



*analogous city, Aldo Rossi, 1976*

# part one\_perception

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# introduction

My objective in this project is to develop an understanding of collective memory (and the consequences of forgetting) and to develop this conceptual work and theory through an architectural intervention. I do not intend to explore the scientific or biological aspects of memory but rather to focus on how memory impacts the specificity of place – especially as relating to the chosen site.

## statement of purpose

To develop a working understanding of how collective memory affects the specificity of place;

To explore the repercussions of socio-cultural ‘forgetting’ in the urban realm;

To explore the potency of architecture as a mnemonic device through the conversion and re-design of a historic site in the city of Calgary.

*Architecture enables us to perceive and understand the dialectics of permanence and change, to settle ourselves in the world, and to place ourselves in the continuum of culture and time.*

*Juhani Pallasmaa*

*The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses, 2005: 71*

## **methodology**

The methodology for this project is multi-faceted and aims to approach the concept of mnemonic architecture from a number of perspectives. Its exploration is conducted through several research media and includes a critical analysis of relevant texts, exploration through photography and graphic media, and a review of useful precedents. The development of a conceptual paradigm is then used to inform the design of spatial forms and processes. Key to this intervention is an in-depth analysis of context (site + users + sociocultural milieu), both as it currently exists and how it has existed and evolved through time.

I embarked on this project with a physical site, but without a notion of program. Since the project is heavily process-oriented, the specific nature and program of the architectural intervention was indeterminable at the starting point. The project is focused on developing a process of addressing a specific context in a specific way – as mediated by experience and materiality - rather than the program of the intervention itself. I felt it essential that the design work flows directly out of my research and conceptual paradigm. The project concludes with a design of the building along with appropriate graphical documentation.

## **theoretical framework**

The first aim of the project is to develop a conceptual understanding of collective memory using architectural theory, phenomenology in particular, as a foundation. I am interested in how memory is manifested architecturally through materiality, layering, and as traces of history. Central to this conceptual development is the significance of place and the realization of this significance as rooted in our experience of architecture and the built environment.

Collective memories are inextricably linked to places in which we exist and these places themselves hold ‘memory’ of time and experience. Particular critique will be made of Calgary as a ‘city of forgetting’ and the detriments of memory loss to our physical and emotive existence. In opposition to this ‘forgetting,’ architecture is repositioned as a mnemonic device and the design of places (as opposed to spaces) as a method for both considering and enriching the collective memory of culture. This framework will be concretized in a design intervention – positing architecture as mnemonic device.

## design intervention

As this project is focused on specificity of place, the design will be a conversion of a local building that has ties to the socio-cultural history of this city. I have chosen a brick warehouse, located at 321-325 10th Avenue SW in Calgary, Alberta as my site.

My intention is to partially re-design the building with resonance to the concept of memory developed earlier in the MDP, and with respect to the specific history of the building itself. I envision a conversion as an evocative way to intervene on a place that already exists and thus has embodied memory. Re-designing and re-purposing a building shapes its evolution and potential to hold new activities, new experiences, and create new memories.

## document structure

With the intent of organizing my exploration, this document is divided into five sections that describe sequentially my conceptual development, context analysis, and design development. In addition to this final document, other deliverables included in this project are physical process models and a separate book of precedent studies.

*The contrast between particular and universal, between individual and collective, emerges from the city and from its construction, its architecture.*

*Aldo Rossi  
The Architecture of the City*



*Mystery and Melancholy of a Street  
Giorgio de Chirico  
1914*

# theoretical framework

Long before the invention of books, it was memory that stored, carried, and communicated the history, culture, and identity of a civilization. Out of its mythic and poetic dimensions memory created its own kind of mnemonic space. The role of architecture in ancient Greece was in mediating the formation of memories. Buildings were used as containers of images representing things to be remembered – both loci (places) and imagines (images). Greek mythology specifically draws upon goddesses Lethe (forgetting) and Mnemosyne (acquiring new knowledge) as personifications of memory, representing our psychological and spiritual connection to physical space and time (MacLeod 2004). Other eras used memory to unlock ancient secrets and wisdom; it was not just about storing or recalling past information but was seen as a creative and transformative process in itself.

## etymology/lexicon

Dating from the 14th century, the term ‘memory’ has many sources. Etymologically, memory is derived from the Middle English memorie, from Anglo-French memoire, memorie, from Latin memoria, from memor mindful; akin to Old English gemimor well-known, Greek mermera care, Sanskrit smarati he remembers. Representing cultures from around the world, memory has been and is a consideration in our human understanding of time.

In a contemporary context, memory is defined as:

1 a: the power or process of reproducing or recalling what has been learned and retained especially through associative mechanisms

b: the store of things learned and retained from an organism’s activity or experience as evidenced by modification of structure or behavior or by recall and recognition

2 a: commemorative remembrance

b: the fact or condition of being remembered

3 a: a particular act of recall or recollection

b: an image or impression of one that is remembered

c: the time within which past events can be or are remembered

4: a capacity for showing effects as the result of past treatment or for returning to a former condition - used especially of a material

(<http://www.merriam-webster.com/thesaurus/>)

When speaking on the subject, memory is often linked to recollection, remembrance, reminiscence, contemplation, reflection, retrospection, thinking, awareness, cognizance, and consciousness. For the purposes of this project, memory will be used to describe our individual and collective responses to past history and present experience.

## collective memory

We do not live in an objective material world – we live in multi-layered mental world which is simultaneously experienced, remembered, and dreamed, through which the past, present and future are fused as one. This exploration draws upon phenomenological theory which recognizes the fundamental interconnection of place and authentic experience and makes use of a variety of philosophical texts from which to situate my own understanding of memory and architecture.

An initial point of departure is Henri Bergson's concept of duration which he uses to describe a folding of the interior experience of creative time with human life (*Matter and Memory*, 1912). From this perspective, the past is not a blueprint for the future but is folded into the present and time is seen as a blending of moments rather than a linear rhythm. The 'new' (the current), then, always includes remnants of the past and memories that have been reshuffled in time and space. It is because of this that creative acts cannot be seen as truly original or revolutionary but rather as interventions in an existing continuum. Bergson also speaks of a qualitative multiplicity (an idiosyncratic view of difference) which dictates that matter and consciousness interact on a temporal level – the physical world and our experiences have a relationship to and within time.

One of the first discussions on the confluence of memory and space is the work of Kevin Lynch who in 1960's *Image of the*

*It is an inescapable fact about human existence that we are made of our memories: we are what we remember ourselves to be.*

*Edward S. Casey*

*Remembering: A Phenomenological Study, 2000: 290*

*City*, described how people orient themselves in an environment. Making specific reference to the spatial elements of path, edge, node, district, and landmark, Lynch asserts the necessity of a memorable visual order in man's surroundings. Lynch's ideas were later used by philosopher and architectural theorist Christian Norberg-Schulz and other phenomenologists to support positions asserting the significance of place. Norberg-Schulz notes: "In the past, human life was intimately related to things and places. In spite of hardship and social injustice, man generally had a sense of belonging and identity. The world was experienced as a world of qualities and meanings. Thus it became a common world, which formed a basis for sharing and participation" (1988: 11). This collective connection to place and to identity can be conceptualized as the development of a collective memory – a sense of being and meaning shared amongst a group of individuals. Shared experiences of existential space constitutes collective identity and shared memory.

Aldo Rossi also comments on the structuralist idea that the city is legible through the repetition of elemental (irreducible, archetypal) components and that these components are given meaning through collective memory. This approach advocates for a poetic reading of the city in a reaction to the sterile modernist city. Rossi treats the city as an artifact, an evolving man-made object, and as the representation of cultural values. As he notes in his seminal work, *The Architecture of the City* (1966): “[t]he contrast between particular and universal, between individual and collective, emerges from the city and from its construction, its architecture” (47). Influential architectural historian Vincent Scully has similarly commented that, “...modern architecture as a product of Western civilization...has attempted to incarnate two human aspirations: to respond to the living and work space requirements of men in any given epoch and to represent the values to which men deliberately cling. That is to say, modern architecture has tried to give concrete expression to the collective aspiration of communities that bear positive, consolidated values, while at the same time struggling to preserve its own fundamentally unique originality” (Albertini and Bagnoli, 1990: 4). He continues that, “...[f]rom its very beginning modern architecture has supplied us with a portrait of ourselves as contemporary men, recalling at one and the same time that which we are and that which we would have us be” (ibid.).

In *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*, Christian Norberg Schulz explains: “A place is a space which has a distinct character. Since ancient times the genius loci, or ‘spirit of place,’ has been recognized as the concrete reality man has to face and come to terms with in his daily life. Architecture means to visualize the genius loci, and the task of the architect is to create meaningful places, whereby he helps man to dwell” (1980: 5).\*

\* Here Norberg Schulz relates back to the work of Martin Heidegger and the notion of ‘dwelling’ in place:

“What does ‘dwelling’ mean? It identifies all our architectural knowledge and historical experience...‘Dwelling’ in the existential sense, is the purpose of architecture. Man dwells when he can orientate himself within and identify himself with an environment, or in short, when he experiences the environment as meaningful.” (Martin Heidegger, “Building Dwelling Thinking,” 1977)

The meanings which are gathered in a place contribute to its genius loci, and to the specificity of that place (both naturally and culturally). The resulting places are tactile in that they have a physical presence and are associated with objects and activities in real space and time. In *Places and Placelessness*, Edward Relph continues: “Places are a fusion of human and natural order and are the significant centres of our immediate experiences of the world. They are defined less by unique locations, landscape, and communities than by the focusing of experiences and intentions onto particular settings...they are important sources of individual and communal identity, and are often profound centres of human existence to which people have deep emotional and psychological ties” (1976: 41). Unconsciously or subconsciously we associate place with our experiences of security and comfort. ‘Home,’ for example, is physically and metaphorically our root of safety and security, a point of care and concern, and the point from which we orient ourselves to the outside world.

*One can say that the city itself is the collective memory of its people, and like memory, it is associated with objects and places. The city is the locus of the collective memory. This relationship between locus and citizenry then becomes the city’s predominant image, both architecture and of landscape, and as certain artifacts become part of its memory, new ones emerge,*

*Aldo Rossi  
The Architecture of the City, 1966:130*

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## a city of forgetting

An individual's sense of rooted-ness (in place and space) is essential to the development of personality. Further development of this idea imbues that a group or collective's sense of rooted-ness in place and time is essential to the development of cultural and societal well-being. The identity of place and its relationship to community is part of place-identity, and may be found, "...in the day-to-day traces of the history of the community, the way the community uses its surroundings or the intimate symbolism of community life" (Adam 2008).

Recent scientific research has shown that, "...the purpose of our memory – that networked terrain constantly remapped in our sleep – is to act as a 'projectory,' or a predictor of upcoming events in all their dimensions: emotional, intellectual, physical, and spatial" (Van Shaik 2008: 29). Revisiting our collective memory as it associates to place contributes to a more productive force towards the future. A culture cannot thrive if it does not have a sense of itself and cannot move forward without a secure sense of where it has been. This revived interest in memory can be seen as arising, "...in part from the current fascination with cultural identity, in which people, cast adrift in the global wash of international capitalism and Western consumerism, seek bonds with other people through a common past" (Fisher 2004: 287). Design is one medium through which to define and facilitate commonalities within the public, and "[t]he expression of civic narratives is an

important and legitimate function of architecture..." (Van Shaik 2008: 13). The potency of our collective memory lies in our communal relationship to cultural traditions and ways of meaning and also how these memories are manifested in our built environment.



*demolition of Colonel Belcher hospital (1919), Calgary, 2007*

Geographer Edward Relph has described the loss of collective memory in spaces as the phenomenon of ‘placelessness,’ described as, “...both an environment without significant places and an underlying attitude which does not acknowledge significance in places” (Relph 1976: 143). Placelessness is visible in the built environment in the erosion of cultural symbols from the vocabulary of architecture and place, the eroding symbols and the replacement of diversity with uniformity. As Relph criticizes, the postmodern epoch bears witness to “...the casual replacement of the diverse and significant places of the world with anonymous spaces and exchangeable environments” (ibid.). Norberg-Schulz refers to this placeless environment as a ‘flatscape’ - a space which, “...lacks intentional depth and provides possibilities only for commonplace and mediocre experiences (ibid. 79). Not only is this type of site monotonous in its scale and definition, but is also characterized by characterized by visual chaos.

In more contemporary lexicon, Marc Auge describes ‘non-places:’ “...infrastructural spaces that are so determined by instrumental concerns that every last vestige of architectonic, poetic or narrative content has been wrung out of them” (Van Shaik 2008: 93). These symptoms may also be apparent in technique – an example being the overriding concern with efficiency as an end in itself. In a consumption-driven Western culture such as ours, ideas about landscapes and places are determined by a few ‘authorities’ and disseminated to the people through civic bureaucracy and the mass media. It

is the contemporary mandate to totalize and make uniform the functioning and appearance of the city – resulting in sterile, other-directed, and kitschy places of greater or lesser efficiency. The overt privatization of public space (which is inherently communal and thus tied to our collective memory) is one such example of how a city denies and forgets its local history, traditions and community.



*Calgary, 2007*



In his 1982 essay, “The Place of Man: Time, Memory, and Place in Architectural Experience,” Juhani Pallasmaa highlights eight architectural symptoms of a loss of sense of place. Following the methodology of this MDP, these symptoms could also be seen as characteristics of a ‘culture of forgetting’ (74):

- 1 weakening of this sense of place on the human scale
- 2 over-scaled building complexes
- 3 excessive repetition
- 4 standardization dictated by production techniques
- 5 a lack of spatial organization due to need or flexibility
- 6 a flattening of shapes and surfaces called for by functional and economic considerations
- 7 overall erosion of form
- 8 eradication of individual detail



Furthermore, it has been well-documented in contemporary discourse that modern consciousness and sensory reality have gradually developed towards the unrivalled dominance of the sense of vision (ocularcentrism). From this perspective, surfaces are treated as "...abstracted boundary of volume[s], and [have] a conceptual rather than a sensory essence...[they aspire] to geometric purity and reductive aesthetics. Abstraction and perfection transport us into the world of ideas, whereas matter, weathering, and decay strengthen the experience of time, causality, and reality" (Pallasmaa, 1995: 323). An architecture of forgetting imparts all of its significance in the shallow visual realm and denies connections to the process that created it, or to the processes of which it is part (including social and cultural factors). In opposition, therefore, an architecture of remembering also evokes the physical and metaphysical realms and facilitates a haptic interaction which is experienced by the body in and over time.

*pre-demolition of the Underwood Block Calgary, 2007*



## **placemaking: architecture as mnemonic device**

The act of placemaking is antithetical to the notion of ‘forgetting,’ and provides an active way through which to intervene in the built environment. Our, “...involvement with places over time can make even the most mundane space as part of our memory because of the events that have transpired there” (Fisher 2004: 290). Spaces become memorable and gain authenticity (become places) through the actions and experiences that occur within them. As one critic comments, “...we should not forget the imaginative ability of ordinary people to make the most unremarkable space memorable over time. Our duty, as architects, lies in our accommodating the memory and imagination of others, in making space that is not so personal or so inflexible that it leaves out the possibility of others appropriating it for themselves” (ibid. 290).

Architecture from this perspective is considered an element within a larger whole – a mere fragment in an existing urban fabric composed of a variety of histories, styles, and materials. In this way, architecture can act as a mnemonic device – a means of ‘remembering’ and to re-instating the character of our urban realm.

Architecture and remembered architectural images and metaphors serve as significant memory devices in three different ways (Pallasmaa, unpublished):

- 1 they materialize and preserve the course of time and make it visible
- 2 they concretize remembrance by containing and projecting memories
- 3 they inspire us to reminisce and imagine

Authentically created places are characterized as fitting their context, possessing internal harmony, and reflect not only the physical but also the social and aesthetic values and traditions of the culture in which they exist.

Human life requires a home – a system of places that have not only form but also meaning. Without being prescriptive in its role, architecture can provide the structure to both reflect and guide experience. What we need is an architecture that slows our experience of reality and shields us from that which exists beyond our grasp and control. We need a simplified physical environment from which we can reach out and understand the world. Our individual and collective experience of time is an essential consideration of architecture, and one of our basic

human needs. We as people cannot comprehend time as a physical manifestation, "...we can only grasp time through its actualizations; the traces, places and events of temporal occurrence" (Pallasmaa, unpublished). As a contemporary Western culture, we suffer from khronophobia – the fear of time. This fear of time is what drives cultures to 'forget' – to halt the progression of time and its implications of ending and is, instead, manifested as an aspiration for novelty. The passage of time is made evident through architecture (especially through its materiality and patina) and its facilitated evolution through time. Strengthening the human experience of time in this way is one manner in which architecture can intervene in contemporary life.

Architecture is also a medium through which to transfer our ephemeral, symbolic life into material and spatial form. Pallasmaa encourages the quest for a 'haptic architecture,' that is, one which promotes slowness and intimacy; an architecture that is appreciated and comprehended gradually as images of the body and the skin. Haptic or authentic architecture in this sense engages the human spirit and imagination and presents the user with a tactile sensibility: an enhanced reality of materials and spatial arrangements. The benefit of architecture is thus its physicality and ability to come into direct contact with our bodies in space. Architecture not only provides a physical point of condensation for individual and collective memories and experiences over time, but simultaneously create sensory encounters to be experienced in the now – in present time.

*...the city is the collective expression of architecture and it carries in the weaving and unraveling of its fabric the memory traces of earlier architectural forms, city plans, and public monuments...its physical structure constantly evolves, being deformed or forgotten, adapted to other purposes or eradicated by different needs. The demands and pressures of social reality constantly affect the material order of the city, yet it remains the theater of our memory. Its collective forms and private realms tell us of the changes that are taking place; they remind us as well of the traditions that set this city apart from others. It is in these physical artifacts and traces that our city memories lie buried, for the past is carried forward to the present through these sites. Addressed to the eye of vision and to the soul of memory, a city's streets, monuments, and architectural forms often contain grand discourses on history.*

*Christine M. Boyer*

*The City of Collective Memory, 1996: 30*

## conclusion

Architecture and human environments are a significant externalization of memory in that we understand, remember, and imagine who we have been, who we are, and who we might be through our constructions. Building authenticates the collective values and perspective of a culture and, "... converts the community's cosmological view of the world into physical reality. Simultaneously, the temporal order is linked with the mythical order. In the end there is complete affinity between the individual and the community, between thinking and place" (Pallasmaa, 1982: 73).

An architecture of remembering is not about treating our past ways of life as sacred and our past constructions as precious but in exploring a new way of intervening in a context that already exists. The act of design is never about the creation of something entirely new, but rather in negotiating and re-ordering what exists with respect to its present and future potentials. I believe the real creative potency of phenomenology as a conceptual framework lies in applying the poetic and the subtle to the context of today and in recognizing the relationship of experience to place over time. As will be further explored, this is not fundamentally about naming one era as 'wrong' and the other as 'right' but in recognizing the strengths and weaknesses of each and providing a platform from which culture – especially this culture in this context - can move forward.



*notes*  
*installation by Maaria Wirkkala*  
*Helsinki 1996*