term “tends to be used to signify all that relates to local culture, the domestic or the amateur” (Alves, 2017) so it carries a lot of cultural undertones which connect it with the home mode, a potent keyword that delineates all the amateur picture-taking activities (both in video and photography, positioned in and out of the camera: capturing, editing, archiving) which happen within the confines of family life (Chalfren, 1987; Musello, 1980). Chalfren, speaking from the point of anthropology and visual communication, describes a field of visual modesty which “stresses a documentary function in order to produce a copy of a familiar reality” (Chalfren, 1987). Similarly, Musello (1980) discusses vernacular photography from an ethnographic viewpoint, as shaped mostly by social norms rather than technology. Such understandings shape vernacular photography as the area of spontaneous, familiar, close to home and the heart, untrained image making, partly recreational activity and consistent personal documentation, unperturbed by proficiency of equipment, technical mastery and artistic interpretation<sup>1</sup>. Memory-function is considered innate to the medium.

Chalfren (1981) speaks of a “record keeping function”, “of a collection of people”, “for a collection of people”. His phrasing reveals snapshots as performing a personal/collective memory function for a specific audience. As analogue technology turned digital, vernacular photography managed to leave the confines of the photo album and moved on to become a versatile tool for personal communication and self-presentation. Within this context, I refer to personal photography<sup>2</sup> in accordance to Van Dijck’s (2008) suggestion of the term which, she argues, is used to emphasize the shift from “family re-presentation” to “self-presentation” (Harrison in Van Dijck, 2008). The overlapping of all three terms in the text implies a field of interlocking tensions that speaks of sincerity, conformity, everydayness, self-presentation and remembrance. In this set-up I will discuss the memory function of snapshot as the most “reliable memory-aid” (Van Dijck, 2008, p. 57) in analogue and digital era regarding both the maintenance of private memory as “a means for autobiographical remembering” (ibid.) and the cultural processing of remembrance on collective memory. Autobiographical memory is traced back to episodic memory and is explored in its relation to the home mode, the networked image and the concept of networked memory, shaping a process of remembrance facilitated by the affordances of online mediations. Nelson (2003) offers up a key to connect episodic memory to the ideas presented. She states that:

“If self-stories reflect general cultural narratives, whether purveyed in myths, novels, or in contemporary forms such as movies and television, there should be observable changes in the content, form, or function of autobiographical memory over this period.” (Nelson, 2003, p. 133)

Vernacular photography is part of the “general cultural narrative” of authenticity and truthfulness in quotidian representations of the self, providing the proofs of a “successful” living, which includes the enjoyable and competent presentation of the self in culturally resonant terms.

1. Formalist criteria and visual aesthetics aside, these cultural artefacts can be entangled to art discourses from various viewpoints, such as the reclamation of authenticity, the rejection of the institutionalization of art, photography as social performance, photography as public memory, autobiographical debates to name but a few (Cross, 2015).

2. Van House gives a brief, but comprehensive definition: “I define personal photography as that which is done by non-professionals for themselves and their friends and intimates. It subsumes but is not limited to family and tourist photography” (Van House, 2011, p. 125)



Within this framework, when snapshots are transformed into networked snaps, both their appearances and their functions have changed in order to conform to new rituals of image-making, and thus to participate in the current visual lore. Following these changes, it will be discussed whether these are reflected on the “content”, or the “form”, or “the function” of autobiographical memory, as an occasion where the circulating imagery dictates the ways we fashion our stories. This notion of memory, as an interaction of cultural representations and internal meaning-making, is also in agreement with Van Dijck’s (2007, p. 28) suggestion that “mediated memories...are complex manifestations of a complex interaction between brain, material objects and the cultural matrix from which they arise”.

### SNAPSHOT LESSONS

“For this project it was the fact that we all take very similar photographs but we never learned how to do this. Our parents don’t tell us, we don’t learn it at school, and people all over the world do it nevertheless. I don’t know why. Maybe it’s because the resulting snapshots do what people expect them to do, and that’s all there is.” (Schmid, 2013, p. 2)

Artist Joachim Schmid who had started working with found snapshots from 1980, has touched on the straightforward, hands-on practice of snapshots from a pragmatic point of view. It is an acquired knowledge, passed on without any “official” education but based on the time-honoured method of trial and error combined with the certainty that ‘they work’, as he says in the same interview. Whether one acknowledges in them the depths of ‘sentiment’, or the sloppy edges of ‘sentimentality’ (Cobley & Haeffner, 2009, pp. 126-27) their emotional cargo is undoubtedly there. People maintain the circulation of clichés because happy contented images have a reassuring effect on them. Indeed, who wants to create unhappy memories? On the other hand, many vernacular photographs, contrary to the core idea of contentment that infiltrates their making, bring back unpleasant emotions. Overall, there was never a question if snapshots did the trick. In line with Schmid’s reasoning, quite simply people would have moved on to the next best thing, as it always happens and probably has already happened nowadays that contemporary snapshots are not exactly as they used to be.

Entwined with the emotional charge of snapshots is their function as an archive of private visual referencing, a visual indicator that verifies the oral stories of personal folklore which ran within family life. Musello (1980, p. 39) cites Sekula’s notion of photography as a ‘realist folk myth’ through which “photographs are conceived by home-moders as mechanical recordings of real events”. This claim brings forth the veracity vs reality discussion on photography and the reliability of photographs to represent an official, accurate version of memory. As Sontag (1973) has observed, people treat cameras as if it is the apparatus itself that takes decisions, personified in a mechanical, automated supremacy, “it is the camera that sees”. A complementary notion to this is a general consensus that photographs ‘know’. This is quite a disputable notion as snapshots do not happen on their own. On the contrary, they take sides, and the recollections they trigger based on their representational value “are drawn to perform in the rhetoric of social memory” (Arnold-de & Leal, 2018, p. 3) leaving the personal narrative a mystery, an agent always locked in itself.

Whether snapshots work as mnemonic aids, as an excuse for the retrieval of forgotten details, as the starting point of oral narratives or as the validation of what has passed, we can assume, in accordance to Rancière (2007) that there is a part of sheer visuality that remains mute and stares back. Moreover, Arnold-de & Leal observe that family photographs “become decontextualized and recontextualized triggering and shaping memories, inviting story-telling, helping us to negotiate the past and the future” (Arnold-de & Leal, 2018, p. 2). In this light it becomes obvious that we can never take for granted that vernacular photographs are “transparent documents offering veracity” (Arnold-de & Leal, 2018, p. 3). Whether they refer to an unsophisticated, straightforward representation, snapshots allude wordlessly to what they have omitted, and work as intermediates that “point inevitably elsewhere” (Cross, 2015). Thus, they are not perfectly frozen moments but material submitted for interpretation (Arnold-de & Leal, 2018) which might alter as time progresses.

## SNAPSHOT MEMORY

“No one sees your snapshots quite like you see them” (Chalfren, 1981, p. 113)

Vernacular photographs, although evaluated on the grounds of their “representational values” rather than “aesthetic or expressive properties” (Musello, 1980) cannot provide viewers with a “magical mirror of past and present ‘true’ situations” (Chalfren, 1981). Regardless of popular claims about their veracity, their limitations are both external and internal. Considering the external factors, Chalfren (1981) observes that snapshots record ‘special’ or ‘significant situations’ but the ‘qualitative dimensions’ of such descriptions are not clear.

Actually, this notion works backwards: every recorded moment becomes special because this is what finally has remained. In addition, the extensive editing of the analogue era, which allowed only certain photos to enter the family album, was continued with a vengeance in the digital-era, when people started using their cameras differently. Digital technologies brought immediate control over the picture, and with the simple usage and no extra cost for films and printing, the established process of production so far was disrupted. People could review instantly their takes, delete unwanted ones, experiment more and as a result they started taking more snapshots, to the point that photographs stopped being as unique as their analogue counterparts (Keightley & Pickering, 2014). Still, digital photos were deemed perishable, since these archives could easily either become corrupted and permanently lost, or forgotten for good in unnamed computer files and CDs (Keightley & Pickering, 2014; Van House & all, 2011).

Consequently, the traditional relationship of private memory and personal photography was shifted towards immediacy, plurality and the recording of trivial scenes and a loss of the uniqueness of the shot. As for the internal limitations, a photograph whether material or immaterial is a two-dimensional surface with prefabricated dimensions. It takes less than a second to happen and occupies a specific viewpoint. This spatiotemporal rigidity in its production in conjunction to the palpable edges of its materialization delimits the photograph to include certain things and omit others. Sometimes the allegedly all-watchful camera-eye misses a lot. Tight close-ups, pan-outs shots, out of focus blurs, are some examples where many details are obliterated. In comparison, human perception is not restricted by the two-dimensional, somehow flat photographic framing neither can be contained within it. Photographs hold very short, imperceptible timelines while memory extends throughout an event. In particular, episodic memory which is responsible for the creation of autobiographical memories is formed as a narrative structure (Heersmink, 2018). Thus, it deals with sequences of events, providing answers for the when, what, and who in pertinent ways specifically to any given person's life (King, 2010), so that this “subjective re-experiencing of personal events”, “involves movement, non-visual sensory information and reconstruction” (Tulving in Fawns, 2014, p. 8). Following memory's temporal corrosion several versions of an event circulate at various times, even more if they are told by different persons as each participant relates to their personalized story.

The diversity of each individual narration is in stark contrast to the global homogeneity of snapshot as representational form. Usually, the social setup of a snapshot needs no guesswork, but understanding a story or an emotional process needs further explanation. This muteness is probably what Musello (1980, p. 40) has expressed when he noted that there is no “explicit system of conventions and rules for decoding the home mode message form”. Even though the memory function of snapshots ‘seems implicit’ (Musello, 1980) photographic representation is “too coherent and too linear” to equal memory, which is malleable and fictional (Batchen, 2004, p. 16).

In this regard, memory and image form an unstable, precarious co-existence that fluctuates as memories fade, narrations vary and images remain unwilling to be anything but themselves. Nevertheless, throughout the history of home mode people insist on taking pictures as an efficacious way to create mementos. This is probably the most prevailing mode of memory making in the 20th century, on the simple premise that it is better to have a photograph as a memory, even if it does not “say everything” than to have nothing at all (Cobley & Haeffner). In this, the idea of a snapshot as “the focal point of the memory system” upon which one can “build and build and build” seems rather resonant, for it refers to the experience of an event and not the actual moment,

its sole shortcoming that it explains the snapshot in too many words for the image that it is. This version of memory, which draws additional information as it comes along, reflects on memory “as constructed through a progressive layering of interactions” (Fawns, 2020, p. 903). Fawns speaks also of a ‘contextual scaffolding’ for the construction of memory which “combines inferred and ‘remembered’ information in which inferences enable remembrances and vice versa” (Fawns, 2020, p. 903, see also Heersmink, 2017, p. 3138).

In these accounts, a vernacular photograph is cryptic outside of the spatiotemporal frame of its unique circumstances and asks for (or promotes) verbal explaining. While oral narratives might explain snapshots and connect them to memories, photographs are primarily visual entities and it is their ‘non-verbal coordinates’ (Cobley & Haefner, 2009, p. 144) that people relish - whether about pose and lighting or as little as a crooked smile and a stained blouse. Thus, within the introverted seclusion of the home album, a snapshot holds a place in the family folklore. While insiders relate to the photos accordingly, it is almost impossible for outsiders to participate in the stories (and the memories) properly. As time goes by, oral accounts are gradually lost and photographs, even within the confines of home memories, become silent again. This ambivalence is exemplified by the turn to ‘found photography’ as “the found object of the moment” (Zuromskis, 2008a, p. 107).

Looking at strangers’ photographic archives and inserting found photographs in artworks employs memory as ‘borrowed’, rather than collectively shared an indication of a performative act which alludes to the utilization of someone else’s personal property.

Artists have employed this kind of images in order to draw attention to the inability to rely on their sameness because of their reticence<sup>3</sup>. Moreover, found vernacular photography’s appeal to collective memory can easily turn to the exoticism of imaginative experiences. Zuromskis (2008a; 2008b), on reviewing several exhibitions of snapshot photography held in museums from 2002 to 2008 is skeptical of such groupings<sup>4</sup>. She pinpoints that the tagging of photos as “visual elements of a ‘shared memory’, ‘strangely familiar’ despite their specific and dissociated origins” (Zuromskis, 2008a, p. 122) promote snapshots as ‘nostalgic’ and ‘generalized’ and therefore fail to communicate the “rich culture of snapshot photography”. In contrast, commenting on the exhibition “Pictures that matter” held in George Eastman House International Museum of Photography and Film in Rochester, New York, she praises the ‘brave’ curatorial decision to put on the walls of the museum snapshots with ‘blatant’ indifference to aesthetic conventions and “the ‘uniqueness’ of the image”. While she admits that as a spectator she was confronted by a “sea of thoroughly private, largely visually uninteresting images” (Zuromskis, 2008a, p. 124), “each image an isolated glimpse into the sentimental self-fashioning of a perfect stranger” (Zuromskis, 2008a, p. 123), she notes that due to this policy, vernacular photography avoided being drawn in “formalist aesthetics or generalized nostalgia”. Zuromskis’ reserve of nostalgia in the context of exhibiting ‘found’ snapshots can be connected to the secluded, personal environment where snapshots belong and where emotionally laden, meaningful recollections take place within a rightful context.

Snapshot memories are intense but private, hence when performing as collective memory they turn misleading, disorientating and bland.

The removal from context invokes a sense of ‘ideological’ nostalgia that, absent-mindedly, reflects on “the beauty of a ‘vanished’ past”, too generalized to open up a dialogue with the particular context that shaped it (Zuromskis, 2008a, p. 113). In short, snapshots remain private visual documents which resist being generalized as evidence of what has been. Boltanski, having employed snapshot photography in the early stages of his career, has claimed that family albums “do not represent reality, but only the reality of the family album” (Alves, 2017, p. 57). If snapshots act as “evocative objects” (Heersmink, 2018) with representational qualities, capable of containing a series of narratives, this is true only on a personal level.

3. Christian Boltanski in his work 10 portraits photography (1972) has played with such notions of ‘fake’ photographs that he presented to be from his childhood (but belonged to strangers). This use of the reliable photograph to form an unreliable autobiography was also explored in *Album de photos de la famille D, 1939-1964* (1971), when he reconstructed chronologically a family album (which belonged to a friend) and realized that it was impossible to convey any meaning apart from what the photos showed (Alves, 2017).

4. She notes that certain shows promoted an aesthetic appreciation of snapshot photography based on ‘happy accidents’ which provided intriguing visuals or others were proclaimed to be artistic, whereas snapshot photography is ‘rarely accidental’ and “certainly not made ‘without the intention to look good or bad’” (Zuromskis, 2008a: 113).



In the analogue era, as well as the early digital stages, such individual experiences were manifested as private recounting, both oral or non-verbal, thriving only within the confines of home, exchanged between relatives or close friends and preserved as series in albums and later in CDs or computer files.

## NETWORKED SNAPS

"Now I recently got a little smart-phone and... I find myself many times a day, just you know, scrolling through them, yeah... but each one is like 'oh look at this, this is that day, look this is us having coffee'. I don't know why, I am getting more and more tearful and emotional about events and memories... Getting more emotions [laughs] like 'oh, I want to remember this?' I don't know, it's something like I appreciate some moments more. Like an ordinary day, coffee with your friend."

(Alma, a woman in her 30s who lives in Croatia, in Keightley & Pickering, 2014, p. 585)

In the previous sections I have already discussed the shifts in the production and usage of photographs that took place when cameras went digital, but the revamping of snapshots to mobile takes is more than a tribute to technological innovations. The omnipresence of mobile cameras alongside to the proliferation of Social Network Sites (SNS) have turned snapshots, formerly moored in the seclusion of home-mode, not just to mobile snaps, but into networked images, characterized by ubiquity, multi-layer textuality, connectivity and shareability (D'Aloia & Parisi, 2013; Mota, 2013; Rubinstein & Sluis, 2008; Hand, 2020). This convergence has given rise to a novel sense of immediacy (Hand, 2020; Rubinstein & Sluis, 2008) in communication, enacted as a direct link between subjective, asynchronous presentness within an expanded field of audiences, which do not anymore include only friends or acquaintances, but might also involve complete strangers who now are formed through SNS as social publics<sup>5</sup> (Hjorth, 2013, 2014; see also Boyd: 2011).

The unavoidable transition of viewing practices from the traditional photographic surface which was still a tangible object to the immaterial computer (or mobile phone) screen as part of networked media platforms sets an example of how snapshots became embedded to an endless flow of data which gets appreciated as "central to the 'fun' things that the computer can do" (Rubinstein & Sluis, 2008, p. 15). Such participation practices infuse the ways we understand and value these photographs, so that they have become "dependent on the interface which mediates our encounter with it" (ibid., p. 22). Also because of this new socio-cultural positioning, snapshots became shareable entities, extroverted, both enjoyable and performative as activities (as in taking a snap in anticipation of posting it) and highly communicative.

Villi (2013, p. 225) suggests the word 'publishing' to describe this "novel dimension of mass communication to personal photography".

Publishing therefore, indicating the combination of technological affordances and the expanded understanding of cameras as "tools for mediating quotidian experiences" (Van Dijck, 2008, p. 72) points to a succession of performative acts we enact daily in order to deal with personal photography as an enriched experience of the everyday. Moreover, the turn to prosaic themes has challenged the sense of picture-worthy. Such positioning affects the actualization of self-representation, the construction of identity and the continuation of memory, all of which now encompass in their image-layering notions such as 'posting' or 'sharing' and the incorporation of textual traces in the images such as 'tagging' and 'comments' (Arnold-de & Leal, 2018, p. 8; Nacher, 2013). In addition, networked photographs are placed in an asynchronous present which fulfils the contradictory condition to be ephemeral and to last forever, their predicted temporariness set against their unpredicted re-appearance. In this I refer to a fate common to SNS photographs: to become pretty soon dated as they get buried under more recent postings, only a few comments and likes further in the users' timeline.

5. "...not all publics that get around an emotional affinity via social media can be described as intimate. The coming together of loosely defined friends and acquaintances forms a public that shares collective ground, is self-forming, shares a horizon and is not institutionalized, and it does this through a shared social effect, but the nature of this effect is not strong enough or tightly bound enough to warrant the term intimate. They are, after all, just friends. It is, however, a "social public" inasmuch as the common ground, the motivating dynamic for a coming together, is a collective emotional or affective horizon, albeit more loosely defined and more fluid than is the case with an intimate public (Hjorth, King, & Kataoka, 2014, p. 11).

Their limited circulation from a few hours to a couple of days does not mean that they are erased forever. Once posted they do not cease to be online, but remain prone to resurfacing on the same site or elsewhere, re-contextualized, remembered in new (digital) environments or dismembered into new assemblages of image, text and meaning<sup>6</sup>. Hand speaks of “potential memories”, “persistent traces” and “undead qualities” (Hand, 2016, pp. 269-270) in order to characterize the interminable scattering of visible traces in a variety of mostly intercommunicative media archives. Within such environs he concedes that “digital memory-objects are fluid, rewritable” and “subject to continual negotiation” (ibid., p. 272).

Another feature of networked imagery, shareability is considered responsible for replacing the tangible printed versions of the past with digitized archives and multi-circulation. As a result, memory is removed from the seclusion of home and its terms are negotiated now in the open public space, designated by computer/mobile screens and the unlimited data of the net. In relation to this idea, an agony is expressed that memory is not only exposed as communicative, fluid and persistent but also – due to these qualities – prone to elimination, thanks to ‘the delete button’ which threatens a “death blow” to previous notions of photograph as “memento and keepsake” (Rubinstein & Sluis, 2008, p. 13). It is uncertain whether something posted online can ever be deleted for sure, but the point of this argument is that digitized memory is also susceptible to disasters that are beyond our control: file-corruption, decontextualization, un-retrievability, unexpected modification (Hand, 2020, p. 215). A comparison of such externalization and amplification of functions to the discreet, home-bounded uses of the photo album or the shy shoe-box leaves a sense of awkward disbelief. It is uncertain whether memory’s propensity to be so outspoken, so eager to be communicated, so thinly but finely stretched enhances or undermines our relationship to images. Surely there is a tendency, proved by the millions of personal pictures circulating online that we have stopped saving our pictures in private places, only for us, and started to mediate them through networked sites like Facebook and Instagram so that an extra, culture-specific meaning should be added on the same pictures, instantly made different. As a result, our images have been adapted to specific format-peculiarities (square for Instagram, quadrangular for Facebook, vertical as a direct linkage to the format of mobile snap in Facebook and Instagram ‘stories’), all the while absorbing the use of filters (Snapchat and Instagram, might provide examples), and emoticons, wordless exclamations, thumps, hearts and smileys. Respectively, we might have to admit that image-wise our memory has developed a dialogue with visuals elements other than the representation of a photo and external to its initial visual traits. These textual intruders after their addition become an integral – if not essential – part of the photo they originally layered.

In this metamorphic procedure, what appears as an infestation that might obscure the initial meaning or representation of a networked photo ends up to support its distinctiveness. How would one like to be remembered? By a privately shared photograph, or by a networked snap amassing 200 likes? In such debate photographs might enjoy a shorter but more colourful life span and an extended, as much as an uncontrolled and extrovert external storage.

## NETWORKED MEMORY

The merging of the ubiquitous with the vernacular due to the use of camera phones resulted to the extensive circulation of amateur documentary photographs during the last decade or so in an ensuing wave of informal, anonymous photo journalism (Rubinstein & Sluis, 2008; Larsen & Sandbye, 2013; Mota, 2013; Shanks & Svabo, 2013; Mortensen, Jones & Keshelashvili, 2015; Hand, 2016). This trend, perpetuated in instantly uploaded mobile takes on SNS, is welcomed as a proof of authenticity even to official news sites. (Mortensen, Jones & Keshelashvili 2015, p. 216). The proliferation of such instances verifies that online vernacular aesthetics, as supported in smartphone snaps, continue to vouch for emotional resonance and ‘currency’ (Hjorth & Burgess, 2014, pp. 501, 505).

6. Proof of that is Facebook’s recent service to resurrect our memories as an integral feature. Older posts and pictures pop up in front of us, while the platform asks if we would like to share them, as remembered posts ‘commemorated’ publicly again. One could wonder if this function is a playful prompt aiming at a pleasurable recounting of digital deeds as a surprise encounter, or an assimilation or an appropriation of our memory as a set of prosthetic functions.

A new sense of history-in-the-making and memory-on-the-go has thus sprouted, which invests in affectivity, co-presence and shareability, while it questions the limits of official visual communication. Moreover, as personal photography usurped traditional notions of snapshot in networked environments, networked snaps provided visual material containing personal responses to collective events that are socially widespread or extensive and culturally important for the community of users. Built on external, vast tanks of virtual image-memory deposits which depend on personalized, eye-witness testimonies, this new reality has repercussions in the socio-political processes of creating tanks of communal memory as well as the understanding of memory as a techno-mediated process. Following from shock-instances that affect shared sensibilities, such events are collectively articulated online as the mediated circulation of personal posts entrusting in the affective eloquence of the vertically oblong, non-political, “normative”, “inherently benign” (Rubinstein & Sluis, 2008, p. 23) mobile snap.

In discussing collective memory and connectivity Pogačar (2009) observes that off-line communities build memory out of their collective spatiotemporal co-existence, thus they turn collectivity to connectivity. Online, the abstractly shared horizons of social publics accommodate virtual collectivities, which “build memory out of connectivity” (Pogačar, 2009, p. 27) affecting the ways we “conceive of collectivity and memory online” (ibid., p. 38). Public narrative merges with autobiographical cues thanks to the [mobile] camera’s fluidity to be everywhere and to picture every possible mundane moment as “memorable in one way or another” (Shanks & Svabo, 2013, p. 12). This sort of published, shared reality that gets recorded-as-it-happens infuses the online flow of networked memory with the emotional resonance of snapshots and a heightened sense of newness. It is also argued that networked image is almost indifferent to subject matter or form or discipline, but rather depends on a “hybridization of distributing institutions, individuals, families and social or professional groupings” as these determine the fluid “modes of engagement” that add extra meaning (ibid., p. 8). In this spirit, traditional notions of photography and memory as a frozen perfect scene that speaks of the past while producing a well-ordered sequence of events become confused and problematized. Touching on issues as the clear separation of what is personal and what is public, or whether such recounting is intended as memory-mark or plain self-presentation, or glitches concerning authorship and circulation, such understanding of networked photograph as immediate presence and instant archaeology of a fluid past challenge the stability of networked “grand narratives” (Pogačar, 2009, p. 27).

Van House (2011) observes that the memory function of vernacular photography has subsided in favour of communicative practices concerning the self and identity formation, but Van Dijck (2008) claims that memory is still an important part of every vernacular digitization online. She also draws attention to a transition in vernacular photography from its representational value connected to the perpetuation of memory to the “performative rituals” (ibid., p. 63) enabled by camera phones. This prioritizes self-presentation as a function but still she concludes that “versatility and multi-purposing” qualify online photographs to endlessly reappear in ceaseless flows, so that “the definition of personal memory is gravitating toward distributed presence” (ibid., p. 74). Thus, the networked scattering of the digitized, visual traces of the self, which is discussed also by Pogačar (2009), seems to be a decisive trait of contemporary, mediated memory. The solidification of communal memory through the online circulation of personal photographs sheds light to another function of snapshot photography that was improbable before the networked era, which is to stand as the published, visual, non-verbal chronicle of communal testimony without ever denying its unofficial positioning, on the contrary, even more so. There is no doubt that memory and narrative connect to networked photography in different ways than before. As eye-witness evidence has placed the snapshot in public view, one might still wonder how its emotional content is to be interpreted on a personal level. Considering that the authorship of the networked photo is being continuously contested, it is argued that the publishing of personal photos might invoke feelings of detachment from our memories (Fawns, 2018, p. 125).

This idea alludes to the reception of networked snaps, within an ever changing flow of multifarious images and texts (depending on the social platform), as embedded in them. What has come before and after the picture might affect its understanding, because it is placed thereafter within an intertextual framework, both responsible for its specific form and equally the provider



of a receptive framework which allows certain repertoire of reactions among users (Facebook and Instagram for instance provide different sets of users' reactions). Thus negotiated, the memory is drenched in complementary meaning that has been accumulated after the online publishing of the photo, through collective interaction. Pertinent to this idea is another novel use, as derived from Alma's extract cited previously, the possibility to return to our photographs many times a day, due to smartphone's mediation as a prosthetic, portable memory device.

This is also enhanced by the possibility to interact with our published online photos and other people's photos many times a day. Moreover, online interaction- provisional or erratic as it might be – can be photographed to be kept or shared anew. Screenshots of posted photos or shares of an older post usually tend to accommodate commentaries and/or the allocated SNS reactions so that the same visual occurrence circulates enhanced by its online lifespan in a second wave of publishing. In this way the same image marks a new event which refers simultaneously to the initial photo, the tracing of its online reception and its novel resurfacing.

## CONCLUSION

As it has been argued in this text, networked memory is mediated memory, not to be exchanged with the digital memory of apparatuses and applications, although such arrangements play a part in our understanding of it as infinite, continuous and ubiquitous. In an article titled "Memory: an Extended Definition", Zlotnik & Vansintjan (2019), argue that memory is a dynamic process, fluid and interactive "neither just chemical or digital". They suggest that it is useful to accept a widened explanation which might shift the focus from "experience" towards "a more material phenomenon: a deposit of events that may be stored and used afterwards" (ibid., p. 7). Following this view, the networked photo is brought to the forefront as a dynamic interactive storage of autobiographical cues. Throughout this debate, the images per se are deemed to be the same, old, nondescript, quotidian selves and in many ways they still are. The photographic abilities of the common users have not changed drastically, neither the content of their everyday stories. Still, ruptures are mentioned, here and then: themes have become more casual, almost opportunistic, images can be whimsically cropped or filter treated. Their reception is different, their circulation is made public. Commentaries and reactions can be added. Is this the same memory as before?

Meanwhile, networked personal photography has carried online the integrity, banality and sincerity of analogue/digital era to practices that enable, even promote, the alteration and falsification of original files. Many researchers interpret such choices, for example the extensive usage of filters and apps, as communicative necessities, expressive of our determination to override reality and adjust playfully our digital bodily imprint to culturally appreciated beautification standards (Van Dijck, 2008, p 73). Such practices leave an imprint on online photographs so while it could be argued that photographs are re-established as having control in the formulation of future memories, certain doubts might arise whether such actions continue snapshot's legitimate claims on veracity or on the emotional grasp of their owners. Moreover, the circulated images partake on a continuous streaming, which creates mementos as part of a serial progression of photographs that override one another on a continual flow. As Keightley & Pickering (2014, p. 588) argue, regardless of the digitization of images and their "distributed presence" online in stark contrast to the photo-album era, people continue to operate "the mnemonic framework that is constructed out of photo compilations". Only now, in the place of a tangible object or a denominated storage there is an online, ubiquitous platform. Such amalgamation of photographs, texts, emoticons, exclamations, gifs, more images, it is not just daily messaging, ephemeral posting or a flippant collection of likes and plaintive commentaries, but a consistent attempt to fashion in retrospect our memory in cultural accepted terms. This is not exactly novel in regard to a personal/cultural alliance of image and memory. Snapshots were often arduously selected – staged during shooting and then handpicked to conform to the desired effect, so not all of them made it to the sanctuary of the family album.

Therefore, digital snaps continue within the contemporary networked processes of non-verbal discourse on how we want to be remembered by others and most importantly on how we want to remember ourselves.

As Nelson (2003, p. 134) points out, in contemporary societies autobiographical memory is all the more important in an era that “common communal narratives” lose their strength and there is an increasing need for “perfecting the skill of the telling of one’s personal story”. Networked personal photography is an ongoing process of managing just this, all the while balancing the redistribution of “memory between person and connected media technologies” (Hand, 2016, p. 273).

It remains an issue of further discussion how this collectively built personal lore will be subverted, transcribed or inscribed in artistic practices. If snapshot memories were private, networked memories are shared, supporting the understanding of memory as enmeshed into a culturally complicated, ramified context. It is not a matter whether we want or not to negotiate memory in such terms, or as Fawns (2012, p. 126) suggests if we should become more ‘selective’ in the capturing, sharing and storing of personal photographs. It might be more forward both culturally and artistically to embrace and take advantage of the refreshed allegiance of memory and personal photographs, understanding the challenges of these – seemingly flippant – circumstances.

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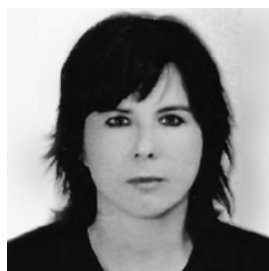
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ARTICLE

# FRAGMENTS OF MEMORY IN RESIDENTIAL INTERIOR ARCHITECTURE

MEMORY AS A COMPOSITIONAL TOOL  
IN TAKIS MARTHAS' ARCHITECTURAL  
WORK

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Loukia Martha studied Architecture at the École Spéciale d'Architecture in Paris (1994). She holds a Master's degree (DEA) in Set Design from the Theatre Et Arts du Spectacle Department of the Sorbonne Nouvelle University, Paris III (1999). She has been awarded a Doctorate in Architecture from the Architecture Department of the Technical University of Crete (2019, with honours). Her thesis, "Versions of Modernism on the architectural, visual and educational work of Takis Marthas (1905-1965)", explores the relationship between Architecture and Fine Arts. She teaches Interior Architecture and Set Design at the Department of Interior Architecture, University of West Attica (2005-2023).

Her professional activity spans Interior Architecture, Set Design, Museology and Visual Communication. She runs an architectural office encompassing interior design, exhibition design, stage design for theatre, cinema and television, as well as graphic design, in Greece and abroad. She has been distinguished in national and international competitions in the fields of Architecture, Interior Architecture, and Design.

Her research covers a wide range of disciplines (Interior Architecture, Design, Set Design, Museography, and Visual Communication), focusing on the relationship between Architecture and Fine Arts at a conceptual, compositional and practical level. Her writings have been published in the proceedings of European, Greek, and international congresses, in which she has participated. She has written articles and essays for architecture exhibition catalogues, monographs, and architecture and design magazines.

# FRAGMENTS OF MEMORY IN RESIDENTIAL INTERIOR ARCHITECTURE

## MEMORY AS A COMPOSITIONAL TOOL IN TAKIS MARTHAS' ARCHITECTURAL WORK

### Abstract

The present paper tackles the concept of memory as a compositional tool employed in the architectural spatialization process. More specifically, it focuses on residential interior architecture in the work of Greek architect Takis Marthas, placing special emphasis on the conjunction of tradition and Modernism, a binary vividly captured in the architecture and visual arts of the 1930s, to which Marthas belongs. In Marthas' oeuvre, design and composition are locked in a dialectical relationship by way of cross-pollination, juxtaposition, complementarity, or the introduction of intact fragments of memory into space. Marthas' architectural style could thus be construed as an attempt of combining the past and the present in the form of a creative process whereby elements—mental or material—are drawn from diverse places and historical periods, only to be repurposed and integrated into a unified whole, retaining their autonomy and alluding to a hybrid architectural model. As far as the composition of the residence is concerned, memory is conveyed through images of the past rendered either as an integral spatial transfer or as mental and material architectural constructions, material elements, textures and colour.

These spatial elements evoke and restore images and sensations of the past. Within the architectural creation of the residence, compositional gestures linked with memory can be freely expressed, connecting the past and the present, architecture and place, as well as bringing together the space and users/residents' personal experiences.

Fraught with a number of tensions typical of the 1930s generation, such as the abovementioned attempt to bring together the past and the present, but also to pursue Greekness through both references to antiquity and references to Greek folklore tradition, Marthas' oeuvre is adumbrated by using residential works as well as written and oral testimonies dating from the 1930s-1960s as methodological tools.

### Keywords

residential interior  
architecture

memory

modern architecture

Greek vernacular  
architecture

## INTRODUCTION

Takis Marthas (1905-1965) was an architect, visual artist and professor at the School of Architecture of the National Technical University of Athens. A versatile personality, he was seminal to the emergence of post-war architecture in Greece. He is regarded as one of the pioneers of visual abstraction, while his contributions to architectural education cannot be overstated. His architectural oeuvre, covering the years 1930-1965, encompasses private and public works, with residences (urban, suburban and vacation detached houses) and blocks of flats comprising the majority of his architectural production.

One should bear in mind that Takis Marthas belongs to the major representatives of the 1930s generation, in which the demand for a Greek identity or Greekness (Tziovas, 2011) as an entity “frozen in time” (Taylor & Wetherell, 1999) through a revival of the past, concurrently with international trends, primarily Modernism, was of paramount importance. Architecture and art were notable for their contradictory and conflicting trends: tradition, alongside Modernism, at the time dominating Europe through processes of cross-pollination, juxtaposition, complementarity, jointly forged a new national identity.

The perception of continuity and historical connection with the past, antiquity, the Byzantine era and Greek traditions as a means of evoking the Greek civilization are crucial questions in architecture, being conveyed through diverse processes: the introduction of integral structures and architectural aspects as well as a quest for encapsulating the spirit of each era thanks to mental processes and renditions. In architecture, memory is intrinsically linked with tradition. According to Pallasmaa, “what is more meaningful is the sense of tradition altogether, that we live rather than analyze and understand; we are historical beings; we are cultural beings; and we exist and live in the continuum of culture and it is our task to continue it – to maintain that sense of continuity” (Wall, 2009, p. 79).

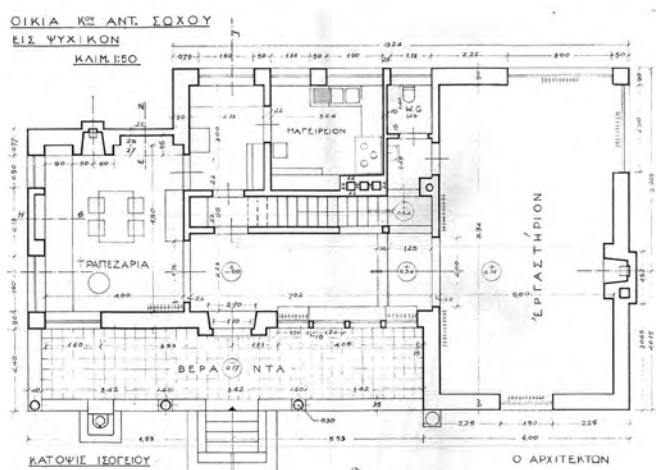
Expressive/spatial gestures linked with memory have an avenue of expression through architectural creation, connecting humans and space, as we “understand and remember who we are through our constructions, both material and mental” (Treib, 2009, p. 17). In his article “Architecture as Memory”, Eleftherios Pavlides highlights three distinct fields of architectural memory: clients’ personal experiences and those of future users; the architect’s long-term experiential memory; the collective memory of architecture, i.e., “the codification and transmission of architectural principles, rules, and theories through apprenticeship, education, or literature”, which “are not hermetically separated or mutually exclusive” (Pavlides, 1990, pp. 28-29).

The art of memory, an invisible art, reflects real spaces. However, it concerns, not spaces themselves, but rather how the latter are problematized in the realm of imagination (Schultz, 2000, p. 48). Hence, the action of memory presupposes the act of imagination (Aristotle, 1912, chapter A, paragraphs 5-6), alluding to the term “image/imagery”; it is the layer upon which the mind acts in order for imagery which we cannot comprehend, namely time, movement, size, to be rendered as a mental image (Aristotle, 1912, chapter A, paragraph 8).

The quest for an expression of memory drawn from different eras, places and incidents is a recurring theme in Takis Marthas’ architectural residential composition. The various mechanisms thanks to which memory is conveyed and recalled give cause for research and reflection, while also serving as a source of inspiration, reinforcing the architect’s imagination and creativity. All these aspects affected Marthas’ architectural work, transforming it into a compositional tool.

## THE EXPRESSION OF MEMORY THROUGH THE CONNECTION OF ARCHITECTURE AND PLACE: A COMPLETE TRANSCRIPTION OF TRADITIONAL ARCHITECTURAL STRUCTURE

As far as architectural structure is concerned, Takis Marthas draws on spatial structures, affinities and qualities of Greek traditional architecture. After transcribing them into the modern style, he incorporates them into his strikingly modern architectural plans in an absolutely rational manner. Therefore, even though his plans borrow from traditional architecture spatial structures, they do not betray any aspects of processes of addition.



**Figure 1.** T. Marthas: ground floor plan of the A. Sochos residence-atelier in Psychiko. Source: Archive of Takis Marthas.



**Figure 2.** T. Marthas: Art work, "Tinos" oil on paper, 1935. Source: Archive of Takis Marthas.

Working on Antonios Sochos' residence in Psychiko (1937), a sculptor and professor at the School of Architecture of the National Technical University of Athens, Marthas contributes to the transfer and expression of memory and, by extension, to the connection of architecture and place in the form of a dialectical relationship with tradition. More specifically, in an attempt to locate affinities with Greek traditional architecture, Marthas attempts a transcription of a typical, traditional Tinos residential structure, adjusted to the specific characteristics and needs of the client, instead of merely inserting integral traditional forms as 'constructs', a decision applauded by fellow architect A. Konstantinidis. (It bears mentioning that sculptor Antonios Sochos hailed from Tinos.

As such, the architect's references to the island are far from accidental. An antechamber is placed in lieu of the main hall of a typical Tinos residence. The main hall and bedrooms are reimagined as the uniform space of the studio. The entrance into the house is modelled after a Tinos residence, i.e., through a built-in courtyard complete with a roof.

At the same time, morphological aspects and architectural details such as the curved ends of the built-in guardrails and chimneys directly allude to the so-called *kapasos* found in Tinos medieval monasteries. The architectural composition of the Sochos house, with its striking geometry, exemplifies the rational austerity of Modernism, while also encompassing aspects of Greek Cycladic architecture directly referencing the sculptor's birthplace.

The same principles, namely the integration of traditional morphological aspects and structures of traditional Northern Greek architecture, also inform Georgios Vogiatzakis' two-storey residence in Psychiko (1957). In addition to a modernistic approach to the organization and solution of the architectural plans, direct correlations can be drawn with the morphological, typological and structural architectural models of the Epirus and Macedonia regions.

The residence is shaped as a Greek  $\Pi$  (pi) letter. The incorporation of ancillary spaces in the basement and the placement of the main spaces on the upper levels respectively reference the *katoi*, a space with secondary functions, and the *anoi*, the main space wherein the life of a family in a typical Northern Greek household takes place, thus connecting the traditional way of life with architectural space.



**Figure 3.** T. Marthas: View of the G. Vogiatzakis house in Psychiko. Source: Archive of Takis Marthas.



**Figure 4.** T. Marthas. Residential interior design. Source: Archive of Takis Marthas.



Along similar lines, the furniture, decorative aspects and objects completely harmonize with the rural style of the space and the morphological references to the traditional Northern Greek residence. Similar choices are also discernible in the interior space, namely in how the living room on the ground floor is shaped.

The space is divided into two levels, clearly referencing the closed hall, primarily a space of accommodation and reception. The hearth, a symbol of the traditional house, takes centre stage in this space, evincing common morphological aspects with the hearth prominent in traditional residences albeit in a more abstract approach, as a composition of geometric aspects, a simplified version without added decorative aspects and details. The architect boldly combines traditional and contemporary constructions, while refraining from superficial imitations. The aspects of decoration and architectural details provide a straight reference to mainland Greece and are seamlessly incorporated into the design (lintels, wooden guardrails) by being fully integrated into the geometric surfaces of the façades. Individual aspects, such as wooden door frames and doors, strongly evoke the mainland style, with wooden sheets being used for the doors of formal spaces; yet, this is achieved in a modernistic, abstract approach as a result of simplifying forms and proportions.

The rendition is achieved in a contemporary, abstract manner by use of simplified geometric surfaces sharply contrasted to the very “busy” surfaces typically found in traditional residences. The Vogiatzakis residence introduces a rather bold architectural language by weaving together the contemporary and traditional Northern Greek architecture to convey a form of spatialization. References to Northern Greek morphological aspects come as something of a paradox, given that the owners hailed from Crete. The architectural creation walks a fine line between modernity and tradition, past and present, by virtue of its various morphological as well as structural references; ultimately, though, the traditional style predominates. Here, the memory serves as an experience conveyed spatially by dint of the traditional aspects utilized both functionally as well as symbolically or decoratively. The two aforementioned residences can be considered as repositories of memories. They materialize time, maintain its flow and render it visible (McCarter and Pallasmaa, 2012, p. 229), concretize the memory of place and way of life by containing and bringing forth memories (Schultz 2000, pp. 47-48), and imply stories of human fate, real and imaginary alike, encouraging us to contemplate past civilizations and lives (McCarter and Pallasmaa, 2012, p. 229).

### **“ARCHITECTURE OF THE FRAGMENTS”: A PRESENTATION OF DIFFERENT TOPICS AND MATERIALS FROM THE PAST IN CONTEMPORARY DEPICTIONS**

With regards to architectural form, Takis Marthas employs spolia and repurposes integral structural aspects (lintels and guardrails, to name but a few) that have survived the demolition of traditional residences. Moreover, he uses traditional forms after previously processing them on a morphological level and stylizing them. Marthas also introduces individual morphological aspects in his architectural composition, for instance doorsteps and partitions, treating them as stand-alone artworks often drawn intactly from the folklore repertoire. At any rate, these aspects are incorporated as if they were “citations” in the body of a contemporary composition, i.e., he incorporates the traditional vocabulary into the modern syntax. The traditional morphological aspects are usually self-contained and structural and their use is invested with an organic character. The inclusion of individual elements such as columns with decorative aspects and geometric capitals of traditional morphology (traditional and Post-Byzantine) in the interior space of the Paxinos residence in Psychiko (1950) underscore the architect’s intent to incorporate individual forms derived from traditional architecture albeit in a contemporary manner.

The use of contemporary materials, in combination with the abstract depiction of traditional forms, suggests a fertile dialogue between the past and the present. The introduction of an architectural polygonal protrusion in the living room directly alludes to the sachnisi bay window, with the hearth of traditional Epirus morphology symmetrically integrated into it. The traditional basia spaces, i.e., the permanent wooden sofas placed on either side of the hearth commonly found in traditional houses, are transcribed here into the interior space as wooden, stable constructions lending themselves to multiple uses. Decorative aspects and architectural details of the past are

organically assimilated into the design of the Rigos residence in Psychiko (1957), maintaining a direct dialogue with the modern. Morphological aspects and details from Tinos traditional architecture (lintels, marble guardrails) surviving building demolitions are transferred here and incorporated in their entirety into the geometric surfaces, thus retaining fragments of the owner's birthplace and masterfully bridging the past and the present. The experiential factor, i.e., memories linked to Tinos architecture and its idiosyncratic structural and decorative aspects, are instrumental to the design of this residence, investing the architectural work with a poetic quality.

The quality of the design effectively mirrors the fundamental experiences of the residence users, drawing parallels between their way of life and morphological references to tradition, ranging from handles and furniture to openings, nooks and walls, always closely connected with modernity. In Takis Marthas' work, the residence is reconfigured as a hybrid spatial artwork, a stage of action, wherein various elements, disparate or otherwise, collide and are organically linked, in the process generating a new architectural reality.

### **“ARCHITECTURE OF THE FRAGMENTS”: STRATIFICATION OF MEMORY IN THE COMPOSITION OF STRUCTURAL SURFACES – MATERIALS – COLOUR**

During the compositional process, Takis Martha repurposes aspects and parts, mental or material, drawn from buildings of different eras and diverse qualities. With that in mind, he implements the stratification method to the composition of structural surfaces, during which aspects or rather “traces” of time emerge, producing strata of memory within a unified whole. Marthas composes wall surfaces by way of merging diverse aspects, materials, designs, colours and construction details retrieved from various eras and qualities.

These fragments serve as an infrastructure for ephemeral artistic installations, creating individual visual installations in the interior space and making references to the art of collage, with which the architect was quite familiar.

The composition of structural surfaces by use of different materials, contemporary and traditional alike, venturing for instance into the alternation of concrete and stonework, and the fact that the same constructional elements cross paths with a variety of other materials, such as concrete lintels or wooden guardrails, are all in dialogue with modern architecture, with the work often combining modern syntax and traditional vocabulary. In two-dimensional spatial compositions, the memory of the place participates organically through material and colour, directly or otherwise.

Materiality, colorations and textures allude to the distinct character of the place, connecting it with architecture by virtue of mental processes. The architecture primarily utilizes materials drawn from the landscape in which the residence lies, usually originating in excavations. In his personal

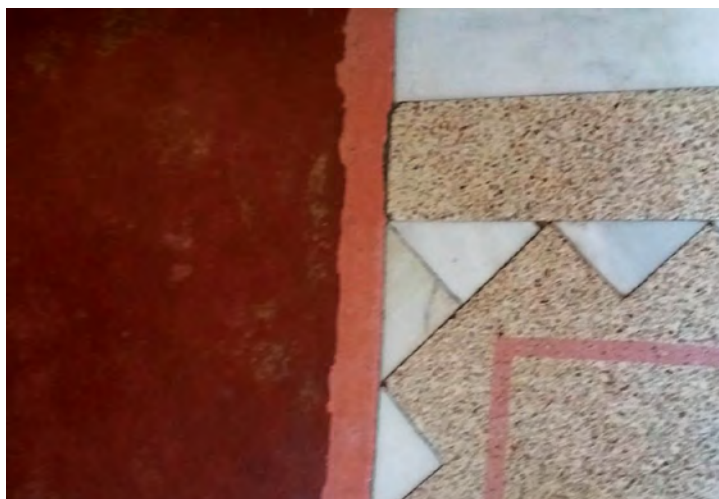
atelier residence in Kalamaki (1950), Marthas creates a surface – interior panels of decorated marble slabs – alongside ancient material unearthed in the building excavation (funerary pediment) or uses excised cylindrical pieces of marble from the opening of sinkholes in order to shape part of the surrounding space.

The architect enjoys an experiential relationship with his material. According to Walter Benjamin, “the relationship of the storyteller to his material, human life, is [...] a craftsman's relationship, [...] his very task to fashion the raw material of experience, his own and that of others, in a solid, useful, and unique way” (Benjamin, 2007, p. 108).



**Figure 5.** T. Marthas: Art work, “Untitled”. Mixed technique, 40 x 50 cm, 1960. In the project, the use of concrete is identified with the use of mosaics that have resulted from the breakage of ceramic tiles used in construction. Source: Archive of Takis Marthas.





**Figure 6.** T. Marthas: Interior floor detail of the T. Marthas' residence-atelier in Kalamaki, Athens. Source: Archive of Takis Marthas.

Colour in Takis Marthas's oeuvre, an element that could have been used as a means of conveying memory, does not actually serve that purpose: via references to the colour chart of the Classical or even better Hellenistic period or Greek traditional architecture, it becomes a narrative medium that overall depicts the 'atmosphere' of the space instead of being relegated to just serving as a means of pursuing a Greek identity. Nevertheless, when such a pursuit is endeavoured, it is conducted through visual renditions of the space in Greek colours, deep red (red iron oxide deep) and ochre, combining raw, industrial materials and Béton brut (raw concrete) and expressing Marthas' stance on the Hellenization of the modern. This compositional methodology, consisting of weaving together fragments of memory, material and colour, evokes tangible, visual and mental associations, and stirs the five human senses (Olsberg, 1999), with residence functioning as a refuge of memory (Pallasmaa, 2012, p. 69).



**Figure 7.** T. Marthas: Interior design. Sketch. Source: Archive of Takis Marthas.

### EXPRESSION OF MEMORY AS AN EXPERIENTIAL FACTOR IN THE DESIGN PROCESS

For Takis Marthas, the design process is a narrative medium depicting not only his compositional intentions but also facts and desires, the past and also the future, drawing a direct line between architectural form and experience. He employs a visual/abstract style to design not just the architectural space but also potential incidents embedded within it, treating it as an active field of action, an experiential space of memory, dream, or imagination.

The narrative representation, continuously reinterpreted by the users/residents, aims at a "plural reading as a work on memory" (Terzoglou, 2017, pp. 93-102) in the construction process.

Through architectural/compositional gestures, the architect detects a significant reservoir of visual and architectural experimentations, approached through their contribution to the experiential relationship with the space, in which senses play a pivotal role. Through editing processes,

fabric is also prominent, as emphasis is given to various threads, weaving methods and technological processing possibilities.

The visual and haptic gradations, so invaluable for exploring the depiction of specific characteristics of the interior space, are showcased through contrasts in texture: transparent/opaque, smooth/rough, dull/shiny. This pursuit of texture sensations vividly conveys the atmosphere of the traditional Greek residence: felt, threads, flokates (woollen rugs), thick woollen fabric reminiscent of shepherds' cloaks, psathia (straw matting), alongside a selection of specific colours (deep red, brown, blue and ochre) and the abstract depiction of decorative aspects drawn from Greek traditional garments all work towards activating the memory of the place.



**Figure 8.** T. Marthas: Art work, "Untitled". Watercolour painting. Source: Archive of Takis Marthas.



**Figure 9.** T. Marthas: Art work, "Untitled". Mixed composition-collage 42x51.5 cm. 1957. Source: Archive of Takis Marthas.

## CONCLUSIONS

The emergence of memory throughout the design process, the construction of the architectural work and the creation of the spatial experience are key goals in Takis Marthas' residential interior architecture. The addition of memory as an intangible ingredient, directly correlated with material, could be expounded as the "active memory" of the space. In his personal style, Martha redefines his personal memories and experiences, transforms spatial elements into new forms, and combines tradition, as a source of inspiration, with contemporary means of expression. Marthas' architecture aspires to build a lasting bond with a specific place, connecting past, present and future through a confrontation between spatial experience and memory. He connects space with both place and time via references to the past and also the environment, bringing about an experience of temporal continuity.

Far from being one-sided and championing a return to folklore or antiquity in terms of how Greekness is conveyed in his work, Marthas responds to these burning questions by seeking timelessness. He effectively rises to

this challenge using geometry and the embedding of traditional forms into modern structures as his instruments. His quest of geometry directly links him with and references antiquity. Meanwhile, the use of traditional forms as 'citations' in his architectural projects connects him with folklore. Ultimately, the combination of the above elements is tantamount to a quest of diachrony albeit in a modern vein.

Marthas conveys memory through indirect references to antiquity, with geometry as the starting point, aiming to achieve the peace of symmetry, invariably through a Modernist viewpoint. When he resorts to tradition, he performs this in a twofold manner: either he refers to tradition in morphological terms and retrieves intact forms which he then embeds as 'citations' in modern architectural plans resulting from clear geometric shapes or he refers to tradition in terms of spatial structure, transcribing traditional spatial structures into the contemporary model, once again utilizing geometry as his principal instrument.

Memory in Takis Marthas' work is expressed through the unbreakable bond between body and space, that is through the manual process of producing a space. This *modus operandi* brings to mind Heidegger's (1978) concept of being ready-to-hand (*Zuhandenheit*): not as a simplistic or poor quality of objects, but as a condition of a direct relationship with the body that ends up being both practically and symbolically important. At the same time, this process forges close emotional ties between the architect and his work, evolves into an acutely experiential relationship and contributes to the creation of a personal poetics of daily life.

For Takis Marthas, the space of memory is a space of myth; a myth that had an emotional effect on him, laden with the residues of his childhood and nostalgia, replacing the conceptual content with an emotional one and transforming "everyday and vulgar objects into worlds of beauty and poetry" (Prokopiou, 1965). The architectural creation strives to activate imagination and emotion, both of which are prerequisites for memory. The activated emotion serves as a driving force throughout the creative spatialization process, as Marthas used to teach his students at the National Technical University of Athens: "I believe that the expression of human emotions, along with the responsible perusal of the various pertinent issues, is something to which one should devote one's life".



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ARTICLE

# FROM CAMERA AS PART OF THE BODY, TO CAMERA – THE BODY PART

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## FROM CAMERA AS PART OF THE BODY, TO CAMERA – THE BODY PART

### Abstract

The digital world is where 3.4 billion people communicate via digital images through social media. On average, each one of us spends 6 hours each day in front of a screen.

The digital images rapidly appearing and disappearing under our scrolling fingers shape our perception, time and body movements, brain structure, and responses in a complex neurological way. The camera enables the formation of our identity, social development, aesthetic value, and cultural participation. Without this camera image, one is isolated, unable to speak.

Moreover, without storage where we save images, we are exempt from personal history, narratives, and memory.

Once we integrated a camera into the smartphone, we produced an extra organ. With the Orion visual cortical prosthesis medical study that implants a camera into the eyes to restore vision, face emotional surveillance project VibeCheck, and BeAnotherLab software, swooping through virtual reality the bodies, this article follows the socio-philosophical and technological shifts through the history of the camera and photography in object production, body perception, their definition, interaction, and final merge between body and camera object.

Through the reference of the theoretical works of Roland Barthes, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Karen Barad and Tim Ingold, the article follows how we have produced camera images through time and how camera images have been producing us.

The camera transforms from a separate room or device to a prosthetic/inherent part of the body, without which the body is not fully functional. Today, a person without a phone camera is marginalized and handicapped.

The deficit of not having an image-generating tool turns out to be a sensual deprivation, social limitation and discrepancy in identity.

### Keywords

camera  
Roland Barthes  
phone  
technology  
Maurice Merleau-Ponty  
intra-activity  
Karen Barad  
Tim Ingold  
visual cortical prosthesis (VCP)

## INTRODUCTION

It is the object perception and approach which leads the human body/mind to produce something for its own use, even in a socio-cultural meaning. The complex development of how certain products are made, improved, used and inhabited in daily life lies in philosophical-theoretical changes on perception of the world over time.

Considering the case of the camera, in this day and age the camera is a globally used term describing a technology of several lenses positioned to produce a picture/image. The name derives from the Latin word for 'chamber', and came to a use in the reference of 'camera lucida' or 'camera obscura', a set of mirrors and lenses that project or produce what we call today the negative of an image. Later, it became a broadly-used device capturing visual images in the medium of photography, movie and digital stream. Today, it is tested as a visual cortical prosthesis that would bring sight to a blind person.

The first of its kind required a whole room and chemical reactions in order to produce images; the latest of its kind reacts at the temperature of our finger. The camera has been transformed from a rarity owned and affordable by few to a tool in one's hand, still needing a dark room, but able to capture family moments. In between, it was not just a tool for capturing the most important memories, eternalizing dead souls, but also to remember children's birthdays, weddings and vacations. The dark room was not needed anymore since we could bring our negatives to specialized shops and come back later to pick up our photos.

Only at that moment would we know whether the negatives were good, if all the pictures had good lighting and were sharp. The memories that were not captured well would be gone. The photo image became part of albums, materialized memories that we could share with close ones; it was an act of intimacy to show them to visitors in our homes.

Currently the camera is becoming part of our daily life, part of the handheld tool that serves for communication. The relationship between our body and camera is becoming an intra-active process in the way we produce images and share them.

This age of communication through images disables the division of private & public, mine & yours, outside & inside, mind & body. The mobile phone becomes the key to image production and camera in hand, always capturing, instantly sharing, storing, or deleting data when needed. It digitally adapts our bodily movements, mapping the geo-political space, dissolving in the hand while becoming an inherent part of bodily reactions, produced as an essential part of the sensual and visual experience. The concert, gallery, visit to another city or even morning coffee is often experienced primarily or parallelly via the screen of a camera-phone.

Although we are aware of the difference, our brain is constantly merging virtual and mental images into realities. These are becoming a single visuo-sensual bodily capturing and screening form of images<sup>1</sup>. In this paper, I follow the socio-psychological steps that led production of images and perceptions from the camera as a room to the camera as a visual cortical prosthetic. I introduce the Orion visual cortical prosthesis medical study (VCP)<sup>2</sup>, BeAnotherLab<sup>3</sup>, project VibeCheck<sup>4</sup> to analyse the theoretical, social and technological changes in understanding of image production that led to the camera's full integration into the body.

I use crucial points in theory that follow the development of the camera as a room, as a personal handheld tool for capturing important moments, as part of the phone, and finally (the camera) as part of the body. I use paper maps the way we produce images and evaluate what the theoretical processes are.

1. The phenomenological reduction describes the two processes, from appearances to the photographic image, and from the phenomena to the mental image. The resemblance of those two in creating, forming, and embodying the images generate their mental merge. In the space of memory, fantasy and imagination of the similarity of those processes, causes adaptation of other's 'strange' their photographic images into someone's 'own' embodied experiences and mental images. Those adapted images are then evaluated and compared in the modes of memory and fantasy. The adapted images are a part of the experience influencing every subsequent subject's experience, participation in collective memory, and deterritorialization (Dimitrijevic, unpublished).

2. Visual Cortical Prosthesis System Study. Available at: <https://clinicaltrials.gov/ct2/show/NCT03344848> (Accessed: 20 January 2023)

3. Project BeAnotherLab. Available at: <http://beanotherlab.org> (Accessed: 20 January 2023)

4. VibeCheck art project of Laruen, McCarthy. Available at: <https://lauren-mccarthy.com/Vibe-Check> (Accessed: 20 January 2023)



Do we produce the tools as we perceive them and then mirror them in our neuro-biological structure, or do we produce them as we understand the world and phenomenal presentations of what we see?

### **CAMERA IMAGE – THE BODY PART – VCP**

On 20th November 2017, the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS) at the University of California started with an Early Feasibility Study of the Orion Visual Cortical Prosthesis System. In this study, the selected subjects with no light perception or bare light perception will be implemented with a prosthetic system based on a camera system that collects pixels like a screen. This system is planned to restore these subjects' vision under the assumption that visual precepts work as a small spot that produces light with electrical stimulation of the visual cortex. The previous finding that worked with a visual map of shapes demonstrated that the brain can produce coherent precepts of visual form this way. The similarity in brain image production and camera image production overlaps to such an extent that it can be used in the development of a prosthetic tool that restores vision. This merging of images due to the resemblance between mental images with a photographic image is presented in the reflective analyses of Roland Barthes in his book, *Lucida Camera* (1981). Through reflection of a picture of his dead mother, he is able to rebuild a memory that has never been his, through putting himself inside the picture. The camera 'teleports' via the visual experience and suggests the embodied memory of certain situations that occurred there-then in the past and its perception here-now in the present (Barthes, 1981). Furthermore, a photographic image is presented as a trigger of memory storage that we connect to this particular scene. We suddenly construct the world outside the frame, the world that is not depicted there, that is invisible. Thus, it is no longer just a copy of an event (a frozen moment in the past, a reminder of our death), but a constellation of feelings, thoughts, attitudes, and beliefs that change the image into another kind, one that exists in the space of imagination.

The perception brain process overlaps with the camera production of an image to the extent that cognition processes are able to classify them as the same. The camera as a tool is the product that copied the visual apprehension process. The tools are created by a human who defines them by creating them, determining their shape and their use. The tools are formed and constructed in the image of human perception, we could say "to fit our hand", or to "fit our life", or even to "to fit our body". Consequently, it is those tools that exist even on a larger scale as objects surrounding us, forming our space. We are then interacting with them, and then they define our actions and our imagination. In addition to Barthes, Maurice Merleau-Ponty argues that bodily involvement is a crucial part in defining the object (or phenomena) (Merleau-Ponty, 1968).

### **CAMERA IMAGE – THE PART OF THE BODY – VIBE CHECK**

The artist Lauren Lee McCarthy in her project VibeCheck presents a surveillance system that records the gallery visitors' emotional reactions and classifies them. The tools of VibeCheck are facial recognition and expression analyses that go through the catalogue of emotions and classify them as happiness, disgust, sadness, surprise, or boredom. Those emotional expressions are then a screen for other visitors or for themselves. The visitors are nicely alerted who the people on the screen are and, at the end, they may better understand themselves and the subconscious processes triggering reactions to art.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty (Merleau-Ponty, 2002), in comprehending this process of acknowledging the world, brings a whole new importance to the sensual experience, since it is the body that experiences, not just the mind (Toadvine, 2019).

The body contains kinesthetic awareness, which is a pure-consciousness scheme of movements and spatial information similarly to facial expressions of the emotions. The body is in the space intentionally, it lives in the space and inhabits it.

In the same manner, it is a living object in space and, by embodying surroundings, creates objects adapted to be parts of the body scheme (Toadvine, 2019).

Our body, according to these collected experiences, adapts its motricity. If the space contains a camera in an emotion surveillance way, our body will form accordingly.

“The properties of things that we take to be ‘real’ and ‘objective’ also tacitly assume a reference to the body’s norms and its adoption of levels. An object’s ‘true’ qualities depend on the body’s privilege of orientations that yield maximum clarity and richness. This is possible because the body serves as a template for the style or logic of the world, the concordant system of relations that links the qualities of an object, the configuration of the perceptual field, and background levels such as lighting or movement” (Toadvine, 2019, chap. 3, para. 9).

The production of any object is in direct response to the body and, vice versa, the body responds to the object. The first camera is the room, something that a person inhabits but, very soon, when technology allows the camera-room to mimic a mechanic of an eye, we produce an ‘artificial eye’. The development of material and technology allowed us to integrate even more the camera shape according to our body and ‘true’ image perception, and we formed the camera as a handheld tool. In the project VibeCheck, we can see how the room and camera work together through the body kinesthetic awareness and adaptation of the camera.

### **CAMERA IMAGE – BE THE PART OF ANOTHER BODY – BEANOTHERLAB**

Since 2012, BeAnotherLab has presented a project that merges the images and bodies of others via the visual image overlap. The project enables experiencing someone else’s body through virtual reality that swaps perception in real time. The primer experiment was based on a gender body swap; today the different swaps occur worldwide using this tool to support a deeper understanding of someone else’s perception.

The project promotes understanding through embodying the movement and vision of another person in real time. The whole swap takes 10-15 minutes and has a series of interactive protocols that support the mirror effect. “We are, firstly, ‘lived’ bodies (Leib), but we also experience ourselves as material bodies existing in objective space-time (Körper)” (Boyd, 2019).

This is presented in the work of Karen Barad where she argues that space-time is materialized via our intra-activity with ourselves and with our surroundings (Barad, 2007). Our bodies are the same as all bodies formed in this interactive process.

Karen Barad brings us a shift from interactions to the intra-active world that leaves marks on bodies in each interactive matter that is constantly ongoing. In other words, there is no being in the world without these interactive marks on bodies. It is not just our body that is in multiple awareness of sensualities, but it is also the constant new reflections of other bodies and apparatuses that are inside the body. The project BeAnotherLab materializes Karen Barad’s theory that follows the automatic intra-activity of bodies and spaces.

“...Matter is substance in its intra-active becoming – not a thing but a doing, a congealing of agency. Matter is a stabilizing and destabilizing process of iterative intra-activity.... We don’t obtain knowledge by standing outside the world; we know because we are of the world. We are part of the world in its differential becoming” (Barad, 2017).

Barad defines phenomena as constitutive of reality; however, it is not a things-in-themselves or things-behind-phenomena, but it is a things-in-phenomena.

The bodies, all of them, not just human, come to matter through the intra-activity which she describes as performativity. Apparatus, in this sense, is a material reconfiguration going on in dynamic space-time-mattering. Apparatus is in the process of becoming and does not serve just for satisfying human knowledge or any kind of other project.

Apparatuses “[...] are the conditions of possibility for determining boundaries and properties of objects and meanings of embodied concepts within the phenomena” (Barad, 2007). What is an essential ‘shift’ in Karen Barad’s theory of interactivity that is the mark that is left on the body. Each specific reconfiguration of mattering leaves certain marks on the body. Those intra-actions are causal characteristics, and we could not easily be objective when measuring them.

## FROM CAMERA AS PART OF THE BODY TO CAMERA THE BODY PART

The camera is a tool that captures surroundings, records sudden events and reports them for later evaluation and scientific research (criminology, photo reports, visual anthropology, documentation). It is a tool capable of capturing sharp and objective memories, without any misinterpretations that can be open for later discussions upon further reviews of the images. There is a button to be pressed, the camera apparatus has lenses that are precisely shaped to be held in one's hand, positioned instead of the eye's vision and on command of the human body to imprint the situation. It is what we dreamed of and a reliable source of memory that we can hold in the hand as an eye in the head.

This analysis shows that we have given it an important asset as an additional eye and part of the brain to generate the images. At that moment, when our neurological maps imprint the daily use of holding the tool in the hand, the sensual experience adapts the body shape. In this sense, the hand is extended by the tool and the tool is part of the hand. When part of the hand becomes absent, we experience a phantom limb. The phantom limb is formed and occurs through intra-active relations with the phenomena.

The camera, conditioned by mechanical parts and developed with technological progress, interacts with socio-cultural beliefs about phenomena and bodily processes. Currently, the camera has become an artefact that is produced as a part of the body, a prosthetic extension, or even a new organ. The camera-phone-organ reaches the highest point of the organ that we can technologically emerge with. The shape that fits hand in hand between the fingers is adapted to a swift touch, sensually reacting to the direct neurological impulses of the fingers. The touch responds instantly, as the camera as part of the VCP restores a percept in the human eye.

Both cases integrate the camera in a biological way and determine the future development of image production. Space and objects are conceived, perceived, but mainly lived and, therefore, formulated in continuity.

In this sense it is important to define how we produce the object/tool or how the tool is formed in its present form. "Making is not filling the hyle with morphe – it is not filling an idea with material. Making is a process of growth. It is an engagement with material – morphogenetic" (Barad, 2007). For Ingold, the phenomena is not based on form or matter, however, we are actually talking about forces and materials. "Ingold (2010), is not about understanding what is done with or to objects as static forms; as 'things' they are alive and intermeshed with the forces that bring them to life and transform them..." (Ingold, 2013).

It is clear from this standpoint that the perception of the object forming has changed in the last two decades, hand in hand with an understanding of what the object is, and what the emotional sensory resources engaged in using it are.

"Artefacts are produced out of this stimulating process of encounter, exploration and interpretation between eye, hand, mind, materials and method as by-products of these investigations that, in themselves, continue to suggest new discoveries, arrangements and conversations with the world in an 'excess of ongoing process' (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010, p. 5)" (Boyd, 2019, p. 71).

The camera inside the phone presents the memory collection, subjective intra-active picture-images of mapped surroundings. In our daily life, everything that our eyes perceive as memorable is elected to be instantly transformed into digital form and loaded into storage.

The memories are not just a representation of the past, they are who the person is, and without them we are empty. The camera-phone-organ brings the images forth, the stories are juxtaposed and shared as family intimacy memories. The picture in the phone goes beyond a single hand, it is instantly shared with others, becoming the essential means of communication.

The digital anthropology of an image becomes one with collective memory building as an immune system that never forgets. In the end, those not having a camera-phone are those with a disability, lacking presence in digital images of visual language, blind.

## CONCLUSION

The camera is the transport of energy from one body to another, the touch of the screen as an interface that teleports the particles of movement. This confirms the finding that the production of the camera, either as social skin, a third eye, a limb, a part of another body, or a prosthetic part of the brain, contains organic tendencies in the interaction and use of the camera.

The second result shows a correlation between the production of cameras and its theoretical understanding. Clearly, it is not possible to separate bodily adaptation from the production of a camera as an object.

This theoretical research shows that the understanding of what a body is changes across thinkers and philosophical-theoretical approaches, and it influences the use and shape of the camera. Without the camera, our body is functional merely to a limited extent; without the phone-camera-organ, the person experiences a phantom limb and is in the position of disability.

The deficit of not having an image generating tool turns out to be a sensual deprivation.

The camera-phone-organ becomes the social skin of current times, forming the identity via transnational communication in trajectories of digitalized bodies (Shiple, 2013; Petterson, 2011).

The research findings show that the current embodiment of the camera-phone-organ is, through the new 'realities', the port for sensational experience without regard to whether the implementation is a mental body process, full body implant (VCP), or the projection of someone else's body (AR).

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DAC Journal  
Vol. 3

Image and  
Memory  
N°1

# | PORTFOLIOS





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## PORTFOLIO

Design | Arts | Culture Vol. 3  
ISSN: 2732-6926

Image and Memory N° 1  
December 2022

# PHOTOGRAPHY OF TIME

Nicolae Coșniceru





## Nicolae Coșniceru

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Nicolae Coșniceru is a visual artist who lives and works in Bucharest, Romania. He has been working in commercial photography for about 20 years, and quitted to be completely free to involve in his own projects. He holds a Master's degree in Fine Arts, and is attending a PhD in Visual Arts and his focus is on Staged Photography based on anthropological, historical and social studies and personal research.

He attended international photography workshops in Great Britain, Germany and Austria, and international art workshops in Holland, the UK, Serbia, and Turkey. Nicolae had personal exhibitions of conceptual photography, fine art photography, and new media and participated in group exhibitions in the country and abroad, such as in Austria, Poland, Sardinia and Turkey.

He worked on an album with portraits of Romanian artists and cultural personalities called Inner Light and collaborated with the artist Ioan Nemțoi for his exhibitions in Bucharest, London and Bassano del Grappa.

He also gave lectures on different topics on photography at conferences in the country and abroad, and his public recognition is proven by numerous nominations and awards at high-ranking competitions, such as "The International Colour Awards Photography Master Cup" or "Black and White Spider Awards".

He became a member of the Artist Photographers Association of Romania before 1989 and had two personal exhibitions in the foyer of "The Very Small Theater" in Bucharest. The first exhibition took place in the summer of 1986 and consisted of black and white photographs with a political message, illustrating subtly the protest against the restrictions on freedom of expression imposed by the communist regime. It was closed down earlier due to the censorship of the communist regime. The second one took place in the fall of 1989 and featured photography and visual installations.

# PHOTOGRAPHY OF TIME

## Abstract

Seeing the configuration of a place firsthand, we can believe that it has always been like that and we don't ask ourselves questions about how it looked five years ago or 20 years ago and what processes and changes have taken place. It is possible that it was an unhealthy place and became a point of attraction where the community could spend time and carry out cultural or recreational activities, or it was a protected natural site and interventions beyond the limit of the law would have transformed it into an industrial, residential or commercial area, which led to overcrowding and pollution. Documentaries of the respective place taken at different times can help preserve local history and bring the community awareness of the recent history and the changes that have taken place. They will claim a lost inheritance if this is the case and if social promoters will campaign in this sense. But above all, they need to know the context in which they are.

## Keywords

time

memory

Black Sea

Costinești

Mamaia

Bucharest

sprawl

Because they were the object of my study or because I accidentally encountered places that had undergone significant changes and had previous documentation, I proposed to provide documents of organic changes or actions that must be under the lens of criticism. I am motivated by the need to draw attention to the worrying aspects of everyday life, before being too late for public reactions. In a country with a fragile democracy where the authorities do not hear the voice of civil society, I want to bring to the public conscience the negative aspects that are happening here and now, which can have significant implications for the present and future of the population.



**Figure 1.** Seashore in Costinești, beginning of the 1990s

I am a visual artist that uses photography as a means of expression, and I am interested in the participatory dimension of photographic art, which is perceived as the art involved in the social aspects of everyday life. As an indisputable witness of the changes that Time in its irreversible passage leaves on the natural and social environment, photography becomes an instrument of personal and collective Memory. It helps to reconstruct the course of a place and/or a community. I am interested in the changes that occur due to human intervention, both through action that causes transformation and the lack of action that leads to degradation. In this sense, I present a few examples, two of them from the shores of the Black Sea.

During the communist period, Costinești, a small village on the shores of the Black Sea, was the „Youth Resort”. It was mainly full of students coming on vacation, and many festivals used to take place here. Film, theatre, jazz festivals etc., sea celebrations and many other events kept young people from all over the country connected to cultural and recreational activities. Beyond the resort was an area with an aspect of unexplored space. It was primarily intended for walkers and was frequented by a tiny number of tourists who wanted to be far from the uproar of civilization.

There were no facilities of any kind. The area consisted of a high bank around 6-10 metres high, cut in a vertical plane, the colour of the soil varying from a dark brown at the base, to yellow in the upper part. From this bank to the water, various mounds of earth were very ‘photogenic’ due to their shape and the fact that they had the same colour variation as the high bank. There were no buildings on that high bank and there were no people who were affected by the fact that, from time to time, portions of the bank were dislodged due to water erosion, and no one took care of the protection and conservation of the bank. The process of corrosion and modelling perpetuates slowly and surely over time. After the fall of communism, film and theatre festivals, sea celebrations etc., continued for only a few years, then they stopped and that bohemian atmosphere disappeared. Costinești was no longer the “Youth Resort”.



The resort, essentially inheriting an endowment for cheap tourism, massively attracted the population segment with low-income wages. It became very crowded, which led to new accommodation developments. The high bank got polluted by the over-expansion of the buildings crossing the past limits. Nature could no longer be left to take its course, the soil was reshaped according to the needs of people, it acquired a particular inclination, a concrete alley appeared at its base, dams were made with stone and concrete to prevent the erosion process, and the narrow line left of the beach was invaded by tourists. The resort has expanded.



**Figure 2.** Seashore in Costinești, 2022

Finding a landmark that remained unchanged, I managed this year to take a photo of the place I had photographed at the beginning of the 90s. We thus have pictures of the same place on the shore of the Black Sea, approximately 30 years apart.

Another example is the transformations that took place in the northern part of the coast. The Mamaia resort had the most extensive beach on the Romanian coast, but an even wider beach was desired. During the widening operation, given beaches were not accessible and tourists turned to others, such as Eforie Nord or Năvodari.

In 2022, when everything returned to 'normal', hotels and restaurants were occupied in a small proportion. Some of the regular tourists of the resort did not return. Now we have a resort with a much wider beach and far fewer tourists.

The beaches are solitary and uncared for, and the vegetation is starting to populate them. You could never have imagined that in the middle of the season, in August, in perfect weather conditions for a vacation at the seaside, you could see such a deserted beach in the Mamaia resort.





**Figure 3.**  
Extended beach in  
Mamaia, 2021

Photos taken in the same place show us an extensive beach, designed to offer outstanding tourist potential, versus a deserted and unkempt beach just one year apart. By comparing it with a photo taken in 2015, we can understand the considerable effort that was made, considering that the added layer of sand is approximately 2 meters thick and the shore is prolonged by about 250 meters. This extension marks a massive waste of resources.



**Figure 4.** Extended beach, Ola harbour, Mamaia, 2021



**Figure 5.** Extended beach, Ola harbour, Mamaia, 2022



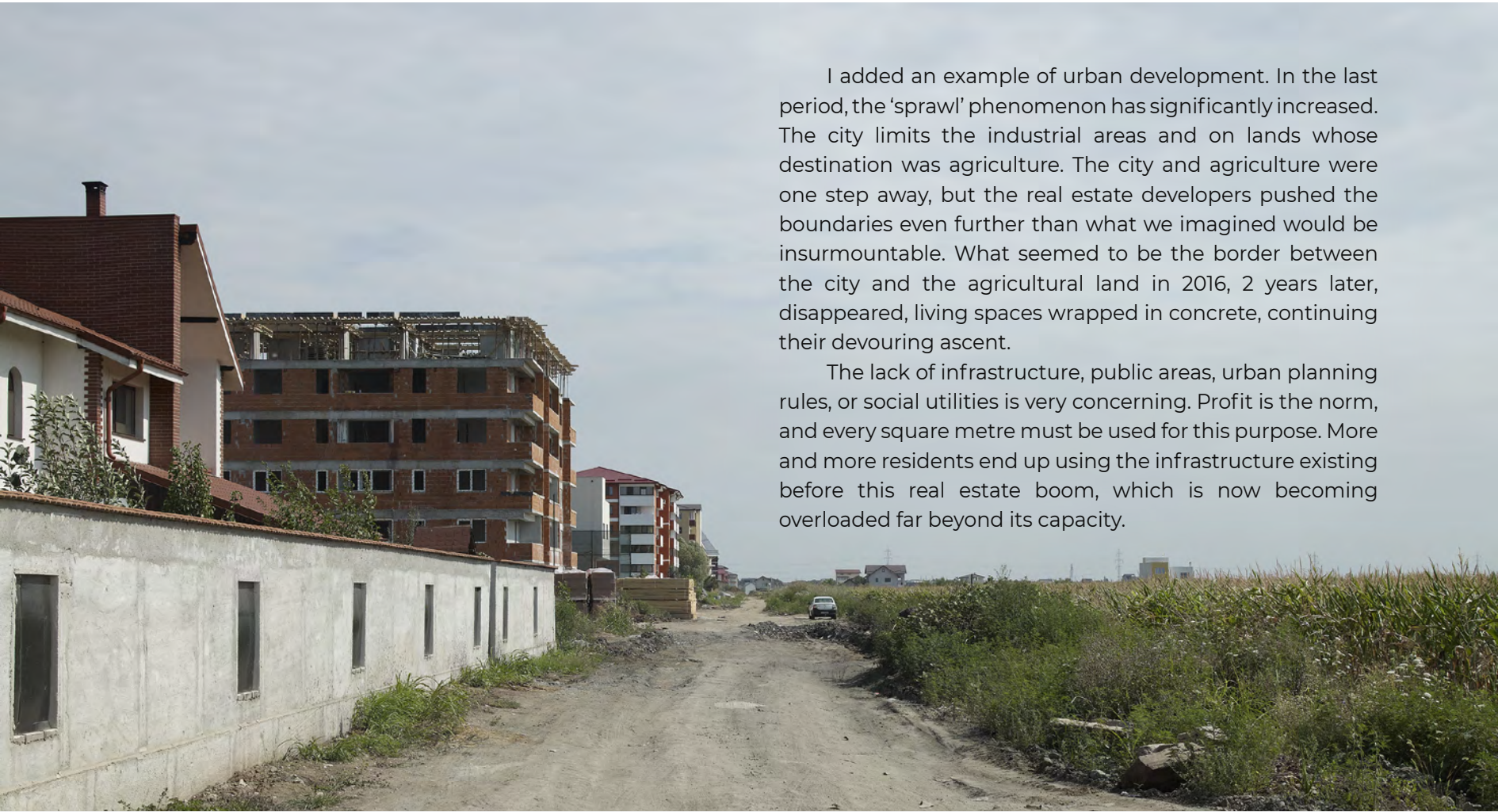
**Figure 6.** Uncared extended beach, Ola harbour, Mamaia, 2022





**Figure 7.** Former beach, Ola harbour in Mamaia, 2015





I added an example of urban development. In the last period, the 'sprawl' phenomenon has significantly increased. The city limits the industrial areas and on lands whose destination was agriculture. The city and agriculture were one step away, but the real estate developers pushed the boundaries even further than what we imagined would be insurmountable. What seemed to be the border between the city and the agricultural land in 2016, 2 years later, disappeared, living spaces wrapped in concrete, continuing their devouring ascent.

The lack of infrastructure, public areas, urban planning rules, or social utilities is very concerning. Profit is the norm, and every square metre must be used for this purpose. More and more residents end up using the infrastructure existing before this real estate boom, which is now becoming overloaded far beyond its capacity.

**Figure 8.**  
Sprawl  
Bucharest, 2016



**Figure 9.**  
Sprawl  
Bucharest, 2018

I use photography as a Memory tool because, through my art, I want to provide documents of organic changes or actions that must be under the lens of criticism. I am motivated by the need to draw attention to the worrying aspects of everyday life before being too late for public reactions. In a country with a fragile democracy where the authorities do not hear the voice of civil society, I want to bring to the public conscience the negative aspects that are happening here and now, which can have significant implications for the present and future of the population.





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PORTFOLIO

# SENSING THE PAST: AN EXPLORATION OF ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY

BELAS KNAP LONG BARROW, ENGLAND

Design | Arts | Culture Vol. 3  
ISSN: 2732-6926

Image and Memory N° 1  
December 2022

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## Elizabeth Poraj-Wilczynska

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Elizabeth Poraj-Wilczynska was born in England in 1965. She is an experimental visual artist and archaeological illustrator specialising in reconstruction drawings for professional archaeological publications. She is also an art tutor and therapist.

She has co-authored several academic papers on the subject of art and archaeology and 'Spirit of place'.

Her most recent work, 'Art and Archaeology of Belas Knap,' exhibited at the Corinium Museum (Cirencester, England) earlier this year. Elizabeth has an artistic approach to archaeology and heritage. Using her art as a bridge to engage with people and to promote health and wellbeing.

# SENSING THE PAST: AN EXPLORATION OF ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY

## BELAS KNAP LONG BARROW, ENGLAND

### Keywords

art  
Neolithic  
long barrow  
archaeology  
memory  
sense of place

This portfolio deals with the work I have been undertaking for the past 20 years. Investigating sense of place at Belas Knap Neolithic long barrow, Cotswolds, England.

I have taken an holistic approach in the creation of art that aims to bridge the sensory experience of archaeology, memory and culture.

Over the last twenty years I have been responding through my art to place and memory, mapping, interpreting and connecting to the seasonal changes at Belas Knap, a laterally chambered Neolithic long barrow located in the Cotswold Hills, Gloucestershire, South West England (NGR: SP0209 2554).



**Figure 1.**  
Belas Knap long barrow  
England, 2022  
© 2022 Elizabeth  
Poraj-Wilczynska





**Figure 2.**

Belas Knap, England, 2021  
False Portal with  
straw offering  
© 2022 Elizabeth  
Poraj-Wilczynska

My earliest memory of Belas Knap is not an image; I simply knew its name. When I was growing up, my family lived in Cheltenham eight miles from Belas Knap. My elder brothers would often cycle to the burial mound and when they came home, I heard them talking to my parents about the fossils they found there. Being too young to join them on their adventures it became for me a mythical place, one that I imagined to be dark and earthy, where magic happened. This mental image endured until I made my first visit.

I was 17 when I made this 'pilgrimage'. Up a steep slope through an atmospheric wood along a tree lined ridge and then suddenly it was before me. I was not disappointed.

Belas Knap is a large ancient monument, 55 metres in length and about 4 metres high. At one end, open to landscape, is a forecourt. Edged by dry stone walls, this space funnels the visitor towards an impressive false portal that guards one end of the mound. There are three other chambers cut into its sides, each entrance a boundary between the outside world and the Neolithic interior. In each of the chamber's megaliths embedded with fossils line the walls.



**Figure 3.**

'The Mothers'  
Fossils found next to  
Belas Knap, 2022  
© 2022 Elizabeth  
Poraj-Wilczynska



In the half-light the cracks and holes in their surface transcend rational thought providing access to the spirit world. The fourth chamber, located diagrammatically opposite to the false portal at the other end, is like a fresh cut grave that entices you to shelter and connect to the mound. On my first visit I did not have a camera, but I did sing a song, a tune of the place that would return to me some twenty years later to inspire the soundscape for an exhibition.

**Figure 4. (left)**  
Belas Knap, England, 2021  
Morning Sun, East Chamber  
© 2022 Elizabeth  
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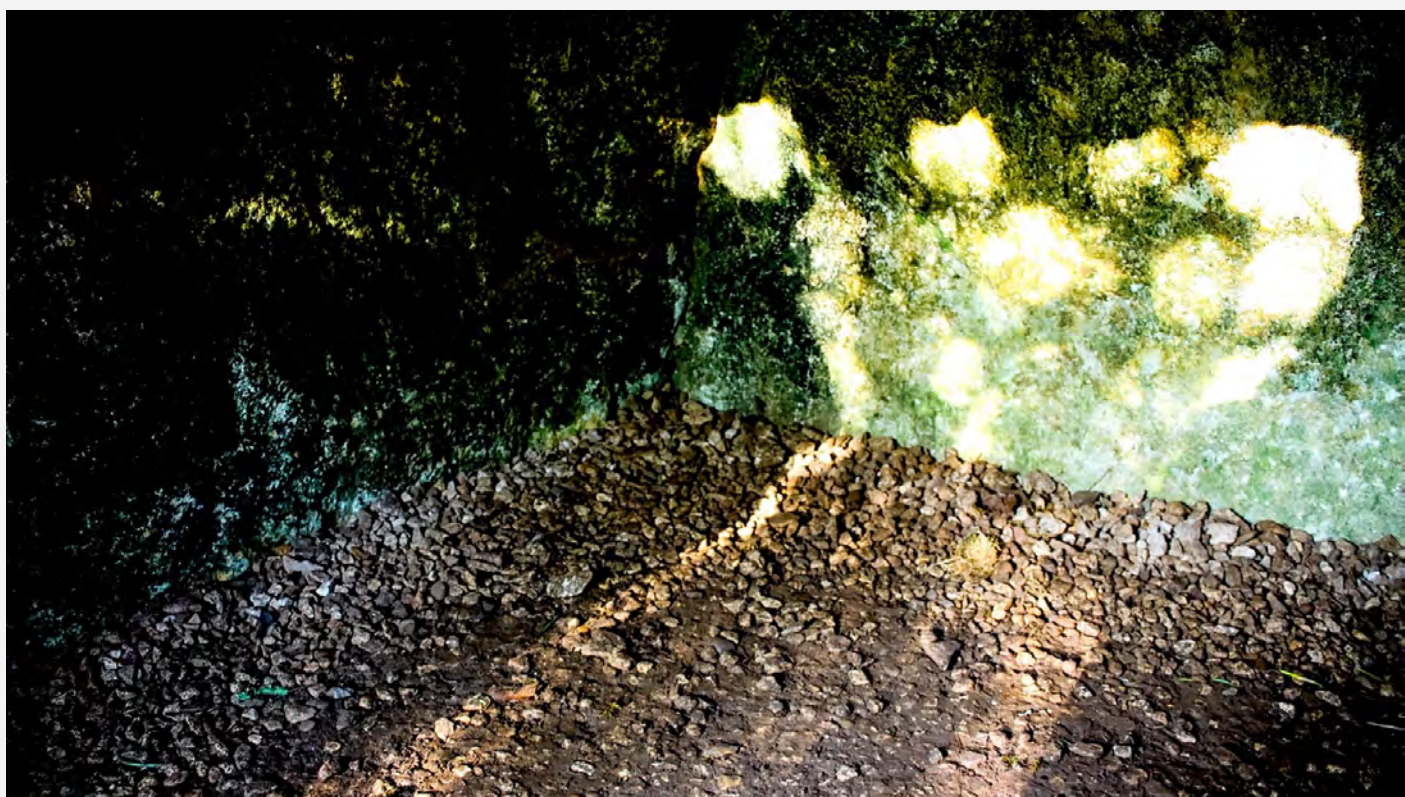


**Figure 5. (right)**  
Belas Knap, England, 2021,  
Winter Sun, West Chamber  
© 2022 Elizabeth  
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Over the years I have made hundreds, maybe thousands of images of Belas Knap, but somehow, they are never enough to tell its story. I have experimented with film, still images, sound and writing and have just completed a project called, 'The Shimmer'.

**Figure 6.**  
'The Shimmer'  
Belas Knap,  
East Chamber, 2021  
© 2022 Elizabeth  
Poraj-Wilczynska





It is a film made in collaboration with Richard Suckling at Cave Bear Films.

Shot on a Canon C100 cinema camera it has taken two years to produce. It records light phenomena that occur in the chambers on the wooded east side of the barrow.

As the sun rises golden orbs of light dance across the stone surfaces of the chambers, settling for a short time on the back stone.

This light show mesmerises and delights the senses. Its intensity and character changes with the seasons, from bright gold in spring to rich and orange in winter. A fleeting spectacle, no doubt witnessed by prehistoric man, it connects past and present.

**Figure 7.**  
Screenshot from  
'The Shimmer' film,  
Belas Knap, East Chamber  
© 2022 Elizabeth  
Poraj-Wilczynska



In search of this connection, I have spent many nights sleeping in the barrow, where there is only me, the barrow and the darkness. My recordings on these occasions capture a deep and sometimes frightening soundscape.

On the east side, in the dark chamber that faces Humblebee wood, a dangerous place where trees claw into the hillside, the winds that blow around the barrow converge in a deafening roar. Listening from within this confined space one could easily imagine that the sound is the voice of a huge animal roaming the land.

**Figure 8.** Belas Knap, England, Humblebee Wood  
(Digital Image), © 2022 Elizabeth Poraj-Wilczynska





Recently, I have continued exploring ways to engage with the memory of place by using materials found at the site to create art works. Ground up stone, mud and natural plant pigments are used to make earth maps and representations of the mound.

I also collect soil from various locations around the mound to make pots and 'homes' for the wheat and flint that I have found nearby. Most of the time I feel as if I am working from a memory that is not mine but embedded in the place itself. The more I let go into this feeling, the more prolific and potentially profound my artistic output becomes.

**Figure 9.**  
Belas Knap Sky Map,  
earth and natural pigments on cotton,  
size: 40" x 30"  
© 2022 Elizabeth Poraj-Wilczynska



**Figure 10.**  
'Vessels', homes for flint and wheat, sun baked earth  
© 2022 Elizabeth Poraj-Wilczynska



**Figure 11.**  
'Burial Pot' for flint waste  
flakes, sun baked earth  
© 2022 Elizabeth  
Poraj-Wilczynska



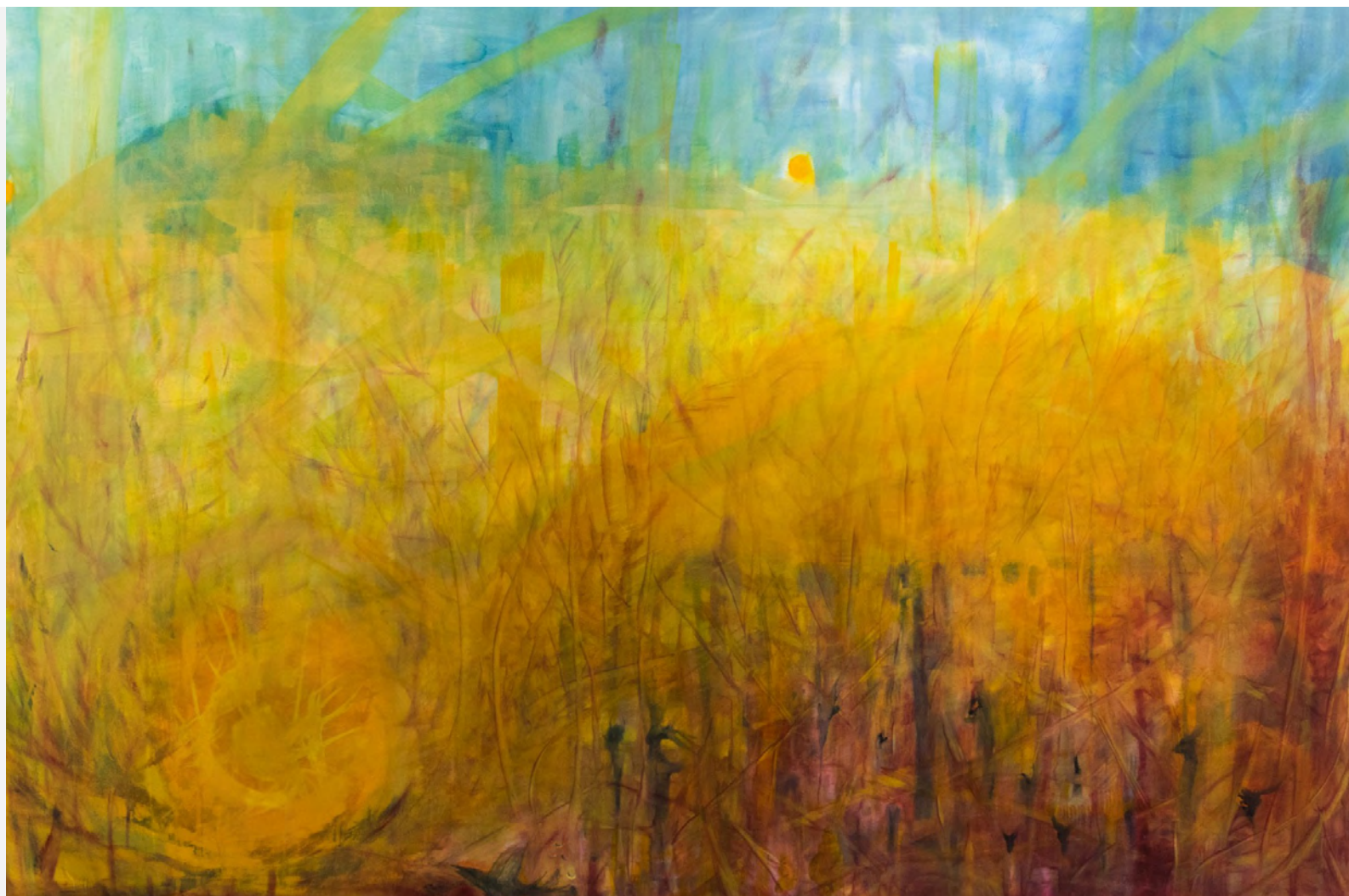
The land around archaeological sites is seldom documented and there is little interpretation or information about the species of plants or animals. To address this, I have taken an holistic approach, documenting human and animal interactions with the mound. Animal bones and animal tracks are scattered all over the Belas Knap landscape, and I cannot help but wonder how significant the behaviour of animals, their paths and tracks may have been to prehistoric people.



**Figure 12.**  
Belas Knap,  
Animal Tracks next to the  
long barrow, England  
(Digital Image)  
© 2022 Elizabeth  
Poraj-Wilczynska

Indeed, our human interaction with Belas Knap is ongoing. Located on a popular walking route, 'The Cotswold Way,' it has hundreds of visitors every year. I was curious about why people came and what they thought about it. Over the years it has become clear that some people have a need to visit Belas Knap for their wellbeing, visiting the site regularly. Many said the mound gave them a feeling of peace. Some had scattered the ashes of a loved one and returned to remember them. Several of these people were in fact quite unwell with a range of long-term health conditions, such as Fibromyalgia, Parkinson's, learning disabilities, dementia and depression.





**Figure 13.** 'Underworld'  
Spirit beings in the barrow  
landscape, oil on canvas,  
size: 30" x 60"

© 2022 Elizabeth  
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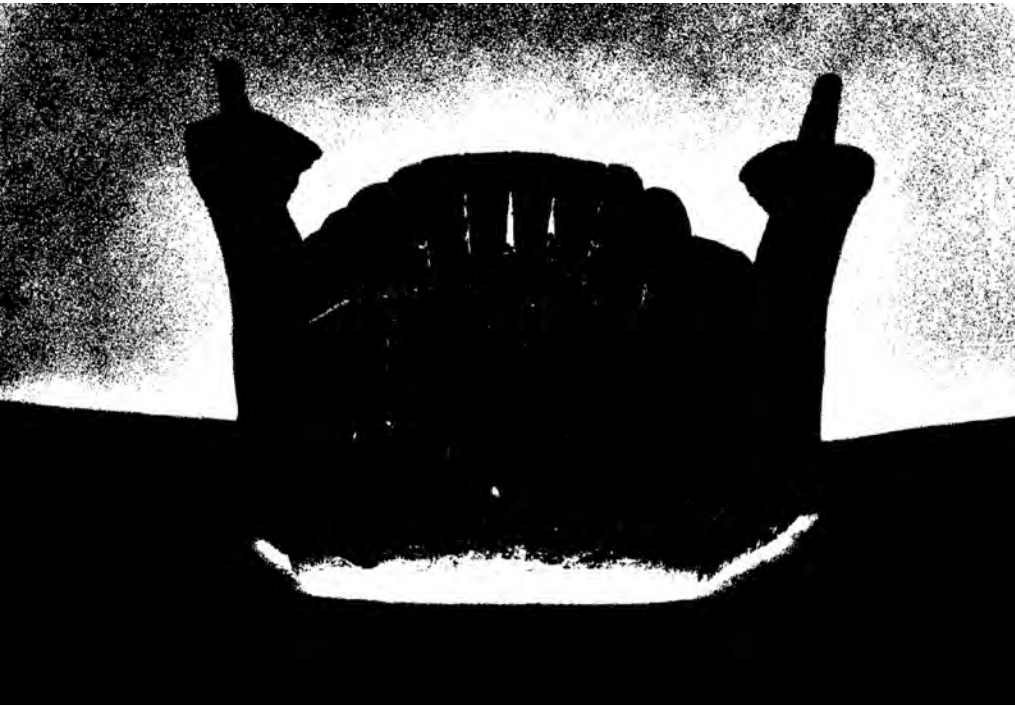
They had concerns about being physically unable to make the journey, and whether their memories alone would be enough to keep them well? Some have pictures of Belas Knap in their houses, and some have made small shrines in their gardens. They often take a stone from the mound home and bring offerings to the barrow in return usually flowers from their gardens left in a chamber or on the forecourt.



**Figure 14.**  
'Earth Spirits', reimagined  
ploughed out round  
barrow next to Belas Knap,  
watercolour, size: 20" x 10"

© 2022 Elizabeth  
Poraj-Wilczynska





**Figure 15.**  
'Belas Knap Cosmology'  
Representation of a  
human lower jawbone,  
found within the  
forecourt, Belas Knap  
(digital image)  
© 2022 Elizabeth  
Poraj-Wilczynska

Clearly, Belas Knap is a place that triggers feelings of comfort; people come there to feel good, to feel something other than their worries, to relax into a meditative state pondering the distant past and remember past visits with friends and family. But some come there to forget. It seems extraordinary that a monument built thousands of years ago should still be the focal point for human interaction.

Belas Knap was built to last, a home for the ancestors and the thirty-eight skeletons buried inside. It is a time machine that prompts memory. Its structure is womb-like, enclosing and protecting. It may have been a place of the dead during the Neolithic with rituals that we will never comprehend. However, this ancient monument for some now provides comfort and nurture, its permanence in the landscape an emotional and spiritual anchor.

The images in this portfolio were recently part of the Belas Knap art and archaeology exhibition shown at Corinium Museum Cirencester England.

Alongside multimedia artwork, the film of the shimmer was screened, and a soundscape played on a loop in the gallery. The initial response from the public has been unexpected. It seems that the combination of images, sounds, and exhibits have combined to transport the viewers to Belas Knap. Comments such as 'chilled out' and 'relaxed' 'evocative' and 'peaceful', 'immersive' were recorded; many visitors returned to view several times. Perhaps multi-sensory exhibitions could be used to support our health, well-being and memory.

Often all that remains of excavated monuments is a dark stain or outline on the surface of the ground. Archaeology takes things apart until there is nothing left. However, I have experienced these traces, and have found them to be powerful and compelling. The memory of collective intention to craft and shape the natural and spiritual world, if we can connect to this, we can experience a sense of place.



**Figure 16.**  
'Barrow Lands'  
England, Belas Knap  
long barrow  
© 2022 Elizabeth  
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PORTFOLIO

# LIGHT FROM BELOW

A VISUAL MEDITATION ON  
TIME AND SAND

Design | Arts | Culture Vol. 3  
ISSN: 2732-6926

Image and Memory N° 1  
December 2022

Geir Harald Samuelsen



**Geir Harald Samuelsen**

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Associate Professor, researcher and visual artist living and working in Oslo, Norway. Samuelsen is the leader and founder of the artistic research project: *Matter, Gesture, and Soul* at the Art Academy, Department of Fine Art at the University of Bergen. <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/837154/837155>

He is a painter and photographer. He has exhibited extensively in galleries and museums in Norway and abroad.

## LIGHT FROM BELOW

**Keywords**

time

sand

meditation

photography

Fontainebleau

### A VISUAL MEDITATION ON TIME AND SAND

The light is shining from the ground, minutes after the sun has set. The Fontainebleau sand is glowing with a mysterious light from below. I prepare for the camera to capture it. If it does, it will capture the disappearing sun shining in the bright surface of the sand.



**Figure 1.**  
Night Picture # 2,  
Analogue C-print,  
© 2022 Geir Harald  
Samuelsen





**Figure 2.**  
Night Picture # 3,  
Analogue C-print  
© 2022 Geir Harald  
Samuelsen

Good sand is becoming more and more rare. We have soon used it all up to make glass, concrete buildings, and roads. Sand from the deserts is useless for these purposes. The wind has made each grain of the desert-sand too smooth and round to have any use value. It will not stick together for glass or concrete. But the Fontainebleau sand is brilliant. Especially for glass. This specific type of sand is well known to be among the purest types of quartz sand in the world. It is very bright, and each grain has an even, but not too eroded texture. It is sand made by water. It is totally transparent when transformed into glass. No colour is visible in the glass windows made from it. No visible tint of iron green which is normal in other types of glass. The glass pyramid outside the Louvre is made from Fontainebleau-sand. So are the well-known Venetian Murano glass products.



I have just finished the evening's photo project in Fontainebleau, packed down the equipment I make sure nothing has disappeared in the dark.

My ambition with this work, apart from capturing majestic stones, is to capture a climber climbing on one of them. I want to picture him all the way from the ground to the top in one single frame. I want to gather his movements and put it into one picture. I want to picture a moving body on a boulder in one still photo.

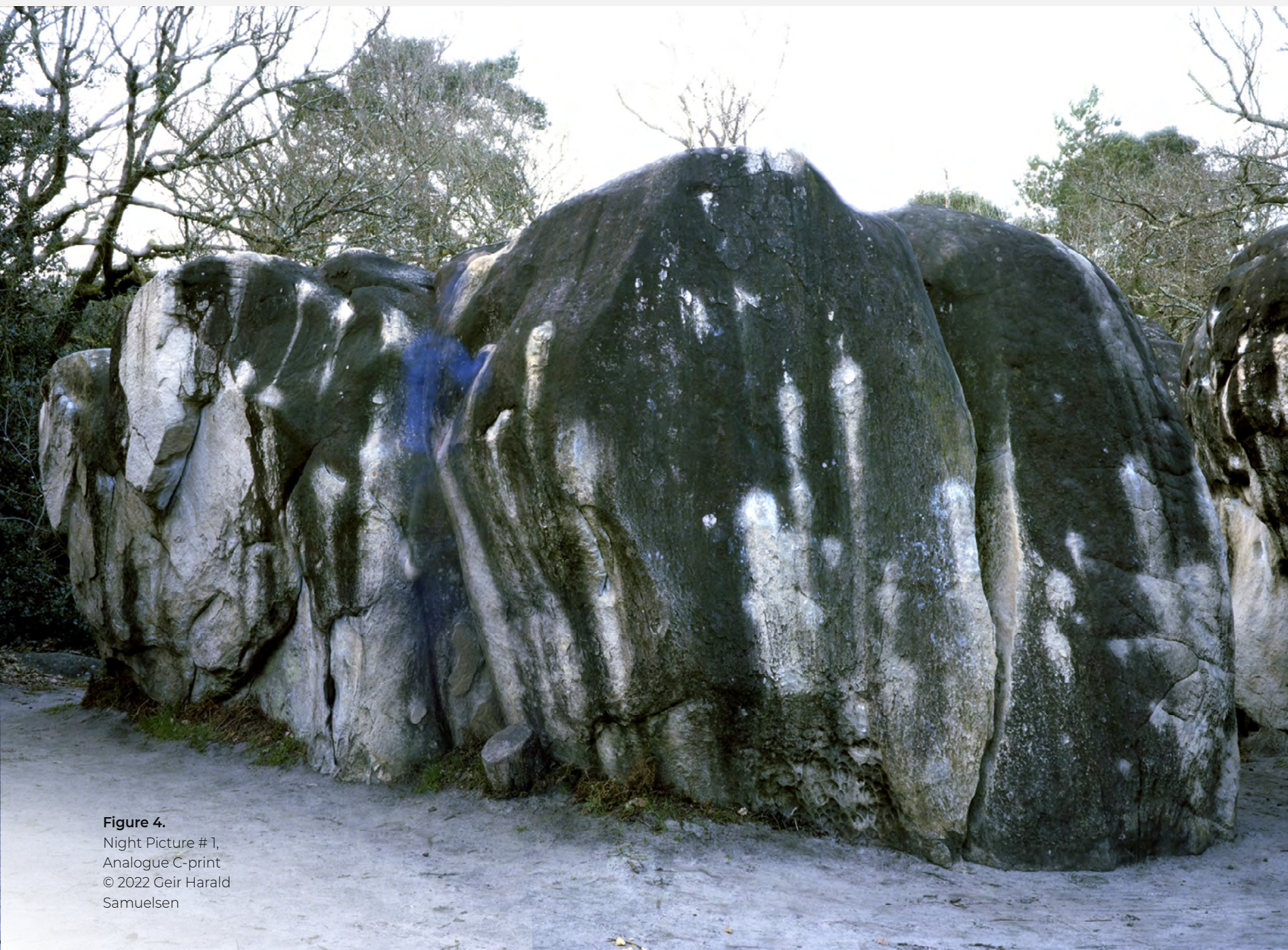
**Figure 3.**  
Night Picture # 4,  
Analogue C-print  
© 2022 Geir Harald  
Samuelsen



It is almost dark now. In fact, you can only do this type of project in the evening, when the light is fading. You have a time-window for about 30 minutes from the sun sets until it gets too dark to shoot your photo. At least one minute is needed to climb one boulder, so the camera lens must stay open for one minute to capture the totality of the climb.

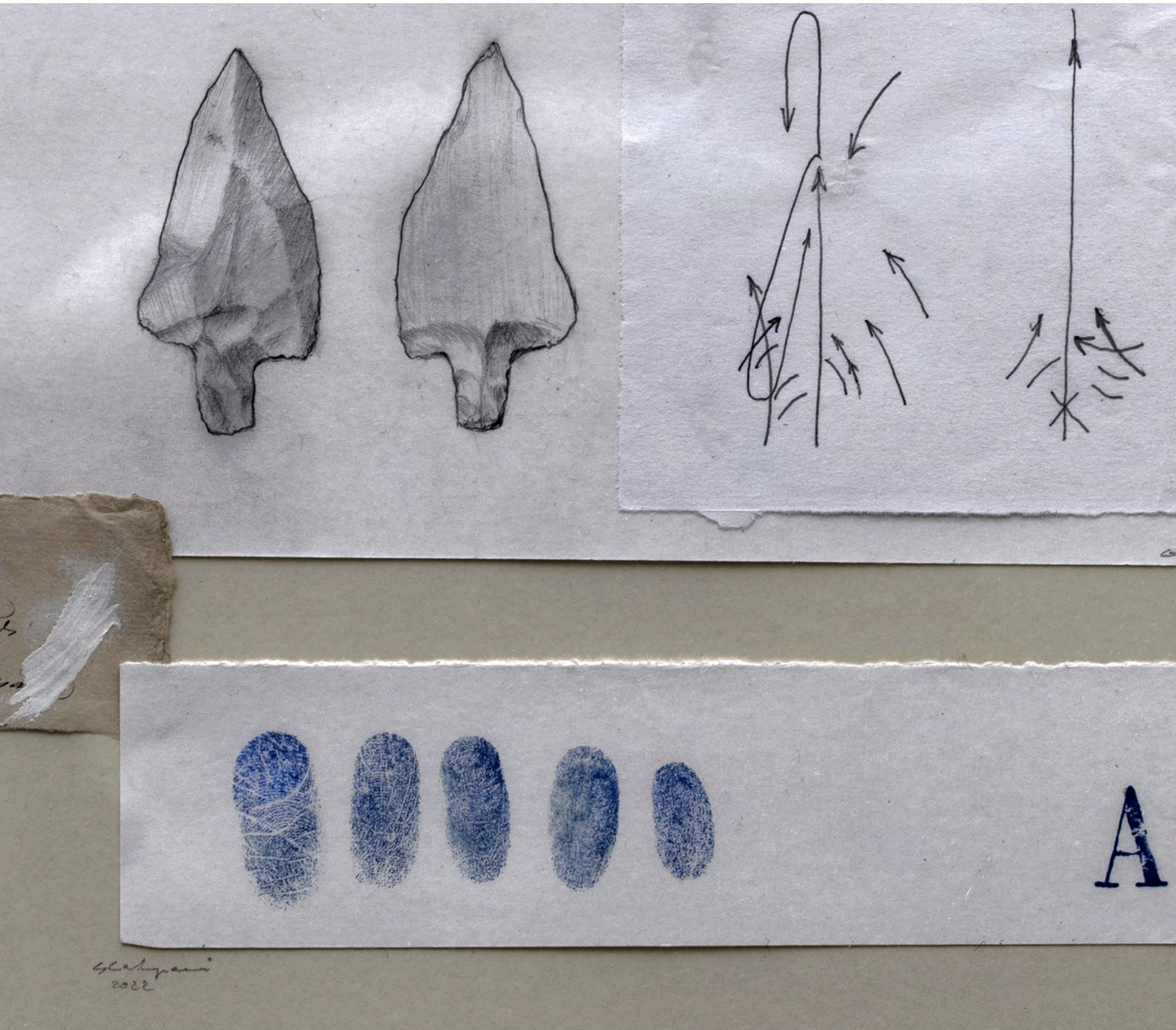
Too much light and the picture becomes all white. No light, and the picture becomes black. You have only a couple of possibilities each evening, that is all. It all becomes a ritual. Going restlessly waiting all day. Packing your stuff. Going out. Setting up.

Acting determined but slow not to ruin the set-up. But the riskiness suits the project. The ritual becomes a part of the picture. The photographer becomes a part of the photo. The observer becomes the observed. You are forced to follow the rhythms of the light. Time is consumed and moments are stored on top of each other in layers of light on thousands of years of glued, grains of sand.



**Figure 4.**  
Night Picture #1,  
Analogue C-print  
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Samuelsen





PORTFOLIO

Design | Arts | Culture Vol. 3  
ISSN: 2732-6926

Image and Memory N° 1  
December 2022

THE HAND  
MEMORY

Giulio Calegari





## Giulio Calegari

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Architect, former professor at the Academy of Fine Arts of Brera for the “Archetipi dell’immaginario” course. Since 1983 he guided different archaeological expeditions in Mali, Eritrea, Morocco and Togo, for the Centro Studi Archeologia Africana and for the Natural History Museum of Milan where he oversees the palaeoethnology department. He is the director of the magazine Archeologia Africana and the author of many papers, lectures and performances.

He edited, among many books, “L’uomo e l’ambiente del Sahara preistorico” and “La religione della Sete”; he published “Repertorio dell’Arte Rupestre dell’Eritrea” and “Aperture all’immaginario – Tra archeologia africana e incertezze”. Since the end of the sixties, he’s been more active as a contemporary artist, often using his research in the ‘anthropological’ field as a language for his art.

## THE HAND MEMORY

Traces of ancient gestures are recalled and re-interpreted in an artistic way. Prehistoric chipped stone artefacts: preserve techniques, gestures, sounds and memories. Maybe stories. Just like in a book or in a musical score. We can reconstruct these ancient artefacts and use them to verify their function.

### Keywords

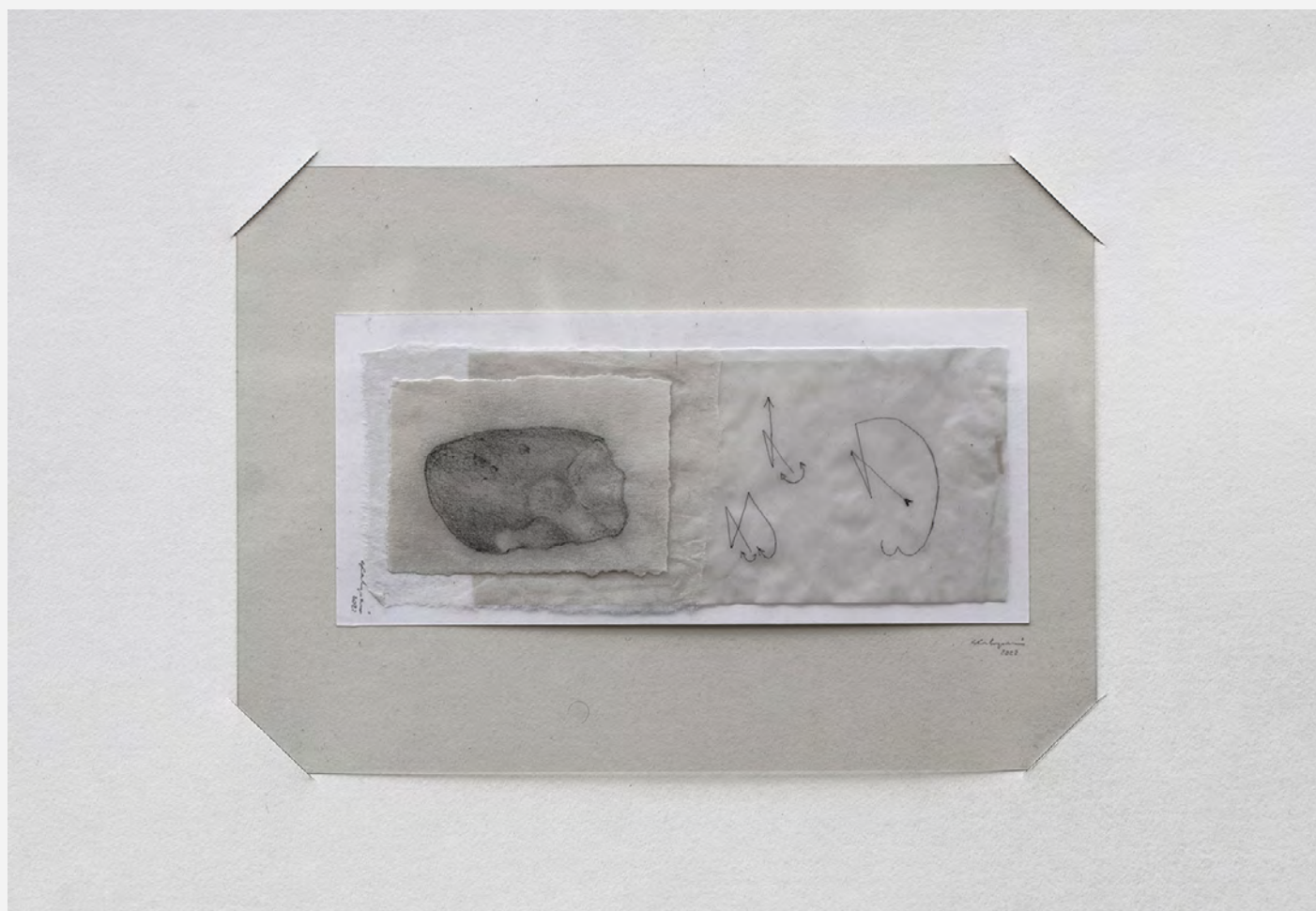
archaeology  
memory  
traces  
ancient gestures  
art re-interpretation

Though I prefer to listen to their secret message.

Grasp the ‘memory’ and the expression of the hand, the creative and imaginary moment that these ancient tools hide, as a souvenir that belongs to us. Wishing to dialogue with the ancient, chipped stones, and see with imagination the gestures with which they were made. I would save them from the prison of museum shop windows and the pages of assaulting books. I wish to reread them in an artistic, free, and creative way. Collecting the ancient gestures without betraying and leading them to a current language, in view of a new dialogue between art and archaeology.

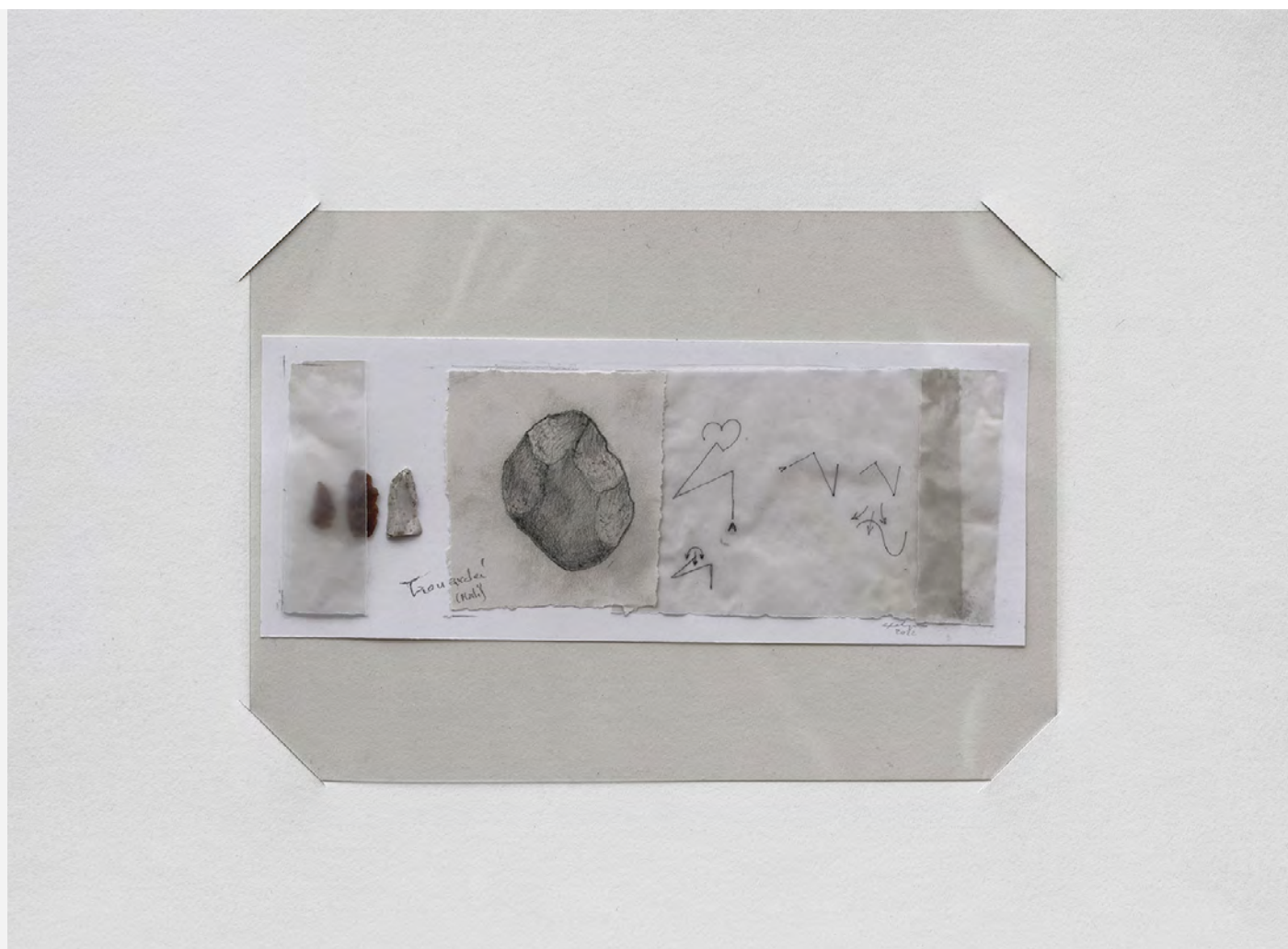
### “ARCHAEOLOGY OF BEAUTY”

**Figure 1.**  
Quartzite Chopping tool  
chipped pebble type,  
lower Palaeolithic  
(Algerian Sahara).  
‘Poetic’ and graphic  
interpretation of the hand  
gestures associated with  
the artefact.





**Figure 2.**  
Chopping tool chipped  
pebble type, lower  
Palaeolithic and Neolithic  
blades in flint and red  
chalcedony (Malian Sahel).  
'Poetic' and graphic  
interpretation of the hand  
gestures associated with  
the artefact.

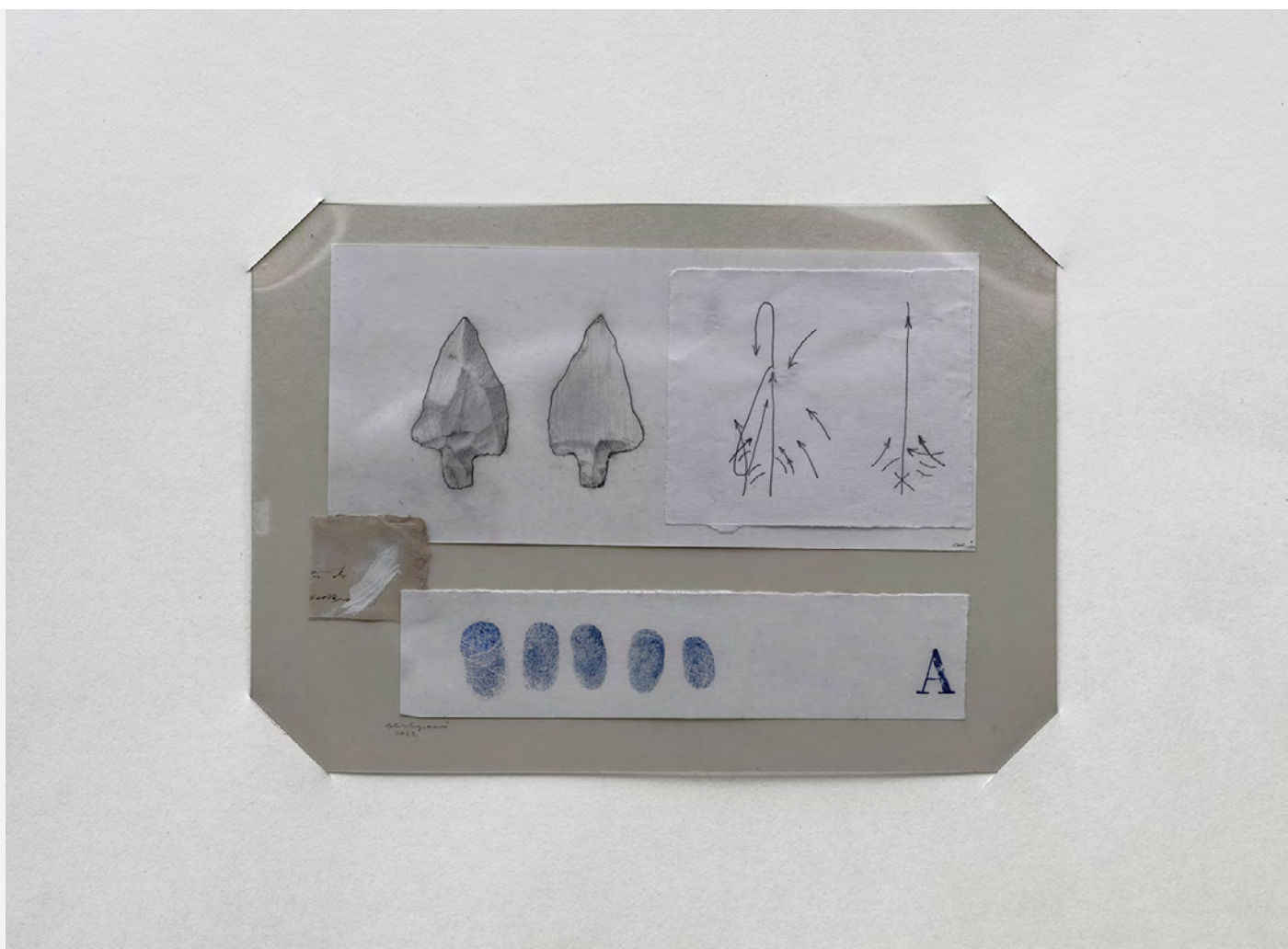


**Figure 3.**  
Tip of quartz sandstone,  
lower/ middle Palaeolithic  
(Eritrea plateau of Cohiato).  
'Poetic' and graphic  
interpretation of the hand  
gestures associated with  
the artefact.

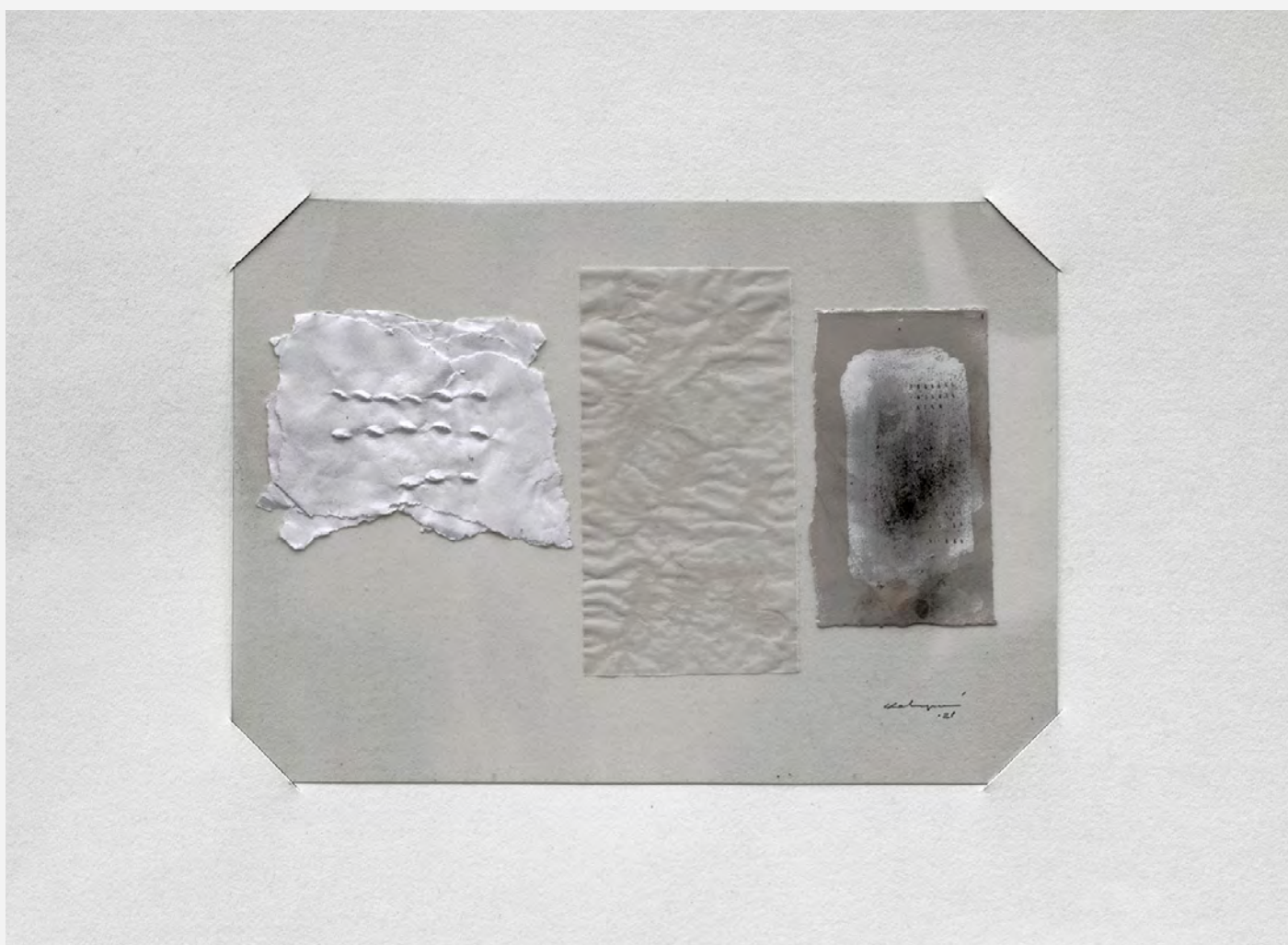




**Figure 4.**  
Pedunculated point  
in quartzite  
(Ateriano Saharan).  
Poetic and graphic  
interpretation of the hand  
gestures associated with  
the artefact.



**Figure 5.**  
Cast of prehistoric nails  
from a fragment of  
vase, Neolithic culture  
of 'Cardium print' (Italy).  
Translation into different  
types of paper, tempera  
paint, and smoke traces.







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PORTFOLIO

Design | Arts | Culture Vol. 3  
ISSN: 2732-6926

Image and Memory N° 1  
December 2022

# THE MEMORY OF BODY AS TRANSPERSONAL ARCHETYPE

Adriana Lucaciu





### Adriana Lucaciu

Professor PhD Habil. and Director of the Doctoral School of Arts at the West University of Timișoara, Romania, Department of Visual Arts, Faculty of Arts and Design

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Adriana Lucaciu is a visual artist who lives and works in Timișoara, Romania where she carries out her research and practice. Since 1993 she has been a member of the Romanian Association of Visual Artists.

#### Studies

2005 Doctoral Studies at West University of Timișoara, Romania;

1992 Graduated from the National Academy of Arts, Bucharest, Romania.

Management activities: since 2020 - Director of the Doctoral Art Studies School at the West University of Timișoara; 2012-2020 - Vice-dean of the Faculty of Arts and Design; 2008-2012 - Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Design; 2012-2016 - Head of the Graphic Department at the Faculty of Arts and Design.

Artistic activities: One-man shows in Romania, USA, Hungary and Germany.

Over 400 participations at international exhibitions and contests.

#### Prizes (selection)

2022 Prize of the Graphic Arts Section granted by the Romanian Association of Visual Artists;

Prize for Excellence in Artistic Field, West University of Timișoara, Romania;

2019 Special Prize of Modern and Contemporary Museum of Art „Pavel Șușară”, Bucharest, Romania;

2018 Drawing Biennial - The Drawing after Brancuși, Târgu Jiu, Romania;

2016 Prize of the Biennial-Miniprint International, Paraña, Brazil;

2015 Prize for Graphic Arts, Contemporary Biennial Art Museum Tulcea, Romania;

2014 2nd Prize of Intercontinental Small Graphic Competition, Aiud, Romania; Prize of Excellence for Graphic Arts, Contemporary National Graphic Arts Biennial, Art Museum Tulcea, Romania;

Prize of Excellence for Artistic Creation, Local Council Timișoara, Romania;

2013 The Prize of the Romanian Association of Visual Artists - 10th “Iosif Iser” International Contemporary Print Biennial, Ploiești, Romania;

2012 Mention 1 - Exlibris Competition-Hacettepe University, Ankara, Turkey;

2011 Prize for graphic arts, “Meeting Point Arad Biennial”, Arad, Romania;

1995 Prize for the Youngest Artist, Bancorex Bank, Romania; Prize for Graphic Arts, Romanian Association of Visual Artists, Bucharest, Romania;

1992 Collective Prize for Illustration, Kriterion Publishing House, Bucharest, Romania.

#### Grants

2015 Artist in Residence at Kunsthaus Salzburg, Austria;

1994 The Grant for Young Artists, Italian Government, Rome, Italy;

1992 Grant of the Heinrich Böll Foundation, Bonn, Germany.

## THE MEMORY OF BODY AS TRANSPERSONAL ARCHETYPE

### Abstract

The paper proposes a perspective based on a research through art at the crossroads between personal memory, corporeality, transpersonal archetypes and drawing. If art can be admitted as a way of ‘writing’ through images, self-reflexive art can be considered a self-description, as well as an ‘autograph’, which is not reduced to affectivity.

### Keywords

archetypes

depository

drawing

self-memory

transpersonal

From here it is only a step to notice that the ‘disguised’ revelation of the self as our memory archived it, by artistic works, turns out to be a symbolic narrative, expressed through metaphors with autobiographical overtones.

The artistic act placed outside of creation in relation to the evaluative factors, is exempt from gratuity because it responds to at least one existential need – that of self-expression, which becomes paramount in historical, social and private history contexts. It plays a main role in documenting actual life and preserving it for the future, like reveries of dissolution and permanence.

Based on the fact that in the creative endeavour there are stages that evade conscious direction, allowing the self to manifest freely, my artistic practice brings to the visible plane contents disguised as visual elements, the meaning of which can be decoded with the help of several analysis systems. According to psychoanalysis, the processes of repression, sublimation, displacement, substitution, condensation, overdetermination, have the work of art as a substitute product, along with dreams, reveries or neuroses.

If human nature is "interpreted by psychoanalysts in terms of conflict, the mind being understood as an expression of forces in conflict: some conscious others unconscious" (Oroveanu, 2000, pp. 7-8) and if the initiation of the conflict can be moved existentially to the encounter between the artist and the reality in which he/she lives, then, solving it can be understood, from the perspective of choosing the level of manifestation, as an option between assimilation or rejection of reality. The artistic act becomes in relation to the evaluative factors placed outside the creation, exempted from gratuity because it responds to at least one existential need - that of self-expression, which becomes primordial in a historical and social context.

The artist can be part of the socio-cultural context in which Individual lives can withdraw, through a volitional or instinctive act, opposing it, through art, a form of resistance. In my opinion, the pluralism of the factors determining creation in general cannot be reduced but can create the frame of reference in which some personal visual discourses can be placed and can offer a reading key, as a result of two main considerations: 1) the relationship between work and the existence of the

artist and 2) the forms of art as an interface between the artist and reality. Hence, it is the challenge to find a correspondence between the subjective-motivational factors and the objective-formal elements on one hand, and the links between the creative subject and the content subject of the works on the other hand. (Figures 01, 02)

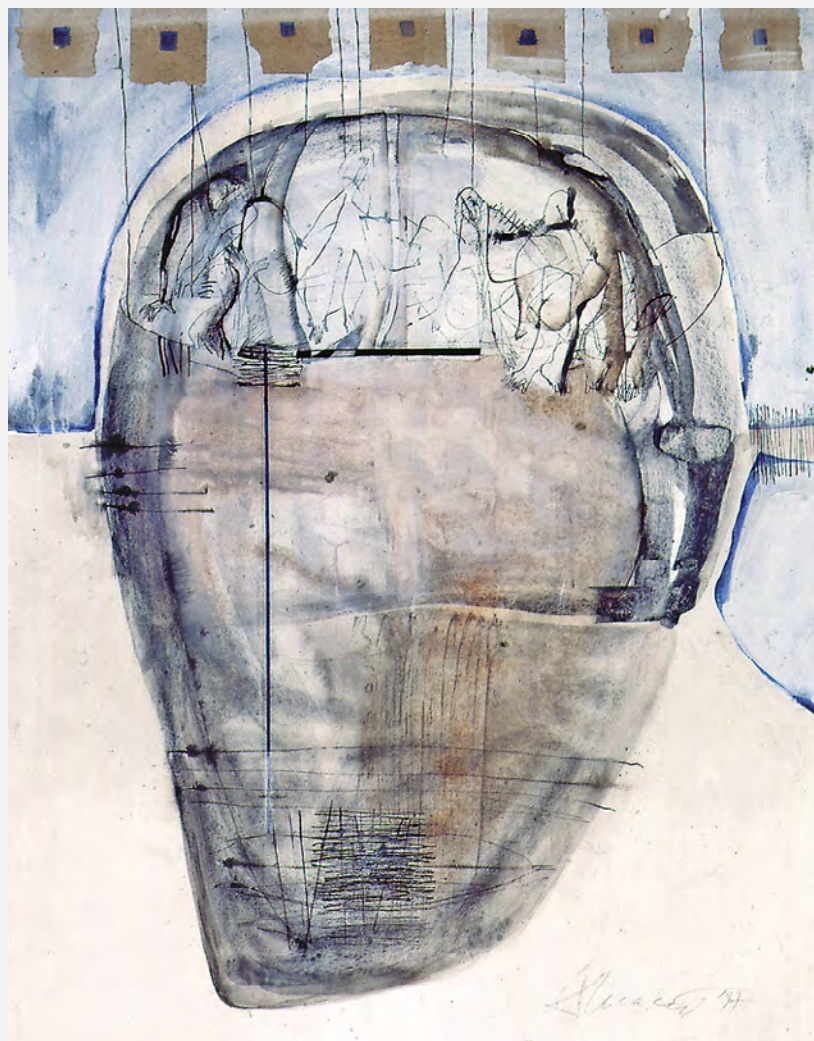
**Figure 1.**

Adriana Lucaciu  
Autography No. 10  
China Ink,  
Acryl on canvas



**Figure 2.**

Adriana Lucaciu  
Autography No. 6  
China Ink,  
Acryl on canvas



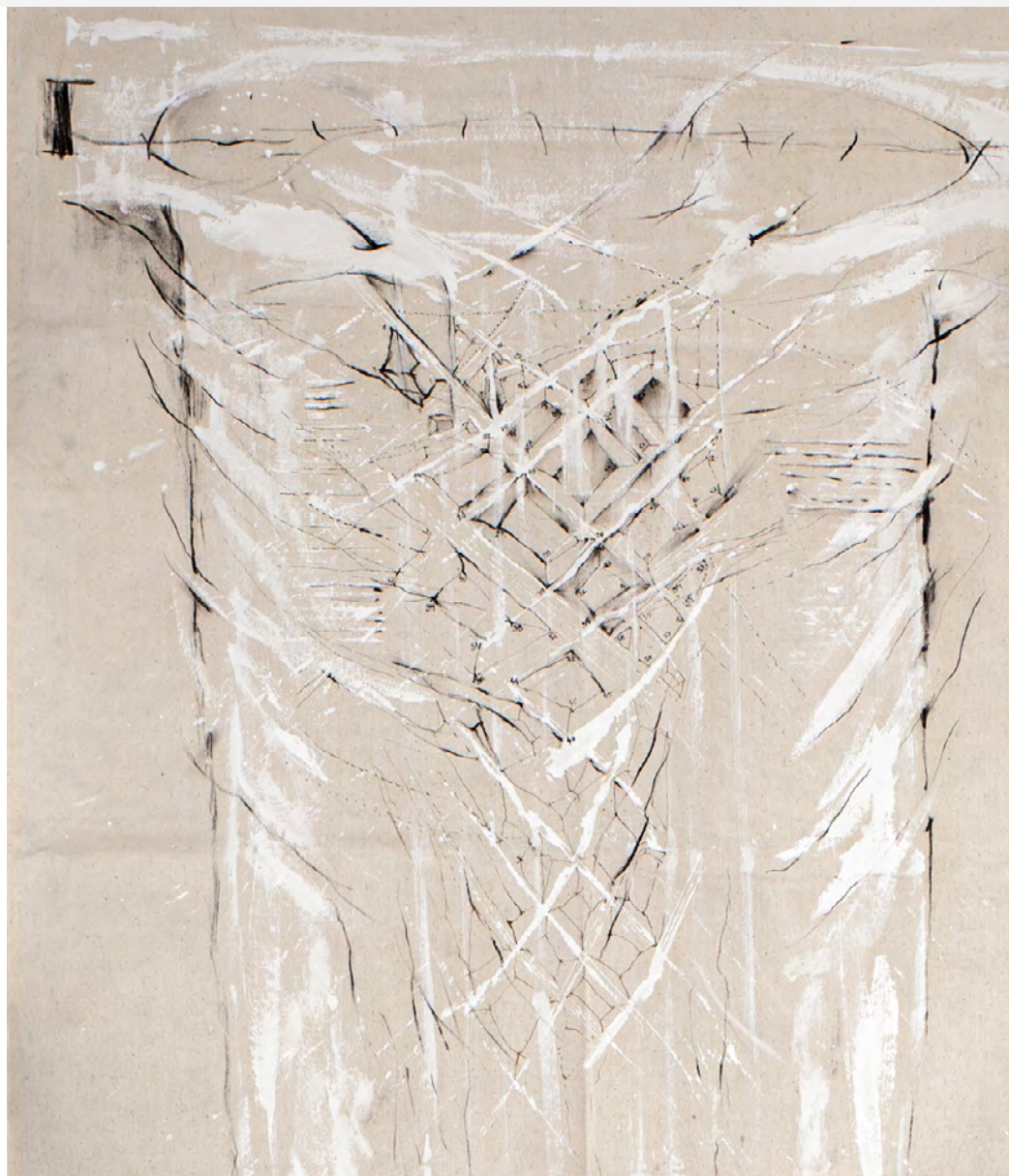


As a concrete way of reflecting the world through a particular complex of signs that belongs both to the author and to the represented object, the drawing is for me the most familiar medium of expression, in a style between linearity and pictoriality.

This option is due to an intrinsic quality that belongs to the direct gesture exercised by handling the tools and materials specific to the drawing, a gesture that can record our existence, like an ultimate interiority, objectified in visible traces in a sublimated way – spontaneous, firm or diaphanous, crossing the path from the invisible to the image. The exercise is to establish a unifying vision between the concept and the artistic realization. The works follow an area of suggestion and the transformations of reality, in the spirit of the humanist vein of the 20th century, which made it possible to decode the self-referential approach, despite the fact that the postmodern scene sometimes uses and abuses the amalgamation of the areas of knowledge, information, technologies, interdisciplinary transgressions. (Figures 03, 04)

**Figure 3.**

Adriana Lucaciu, 2021  
Embodiments No. 24  
mixed technique on  
canvas, 280 x 90 cm



The mutations that occurred in the production and reception of the artistic phenomenon led to a redefinition of the artist who becomes both object and subject.

At the ideological center of the approach could be placed the concepts of corporeality and sublimation related to drawing, with their polysemantic meanings, starting from the questions projected on the roles that these concepts, in their broad sense, play in the content of the professional achievements, topical concepts in contemporary art.

**Figure 4.**

Adriana Lucaciu, 2021  
Embodiments No. 23  
(detail)  
mixed technique  
on canvas,  
280 x 90 cm



In order to transform into a process of signification, the image – what is visible – loses its material substance, so that between corporeality and sublimation an ‘alchemical’ connection is established. (Figures 05, 06, 07, 08)



**Figure 5.**  
Adriana Lucaciu, 2012  
Embodiments No. 06  
mixed technique on  
canvas, 280 x 90 cm



**Figure 6.**  
Adriana Lucaciu, 2021  
Embodiments No. 34  
mixed technique on  
canvas, 280 x 90 cm



**Figure 7.**  
Adriana Lucaciu, 2012  
Embodiments No. 04  
mixed technique on  
canvas, 280 x 90 cm



**Figure 8.**  
Adriana Lucaciu, 2021  
Embodiments No. 19  
mixed technique on  
canvas, 280 x 90 cm

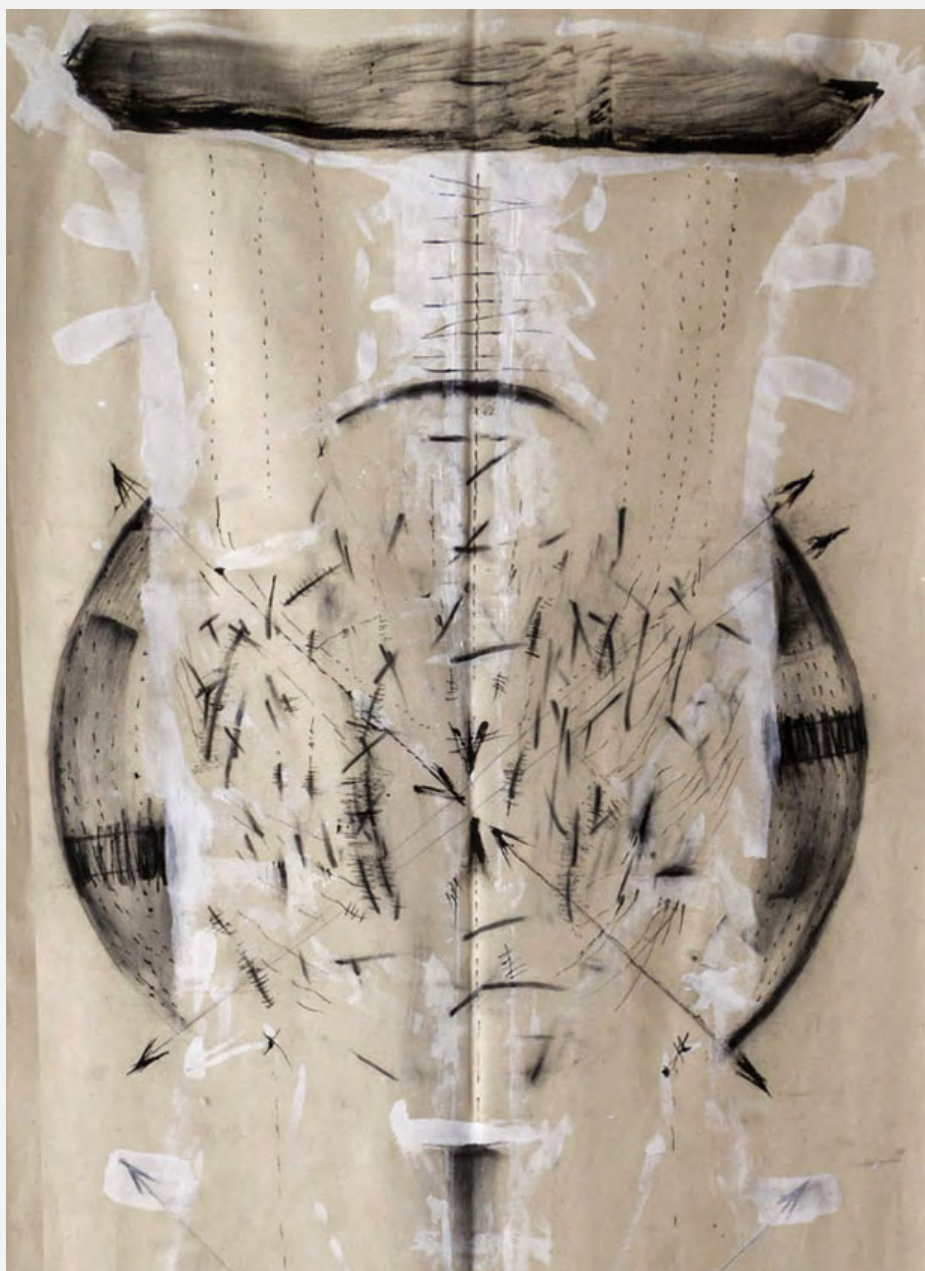
Corporeality reflects the forms of art as an interface between me-artist and reality, and reveals both the material support of the objectifications of the inner substrate (the physical product) and the figural content of personal creations (the human figure/ the body as a topographical plastic element).

The balance between “the need to visualize the abstract and the need to transcend the visible” brought back to my attention the data of the sensorially perceptible world, which can be redirected towards the search for the essences of that invisible world, which belong to the inner background of things, imperceptible by their very proximity, banal and familiar. This determined me not to abandon, for a while, the objectivity of forms, which I kept as visual, anthropomorphic containers, necessary for the objectification of inner states and mental representations, containers with a quasi-narrative content.



The points of support in the genesis of the creative process are the moments when the balance between conscious-unconscious, rational-emotional, lucidity-sensitivity involves changes.

My visual speech becomes, therefore, a speech with ontological support, an autograph, in graphic-pictorial expressions. (Figure 09)



**Figure 9.**  
Adriana Lucaciu, 2012  
Embodiments No. 15  
mixed technique on canvas  
280 x 80 cm  
detail

In the circumstances of the contemporary art, the body maintains its status as an art subject and object as well, which reflects metaphorically the private and social histories, the entire creation being an attempt to recover the symbolic dimension of the corporeality by transforming it into transpersonal archetypes as an ultimately human depository of our memory.

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PORTFOLIO

Design | Arts | Culture Vol. 3  
ISSN: 2732-6926

Image and Memory N° 1  
December 2022

# SOMNIFERA

Elin Tanding Sørensen





## Elin Tanding Sørensen

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Sørensen is trained in art, animation, environmental sustainability, and landscape architecture. Her practice within eco-social art is characterized by in-depth cross-disciplinary and co-creative processes. Her doctoral thesis on rewilding urban sea areas through innovative architectural solutions is being published by Routledge Explorations in Environmental Studies, with the working title “Multispecies Design in Urban Sea Areas: Placemaking and Storytelling in Scandinavian Environments.”

“Somnifera” explores interactions between the opium poppy and humans. The artistic research seeks to return to Mother Earth and ancient practices: Through the opium poppy’s rich multitude of narratives — in a society alienated from the cycles of nature; such as life/death, the raw materials of life and species’ own life histories — my practice examines how multispecies storytelling can connect us emotionally to our ancient, distant past. “Somnifera” is her contribution to the artistic research project *Matter, Gesture and Soul*, Faculty of Fine Art, Music and Design, University of Bergen Norway.

# SOMNIFERA

## Abstract

“Somnifera” explores interactions between the opium poppy and humans. In their exploration of new habitats, human tribes curiously tested out plants that could help them transcend their “normal” state into expanded experiences, possibly communicating with their ancestors or gods, as part of their experimental quest for knowledge.

Since the dawn of time, we have milked the benefits of the opium plant, while politics, religion, and a cynical multinational drug and pharmaceutical industry have assigned the plant a controversial role on the world stage. The plant’s power to both save life and take life is the essence of this artwork with the intention to contribute to a holistic debate about the opium poppy’s potential: To lift it out of the shadow of condemnation and give it its rightful bright place among us.

This narrative dips in and out between trance-states and every-day-states-of-mind, while the author’s alter ego Sigma Woman enters love and grief – transitioning from emotional breakdown to possible healing. The figurative language of this text, and its accompanying images, are from visions emerging from ecstatic trance – described as the *primaeval* technique of a safe, natural physiological transition to direct experience of the eternal now and ancestral wisdom. In one of the trance-sessions we concentrated on the three-thousand-year-old figurine “The Poppy Goddess and Patron of Healing.” This inner journey gave rise to the idea of exploring reenactment, inspired by experimental archaeology.

Approaching the goddess figure, the author anoints her body with *Caput Mortuum*-colored oxidized magnetite, adorns herself with poppy capsules, and mimics the statue’s apparent hibernation. In the attempts to find “surfaces of contact” between today’s imaginary world and prehistoric times – through speculation whether we and our ancestors can “meet” in some way – the methods used to develop the artwork range from knowledge acquisition through scientific papers to techniques for embodying knowledge.

As part of the artistic research project *Matter, Gesture and Soul* (MGS), which seeks encounters and alignments between art and archaeology, my artistic contribution seeks to question how multispecies storytelling may connect us emotionally to our ancient distant past.

## Keywords

artistic research

ritual body and ecstatic  
trance

opium poppy  
(*Papaver somniferum*)

breakdown-based art

multispecies storytelling

traditional ecological  
knowledge

euthanasia

## SOMNIFERA

"Come. Fiery Sun, come, with your beams of light – whizzing at 300,000 kilometres per second to reach us. Light-energy captured by the green leaves that turn water, carbon dioxide and minerals into energy-rich organic mixtures and oxygen. Fire. Heat. Come, I'm your child. Come to me! Now! Come. Swirling winds that let the lightest seeds and grains of sand travel on your air currents: drifting across the earth's surface directed by the Sun's uneven heating.

Winds, in winter, chilling us to the bone. Whirling Winds: strong enough to sail ships across the ocean and rip huge trees from the ground. Equalizer of the Atmosphere. Shaper of landforms. Winds. Come, I'm your child. Come to me! Now! Come. Water. Streams. Flow my tears falling from your springs. Flowing juices and fluid exchanges. The ocean: ebbing, dripping, coursing, traversing time and space. Come Water, I'm your child. Come to me! Now!"



**Figure 1.**  
**Trance.**

The abalone shell represents water, the burnt incense of Artemisia distributed by an eagle feather is earth: water, fire, earth, air.

The sound of the drum is the shaman's horse that carries us through the ritual.

The snake embroidered on the Peruvian Shipibo rug is a symbol of transformation.

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They stand in a circle, in "Bear Pose", enveloped in clouds of incense from the dried leaves of *Artemisa vulgaris*<sup>1</sup>. The body's weight flows down to the soles of their feet. To the ground. Beyond the ground. To the rhythmic beats from the rattle and drum: Mother Earth's heartbeat "lub-dub – lub-dub – lub-dub."<sup>2</sup>

1. The dried leaves of common mugwort can be smoked or drunk as a tea to promote lucid dreaming. This supposed oneirogenic effect is believed to be due to the thujone contained in the plant. Common mugwort is native to temperate Europe, Asia, North Africa, and Alaska, and is naturalized in North America (Ekiert et al., 2020).
2. The drum sessions took place in August 2022 to contribute to artistic concept development as part of the artistic research project: *Matter, Gesture and Soul*. The sessions base on anthropologist Felicitas D. Goodman's method "Ritual Body Postures & Ecstatic Trance," and artist Nana Nauwald's teachings on this tradition (Goodman, 2008; Goodman and Nauwald, 2003).



Sigma Woman<sup>3</sup> feels the grass under her feet. It's growing fast around her. Grow taller than her, or maybe she becomes a little person in the grass: surrounded by their leaves that sing with a fluttering sound as the slender leaves hit each other in the wind. In her mind's eye, Sigma Woman tears the petal of an opium poppy in two, manifesting her broken heart. Love struck. Beaten. Crushed by the heartless wrath of Sigma Male<sup>4</sup>.

She remembers him saying that poppy petals feel like crepe silk: making her want to enter the petals' microcosm. Allowing her body to be soothed and safely enveloped by the flower's super thin, soft, and billowing petals.



**Figure 2.**  
Heart.  
*Papaver somniferum*  
petals.  
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Sigma Male is a force of nature – fire and thunder – a shapeshifter in duration and strength. Nature is never a safe space; its forces can never be tamed. Sigma Man burns his body from the inside: each cigarette shortens his life by seven minutes. The inhaled tobacco narrows the coronary arteries that supply blood to the heart muscle.

Sigma Woman imagines attaching poppy petals to a hand rolled cigarette – transforming it into a butterfly. Her heart shrinks and beats faster. Rhythms from the rattle, the drum “lub-dub – lub-dub – lub-dub”. Our Mothers’ heartbeat. The grass leaves sing in Artemisia’s smoke.

“Reconnect me to Mother Nature: I’m your child. Let me come back to you! Now!”

3. The *Sigma Female* acts with a sense of mystery that draws people to her. If the Sigma woman gets attached to someone who turns out to be worse than she originally thought, it is difficult for her to break off. This eventually comes back to bite Sigma Female, as her emotional attachment leads to feelings that are harboured for a long time without resolution (Jackson, 2022).
4. The *Sigma Male* is an internally focused sibling of the alpha male. He refuses social hierarchy and the need for external validation, and instead pursues internal strength: essentially as a “loner” or a stray man. He simply focuses on himself, accepting that he needs to preserve his own autonomy. Sigma Males are often reserved, paranoid, secretive and selfish (Urban Dictionary, 2022).





**Figure 3. Butterfly.** Joint art created with *Papaver somniferum* petals.  
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## MILK OF PARADISE

The desire for the flowing milk of the poppy and her hypnotic effect has been known since ancient times. In the Swiss Lake Dwellings of the Neolithic Age, there are fossils showing poppy seed cake and poppy pods. *Papaver somniferum* was believed to have magical as well as poisonous power and was used as food, in religious ceremonies, and in the art of healing. The Greek divinities Hypnos (Sleep), Nyx (Night) and Thanatos (Death) are depicted wreathed with opium poppies or carrying poppies in their hands. Herakleides of Pontus (340 BC) describes the “Keian custom” performed on the Greek island of Kea. Here those who reached a certain age voluntarily ended their lives by drinking poison after a ceremonial feast.

Herakleides tells that “especially the women, they do not wait until they are very old for death to take them,

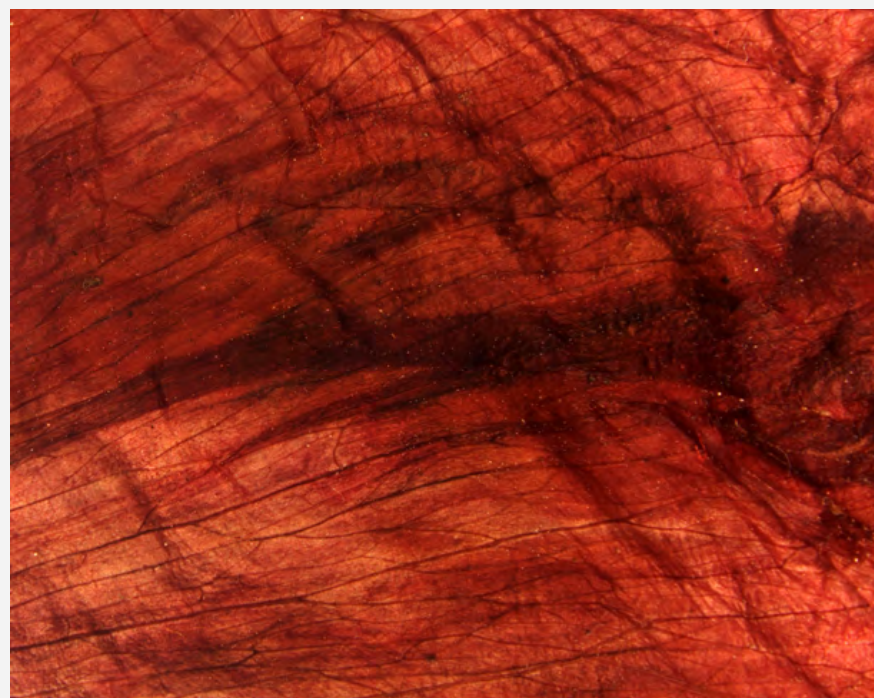
but before they grow weak or disabled in any way, take themselves out of life, some by means of the opium poppy, others with hemlock (*Conium maculatum*)” (U.S. Department of Justice, Drug Enforcement Administration and Office of Intelligence, 1992, p. 1; Kritikos and Papadaki, 1976, pp. 17-18). Such deliberate hastening of a person’s death was supported by Socrates and Plato, while Hippocrates seems to have spoken against the practice (Kritikos and Papadaki, 1976, pp. 17-18).

This moral debate is old. Yet illegal plantations of deadly poppy monocultures around the world continue to drain the soil where they grow, and the pursuit of the opiate causes continuous war and violence. In this game, the beautiful *Papaver somniferum* she is just another innocent species. An existential need that drives humanity to seek the temporary relief that opiates provide has been with us for as long as human tribes have explored new habitats: curiously testing out plants and fungi that can help us transcend our “normal” state into expanded experiences, to possibly communicate with our ancestors or gods. The use of mind-altering experiences to produce deep, spiritual, and cultural understanding was part of human’s experimental quest for knowledge (Merlin, 2003, pp. 295–296). One of the myriad threats that connect us to the natural world is that which links plant chemistry to human consciousness. How amazing it is that so many types of plants have found the exact recipes for molecules that fit snugly into receptors in human brains (Inglis, 2019; Pollan, 2022)! The fact that humans have opioid receptors in our bodies helps to blur the distinction between us and the opium poppy.

I – a creature, that travels through the umbilical cord and transforms  
into a seed in my mother’s dark soil.  
Born into the light and passing into the darkness.  
I – a creature, that since the beginning of time has hunted for something  
to satisfy my hunger, ease my pain, and erase my memories.  
I who gives and takes blessing and stumbles in my own curse.  
I – a creature, that pours out love and clings to hate.  
I who can drown in my sorrows and ride on my euphoria.  
I – a creature, that can bathe in the light of the moon and be consumed  
by the sun.  
I – a creature, who can praise healing and blissful power.  
I who can resist this most beautiful life form and see her as an ugly and  
evil force.  
I – a creature, that merges with her seductive and sweet voice from my  
very outermost to my very innermost.  
I – a creature, who lay down in her heavenly petals, never to return.

**Figure 4. Somniferum-microcosm.**

Micrographs of a *Papaver somniferum* petal, 1000 µm, acquired at the Image Centre NMBU by Lene Cecilie Hermansen with Zeiss Axio Zoom.V16.  
Concept: Märtha Soline & Elin T. Sørensen © BONO 2022





## RIPPLING POPPY MEADOWS

Sigma Man has wandered through poppy meadows which appear as eye-catching bright flying carpets, and Sigma Woman longed to walk a little way with him. He has inhaled the vaporized opium fumes. And she became intoxicated by his seductive powers, wanting more and more.

Within his territory, around the Caspian Sea, Sigma Woman imagines the creation of a garden of wildflowers: A *Papaver somniferum* community of just the right size for a return that puts enough milk in the blood to provide eternal sleep. A garden where the white tears of the poppy can be harvested, processed and shaped like an umbilical cord – a string of just the right length to put enough flower milk into her blood so that she falls into an eternal sleep. Just like humans, poppies depend on beneficial relationships that are essential to their life cycle.

A variety of pollinating insects are its eager fertilization assistants, transporting pollen from one flower to another. Poppies live in a mutualistic nutrient-exchange-relationship with fungi too. And fossil records reveal that plants and their root symbionts share a long evolutionary history (Andrzejczyk, 2017).

*Time is the substance she is made of time is a river which sweeps her along,  
but she's the river; it is a furious force that destroys her, but she is this force;  
it is a wild fire that consumes her, but she is the fire<sup>5</sup>*

The time she spends in Sigma Male's den feels like travelling in a spaceship at the edge of the universe. The seasons go from autumn to winter and the stars seem so much more alive under his sky. Here, Sigma Woman exists outside the reality and time she knows. A life she wants to slip away because she grows in poor soil. His environment appears to be fertile soil, of endless lyrical melodies as his beautiful language sounds like the soothing swells of the sea – and their conversations flow in continuous streams.

The encounters with Sigma Man vibrate deep down at a cellular level. Out of curiosity and wonder, Sigma Woman chooses to ramble into his wilderness instead of turning away.

We can all speculate whether there is a sixth sense. An internal signal system that unfolds halfway between the promising clairvoyance and the destructive demonic forces. A landscape where unrealized opportunities or imminent dangers can come into view (Bargh and Morsella, 2008).

On their journeys beyond time and space – Sigma Man appears as the mighty ocean. From a bird's eye view, Sigma Woman sees herself washing up on one of his shores, and in his tide, feeling she can rest safe and happy forever. Love is an unlimited feeling – a living being – like seaweed clinging to the rocks with the foam of the waves. But he protects himself behind an impenetrable fortress, and her mission in life is to move away from everything that shuts her out!

The antidote to his exclusionary fear is Pisces' openness and flow towards places where she doesn't have to hold anything back. And Leo's courage to step into the light: to let herself be showered in rays of golden honey.

Sigma Male opens a wound in her soul that is bound to time: a trauma that manifests as a vast, empty, yet claustrophobic environment. Here, Sigma Woman stands paralyzed in the centre of an undefined room.

The void crawls inside her, settling in the diaphragm and slicing her body into disconnected parts. Within these inner and outer realms of terrifying emptiness, time passes excruciatingly slowly. The abundance of time that Sigma Man's exclusion leaves her in is suffocating. So she begins to wander through the endless space.

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<sup>5</sup>. The citation is freely interpreted by the authors after Borges, 1962.

After an infinite amount of time, she suddenly finds herself in a room without doors or windows – with a pile of coal on the floor, from which a scented cloud of smoke is coming. As the fumes are inhaled, her hands rise in an uplifted pose.

She appears to be in a state of vertigo. She is in ecstasy: The joy manifested in her face is doubtless caused by the beautiful visions awakened in her imagination. The passivity of her lips is a natural effect of opium intoxication (Kritikos and Papadaki, 1976, p. 23).

Sigma Woman whispers “Come to me Poppy Goddess, my Patron of Healing: I’m your child. Let me stay in your eternity! Now. Forever!”



**Figure 5.**  
**Poppy Goddess Patron of Healing.**  
Stills by Cristián Weidmann Cabrera.  
Concept and performance by  
Elin T. Sørensen © BONO 2022

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Somnifera-artworks are co-created with artistic addiction therapist Märtha Soline. I must also express my gratitude to the following for encouragement and generousness: Dragoş Gheorghiu, Marie Nivel, Geir Harald Samuelson, Cristián Weidmann Cabrera, Hilde and Knut for the poppy capsules, and last the capricious ambivalent Sigma Male. Thank you all for your unwavering contributions and support. The art production is supported by Arts Council Norway.



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PORTFOLIO

Design | Arts | Culture Vol. 3  
ISSN: 2732-6926

Image and Memory N° 1  
December 2022

# CLAY – VEHICLE OF MEMORY

CERAMICS – A LANGUAGE

Vlad Basarab





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Vlad Basarab, born in Bucharest, Romania, in 1977, is a ceramics artist combining working with installation, land art, video and performance.

A former Fulbright researcher and a Rasmuson Foundation for the Arts Grantee. Basarab has had over 20 solo shows in the US, Europe and China. He started working with clay in 1986 under the guidance of traditional Romanian potters from Horezu, Victor Vicșoreanu and Dumitru Mischiu, declared UNESCO living human treasures. In 2001, he received a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the University of Alaska Anchorage and in 2013, a Masters of Fine Arts from West Virginia University. He is a member of the International Academy of Ceramics and of the National Council on Education of the Ceramics Arts (US).

# CLAY – VEHICLE OF MEMORY

## Keywords

clay  
time  
ceramic art  
sculpture  
transformation  
book  
language  
knowledge  
collective memory  
archaeology

## CERAMICS – A LANGUAGE

Through my ceramic work and my experience in working with clay in various parts of the world, I look at how clay and ceramics have been forms of communication and are means of transmitting memory. I found in clay's geologic transformations and in the human interventions it underwent, a metaphor to comment on both fragility and permanence of the human condition, as well as on the different perceptions of time and memory.

Giving form out of clay is like writing, composing new meaning from a large database, yet it is empowering when you dig your own clay to know that you are the first human to touch it and are free to make anything you want out of it. My aim for the artwork that I produce is to generate a thought process in regards to how memory is transmitted and oftentimes altered, how accurate information is in general.



**Figure 1.**

**The Library**, part of the exhibition *Coast to Coast*, The Brâncoveanu Palaces Cultural Center, Mogoșoaia, Romania, 2016, woodfired earthenware 960° C, 536 x 550 x 67 cm, installation view  
Photo: Vlad Basarab



**Figure 2.**

**The Archaeology of Memory**, the three stages of the one-week-long erosion process, installation, unfired clay books, wooden table, clay; 579 X 335 X 81 cm, Mesaros Gallery, Creative Arts Center, West Virginia University, Morgantown, 2013, Photo: Vlad Basarab

Clay, as a material, allows us to look at layers of strata belonging to millions of geologic years, while ceramics, as a process, has facilitated communication for thousands of years. Through the transformative journey of clay, we can draw a parallel between geological and historical meaning, memory facilitating the link between both processes, on one hand the natural formation of clay from the erosion of rocks, and on the other hand, ceramics, the process through which we bring clay back to its original rock-hard state.

The human technological ability to turn clay into rock aided by the technology of firing ceramics in kilns, has contributed to the advancement of culture and human civilization. I found in clay's geologic transformations and in the human interventions it underwent, a metaphor to comment on both fragility and permanence of the human condition, as well as on the different perceptions of time and memory. Part of my research in China, North America and Europe has focused on using local clays, which I dug up, mixed and fired at different temperatures. Based on the fact that each place has its own history, I believe that the local clays contain memories of place and time.

This is both constraining and empowering because, on a conceptual and metaphysical level, clay yields explorations of the past, while granting us the ability to physically and chemically transform it.

My ceramic works and installations become extensions of my investigations. Digging clay in various parts of the world is a subtractive process. While removing parts of the earth crust, layer by layer, I passively engage in the process of decoding it. While clay, on one hand holds geological memory and ceramics, human memory, clay from an unaltered pit has the power of never been reached and touched before by humans, therefore it is empowering to feel that you have the privilege to make something out of it for the first time. Preparing it from scratch, mixing it with water and at times with shredded paper, I seem to bring it to a neutral state allowing me to employ my own vocabulary. Shaping clay is a manifestation of energy that allows for the formation of new memories, it is a method of encoding new meaning.

The act of creation in clay compared with the natural and human ability to raise from the ashes, references how cultures, memory and knowledge can be recycled, transformed, interpreted.

Giving form out of clay is like writing, composing new meaning from a database of what may seem random.

**Figure 3.**

The artist digging for Lillesville clay, Star, North Carolina, USA, summer of 2022

**Figure 4.**

**The Censorship of Memory**, the artist ripping pages out of American encyclopedias, coating them with clay slip and hanging them during the performance at NCECA Project Spaces, Seattle Convention Center, USA, Photo: Vlad Basarab



The history of writing is connected to clay as the first forms of writing were on clay tablets. The reason I do not write on the sculptural interpretations of books that I create is because I want people to engage in exercises of imagination in regards to what they may contain, while also encouraging them to reflect upon their own history and ultimately write their own stories. My goal is for my audience to research about their personal and family past in relation to history. The ways memory and images are interpreted is through the process of imagination by decoding information, which was previously encoded. Understanding the past is looking at memory and history with a detached, critical eye despite the fact that it is rather difficult to stay neutral when it comes to your own history or personal memory. The process of finding the key to understanding the past and the present is vital for the evolution of societies and cultures. The acknowledgement of the wrongdoings of the past is the first step in moving forward.



**Figure 5.** *Books of Memory*, terracotta, installation, 190 x 800 x 530 cm, National Museum of Art, Timișoara, Romania, part of Secret Wings exhibition, Art Encounters Biennale, 2021, Photo: Vlad Basarab

My aim for the artwork that I produce is to generate a thought process in regards to how memory is transmitted and oftentimes altered, how accurate information is in general. This is one of the reasons that I explored the theme of books for such a long time (2012 to present), through various media: clay and ceramic sculptures, time-lapse and real-time videos, photographs and performance. Some of the work dealt with the systematic destruction of books, making a parallel to how culture came under attack at the hand of totalitarian regimes.

Books have been vehicles of transmitting knowledge and that is also why they were targeted and destroyed primarily by burning during attempts of political and cultural effacement. Concerned by the impact of censorship on world culture, I aim for my artwork to not only generate a visual stimulation, but an analytical approach about the significance of memory, identity and cultural heritage. Besides means of transmitting knowledge, certain books facilitate us the expansion of our ideas, and ultimately an ability to decipher. Much like a book, it is my goal for my artwork to stimulate the audience to ask questions. Besides the conceptual and philosophical dimension, my intention is for my work to also contribute to an educational experience.

The Archaeology of Memory series springs from the desire to signal the loss of collective culture and memory and to engage the audience in exercises of reconstructing the past. It signifies the need to dig through the layers of history in order to retrieve altered or hidden meaning. The created contexts are intended to inspire the audience to search for lost or tampered information.





**Figure 7.**  
**Path of Knowledge**  
 installation view  
 part of Books of Earth  
 solo exhibition, 2016,  
 Museum of Art  
 Arad, Romania  
 low temperature woodfired  
 earthenware 960 °C, clay  
 1300 x 250 x 30 cm  
 Photo: Vlad Basarab

The sculptural representations of books, which I created by using native clays and local firing technologies are means for me to create exercises of personal and to some extent collective memories. The transformation of clay through the ceramic process allows for metaphoric interpretations of how memory continues to exist and how ceramics is not only a form of communication, but a universal form of language, a way to connect to people.

The work I produced in the US (2012-2013) focused on the fragility of knowledge with unfired raw clay as the central element. In ephemeral, perishable performative installations and videos of clay books being eroded by dripping water, I wanted to emphasize the vulnerability of culture, seen both as a natural course, but also as the result of political and ideological activity.

In Europe (predominantly in Romania, 2014 - present) my work took a new turn. I began firing the work in the attempt to reach some stage of permanence. Firing clay books inevitably referencing the destructive act of historic book burning. By creating large installations of books and thus working with multiples, I looked at each object individually, but also at the whole, each sculpture representing a piece of a greater puzzle. By working with local earthenware clays and using abandoned traditional kilns fired with wood, I aimed to connect myself to how pottery traditions used to fire the local clays.

The installations representing abandoned or excavated libraries took on the scale of monumental land-art ensembles. Large books, at times monumental, were meant to represent historic books, codices, encyclopedias containing all memories of the world.

They were exhibited in various historic buildings and museums in Romania and the Republic of Moldova and each time they took a new dimension and configuration in relation to the space I was exhibiting them. I continued to use raw clay as a unifying element that the books set on, as the historic background was full of cracks and layers.

The cracked raw clay stood as a reminder of how fragile, imperfect and vulnerable we are in understanding and preserving what we seem to understand.

**Figure 8.**  
**Library of Memory**  
 terracotta and porcelain  
 500 x 200 x 230 cm  
 Ceramics Biennale  
 Cluj-Napoca, 2017,  
 installation view  
 Collection of the  
 National Museum of  
 Contemporary Art  
 Bucharest, Romania  
 Photo: Vlad Basarab







**Figure 9.**  
**Library of Memory**  
 terracotta and porcelain  
 500 x 200 x 230 cm  
 Ceramics Biennale,  
 Cluj-Napoca, 2017  
 installation view,  
 Collection of the  
 National Museum of  
 Contemporary Art,  
 Bucharest, Romania  
 Photo: Vlad Basarab

**Figure 10.** (below, left)  
 Porcelain with  
 red iron oxide  
 reduction fired 1300° C  
 Jingdezhen, 2017,  
 48 x 37 x 10 cm  
 Photo: Vlad Basarab

**Figure 11.** (below, right)  
**Book of Memory**  
 stoneware, reduction  
 fired 1300° C  
 40 x 38 x 13 cm, 2017,  
 Collection of Artron  
 Art Group, China  
 Photo: Vlad Basarab

In China, in 2016, I created around 130 ceramic books made of porcelain and stoneware, oftentimes mixing the two materials together in order to search for different colours and surfaces. By firing at high temperatures in a gas fired kiln I focused on creating a reduction atmosphere in the kiln, in order to flux out the iron and to create self-glazing surfaces.

When working with different clay mixtures that I create in different parts of the world, I am faced with a new vocabulary through which I reinvent my own language.

This also brings me to situations where I am faced with challenging stereotypes about clay culture and taboos as far as how to use clay.

This is more obvious from the individual book sculptures that I created in China, more exact in Jingdezhen. The work that I later made in China (2017, 2019) aimed to explore new ways to contextualize the theme of memory.

China also allowed me to be more detached, to experiment new things and to use different means to create the historic background. In 2016, I used mirrors for the large installation which I site-specifically created for the Liling Valley Ceramics Museum, the mirror allowing the Chinese audience to reflect upon their own family memories and history.

In 2019, for the large solo show at China Ceramics Museum, Jingdezhen, I used stainless steel to bridge the idea of the self with that of the other, almost becoming a double Doppelgänger.

The stainless steel allowed the sculptures to continue in space by both shadow and mirrored image. Movement was a key component for the Folding Memory series (2017 to present).

Clay has become a means for connecting me to different geographical and geological dimensions, some familiar, yet some remote and harder to understand, nevertheless ceramics has been the language, which bridged ways to local cultures and traditions, which at first seemed impossible to penetrate.





Looking back at my experience as a ceramist working in China on seven different occasions, ceramics felt like a second language and oftentimes, it managed to bridge the language and the cultural barrier.

**Figure 12.**  
**Book of Memory**  
porcelain with iron oxide and  
red stoneware, reduction fired  
1300 °C, Jingdezhen 2019,  
44 x 52 x 18 cm  
Photo: Vlad Basarab



**Figure 13.**  
**Garden of Memory** part of  
100 years anniversary of Romania's  
independence exhibition,  
Cantacuzino Castle,  
Bușteni, Romania, 2018,  
red earthenware, 960° C,  
1300 x 300 x 60 cm  
Photo: Vlad Basarab



DAC Journal Vol. 3

# Image and Memory

DECEMBER  
2022

Nº 1

“Images are themselves capable of becoming critical tools.  
They do not merely illustrate ideas: they produce ideas or  
produce effects critical of ideas.”

(Georges Didi-Huberman)

