

Department of Conservation

Memories of a city

Edited by Jonathan Westin
and Ingrid Martins Holmberg



Curating the city series

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Memories of a city

Introduction

In his work *De Zachte Atlas van Amsterdam* (2011), Jan Rothuizen lets us discover a city through drawings that can be read as diagrams, as hastily scribbled notes – shamelessly personal in their observations – and as a map that is not limited by measurable reality and is as perfect and faulty in the details as human memory. Guiding us through cities and places such as Bedford Avenue, Beirut (opposite side), Cairo, Guangzhou, a metro train wagon, and a refugee camp in northern Iraq with Syrian refugees, Rothuizen allows for the banal to be interwoven with serious commentary, in the process creating a whole that does not profess to be whole but rather utterly subjective: ‘A pole *not* for dancing’, ‘this is the longest one site ride (31 minutes)’, ‘looks dead but there are wires running from the roof’, ‘building of no interest’, ‘barber shop with old picture of Beirut in window’, ‘man on the street sells used clothes asks if I can get him a visa for France’, ‘recent flowers at a monument (in stone) for Nasser and (Arab League)’. New York and Beirut blend together through the napkinesque drawings and jotted-down notes. We get to participate in an inscription of memory.

As Michael Guggenheim writes, memory is the capacity that differentiates between those objects and persons that simply exist in time and those that recreate or re-enact former states, meaning that memory is an act of re-enactment in which the past is reconstructed (2009, p. 40). This past does not have to be one’s own, as artefacts – whether they be buildings, objects or inscriptions, *liux de mémoire* as Pierre Nora calls them (1989, p. 8) – mediate memories (Middleton and Brown 2005). Mediators, however,

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Opposite: Map of Beirut reprinted from *Beyroutes : A Guide To Beirut* (Archis) by courtesy of illustrator Jan Rothuizen.

are seldom innocent but often transformative. They ‘translate, distort and modify the meaning of the elements they are supposed to carry’ (Latour 2005, p. 39).

In 1762, as part of his publication *Il Campo Marzio dell’antica Roma*, Giovanni Battista Piranesi had created a representation in the form of a map incorporating all known ancient monuments in the Field of Mars in Rome, regardless of the period these monuments existed in (Frutaz 1962, p. 81). Hence, more than a representation of the Field of Mars, this *Ichnographia Campi Martii Antiquae Urbis* was to a great extent a knowledge-map guiding us through a collective memory space. In her analysis of the *Ichnographia*, Susan Dixon describes the map as a *uchronia*, a concept by Renouvier which amounts to ‘a pastiche of all times’ (Dixon 2005, p. 119). In this *uchronia*, buildings, street levels and ruins of different historical times are interwoven and form a whole that does not concern itself with communicating a certain historical moment. Instead, in Dixon’s reading, the map is an attempt by Piranesi to represent all memory of the ancient city in one drawing, folding both space and time in the process.

However, while Piranesi neither discloses nor concerns himself with a specific historical moment, he still respects the *space* of the city. As the name implies, the buildings, the streets, and the spaces of the *Ichnographia* adapt to each other in a harmonious spatial and proportional organisation. This could be contrasted with Sigmund Freud’s analogy between a city and the human memory, which challenges us to envision artefacts and buildings of different times juxtaposed and in conflict, as if the city was a memory of space without any sense of linearity through which to cull and discriminate monuments of the past (1930). This city, Rome in Freud’s example, in which the Colosseum shares the same space as the Domus Aurea and Agrippa’s Pantheon shares the Piazza Rotunda with Hadrian’s Pantheon, and only archaeologist can separate them, could be referred to as a *synchronia* (see Westin and Hedlund 2016). This is a place where monuments refuse to be forgotten, where they keep flickering into existence demanding to coexist and form a motley whole. A place where buildings and artefacts appear both before and after restoration and reconstruction and are allowed to exist simultaneously: the Vittorio Emanuele monument crowded with the Senator Palace crowded with the Temple of Jupiter.

Memories are not always correct or easy to communicate. And, as Rothuizen comments through his work, a city is not only an assemblage of buildings and spaces. The ‘elements of urban form’, as Spiro Kostof calls them (1992), are not only materiality; a city is also those layers upon layers of meaning, of the activities in the spaces between structures, inside them, before them and after them. To be meaningful, a representation of a city, especially a city of memory, must perhaps strive to be more akin to a *polychronia*, a city of many eras, in which both time and space is of importance

but neither above negotiation nor exclusive. As such, each phase of this polychronia echoes both forward and backwards in time to tell a story that we then consume through an endless array of filters and pre-understandings that sweeps away any attempt to objectively approach the city or its artefacts in temporal isolation.

So when entering into any city we shall attentively look at its margin, note the detail, note the lamency and slip, examine the interstices; they are the sites from which alternative interpretations and representations stem over time. There is the debris, the left-overs and the lumber that we so urgently need for understanding the city beyond its rationality. In these margins, the city's fabric at first appears as disconnected, incoherent, scrappy and disjointed and much less connected, orchestrated and disciplined than we wish for. But after a while, our eyes get used to chaos and what we find are the rejections of applied order. The margins in this sense also tell about rejected memories, about forgetting – deliberate and casual.

In the major part of his book *How Modernity forgets* (2009) Paul Connerton proposes a typology of forgetting that is firmly based in both temporalities and topographies. In a minor but introducing chapter of the book he instead proposes two types of place memory: the *memorial*, intentional, recognized and named places of memory, and the *locus*, which is the generic nature of particular spatial experiences. Their distinction is based upon their different relationship to the process of forgetting: while the memorial has forgetting inscribed from the beginning, the locus is the product of continual transfer and transmission of cultural codes and orders: streets, intersections, houses... These carry with them the contemporary norms, but also the time it takes to build, and when erased may undermine societies. The locus, according to Connerton, is:

‘experienced inattentively /.../ we accept it as a fact of life, a regular aspect of how things are. This is the power of the locus. This is why the locus is more important than the memorial – whose construction is so often motivated by the conscious wish to commemorate or the unavowed fear of forgetting – as a carrier of place memory’ (ibid, pp. 34-35).

There are three particular kinds of forgetting connected to the locus: 1) the contemporary *settlement scale* (overarching our understanding), 2) the *production of speed* (overarching our capacities), and 3) *repeated intentional destruction of the built environment* (creating cultural amnesia). A poetic version of forgetting of this kind is presented in Italo Calvino's *Le città invisibili* (1972) where Marco Polo in 55 short pieces brings us the dreams and memories of his own city, thematized as different cities and based upon notions of memory, forgetting, signs, longing, transformation, or names *et alea*. The city of Sofronia, for example, has two halves, one of which contains the city's entertainments (joyrides, amusement parks etc.) and the other half contains

the serious part (administration, the banks, the schools etc.). One of these two parts is annually deconstructed and dismantled. When time has come, they pull out nails and repack, to haul it all away to an unknown place, adjacent to another half city. In the leftover half, amusement continues restlessly. They count the months, days and hours until they, again, are united.

This piece, called 'The intangible cities 4', tells us about both the volatility of the consolidated city and the longing of the frivolity city, not after stability, but after its 'other half'. There is loss. Noteworthy is that contrary to the vertical stratigraphy of an archaeological excavation, the two layers of this city are not temporal but spatial. Like many other of Calvino's remarkable visionary representations of cities, this unexpected layering makes us aware of our expectations for a unity between temporal and spatial linearity. Perhaps a jumble of expressions made from the dissonance of aspects and artefacts, both personal and public, enrolled from different times gets us closer to making the memories of a city our own? When representations arrive at challenging familiar linearity and ordered stratigraphies, we may meet not only a representation that we have never seen before, but also a world that is someone else's. We arrive at the threshold of inquiry and exploration.

The Contributions

Recognising the perils of being content with the conventions through which we mediate both collective and individual memories, in 2015 artists and academics gathered in an international conference called *Challenge the past / diversify the future*. Drawing over a hundred presenters from nearly thirty countries, the conference sought to critically address visual, audible, and multi-sensory representations of historical times, places, and cultures (Chapman, Foka & Westin 2016). Whether through the development of new methods and ways of documenting, expressing and experiencing both past and present times and landscapes, or through critical approaches to all of these that help us challenge or re-examine that which we have built our structures of perception upon, all sought to diversify both our common understanding of history and culture and the tools through which all is mediated. While the aim of the conference was to discuss how cultural ideas, traditions and practices are constructed (and are constructing), transferred and disseminated in society, we had also the opportunity to connect a wide range of researchers and practitioners within heritage studies, digital humanities, history, game studies and adjoining disciplines to see what new questions could be asked.

The aims of this anthology are twofold. First and most obviously, it gives some of the work on representations of urban pasts and presents from *Challenge the Past* a deservedly wider readership by bringing them into the context of *Curating the City*, a cluster

within the Centre for Critical Heritage Studies at the University of Gothenburg. Second, we also hope that this anthology will give readers an inroad, or perhaps inspiration, to move beyond the visual when thinking about representations. The senses themselves have been characterised as gateways to the mind and the body, and so they mediate between the individual and the social world (Witmore 2006). However, the ways in which different senses are experienced varies greatly both between and within cultures. The recreation of the senses often requires us to think beyond narrative and ocularcentrism: they require the speculation and estimation of ‘sensory artefacts’ of history and archaeology, including sound and movement, as well as a transformation into methodologically tangible materials (Howes 2005, p. 14; Foka and Arvidsson 2016). They also require that the conceptual making of ‘intangible, sensory’ artefacts take into consideration issues of spatiality and temporality.

The contributions collected herein deal with ways of challenging accepted historical representations of the city by offering modes of recollection and perspectives that capture both multi-sensory and multi-layered aspects of urban context. As such, they offer new empirically grounded research on the experiences of the inhabitants, both past and present, whether individually or as a collective (grouped together either by one’s own definition, through happenstance, or through cruel intentions). With a focus on the city as a space that is performed by a host of actants reaching across time through both materiality and memory, the authors critically address modes through which visual, audible, and multi-sensory representations can challenge, diversify or uproot conventions of urban representation.

What unites the collected contributions in this anthology is a relentless refusal to let representations be mute and void of narration. Representations can have depth. Alda Terracciano, using Luce Irigaray’s description of ‘a philosophy in the feminine’ and the concept of ‘sensible transcendental’ as an interpretative framework, gives an account of involving haptic senses as well as sight, smell and taste to communicate embodied and intimate experiences of seven cities – Naples, Shanghai, Mumbai, Tangier, Lisbon, Salvador and London. The experiences are gathered in an experimental artwork, an installation composed of seven immersive environments each occupied by a city and conceived as a ‘memory box’ made up of digital sounds, images, smells and tastes of the places. By entering the spaces, audiences are invited to explore the interaction among bodies, memories and urban environments as a form of primal artistic expression, immersing themselves in the living archaeology of the places. Rather than relying on verbal descriptions of the city, descriptions that strive to objectively map the division of a city into structures and spaces, Terracciano relies on sensory perceptions to engage her audiences and challenge pre-conceived notions of cultural essentialism, all the while reassessing the way in which we experience cul-

tural diversity in the streets of our contemporary cities. For Terracciano, the body is both a sensuous archive and a seismograph, a thing that alerts us to changes, barriers, movements, secrets, revolts, and engagement.

Moving on from cities of perception, Maria Dmitruk leads us into a city of remembrance. In *The Town that Never Existed*, what was once the flourishing town of Miedzianka and is now a nowhere swallowed by the earth, demolished by people, and covered with a growth of weeds is explored as a mnemonic space through installations. In her contribution, Dmitruk explores the role of the artist through a phenomenological approach to the investigation of the past. In Miedzianka emerged the fundamental question 'Ubi sunt...?', derived from the Latin phrase *ubi sunt qui ante nos fuerunt* (where are those, who were before us?). This phrase was a popular motif in medieval poetry and it used to open a meditation on mortality and the transience of life. Dmitruk found that those that came before are all around us, in the dust, turned into particles of soil, into something that has persisted and that offers a tangible presence of the lost town and its inhabitants. The *genius loci* becomes a guiding spirit for the project, and *place* is put in opposition to *space*, which is untamed and undifferentiated. Miedzianka is reinstated as a place through re-enactment, in which our senses have to be activated and tuned to the history of the place, but also through the very humanisation of the space brought on by the artistic intervention.

Can the memory of a city be reawakened? Can a lost city be experienced? The past is a lived reality that survives only in fragments and can only be experienced in retrospect (Silberman 2008, p. 82), and while we may never be able to recreate the past as it actually was, or even an imperfect version of it with a sense of incomplete present-ness and uncertain expectation, we can simulate it. Using a digital reconstruction of pre-earthquake Lisbon in the early eighteenth century, Helena Murteira, Alexandra Gago da Câmara, Paulo Simões Rodrigues and Luís Sequeira let the architectural reconstruction be a stage for the social and cultural dimensions of the city. When the city centre disappeared on 1 November 1755, so did more than a vague collection of buildings, streets and alleys reminiscent of an extended past. It was a long-standing memory, consubstantiated in a much-lived urban setting, connecting past and present. As heritage is as much intangible tradition and social history as any physicality, a challenge lies in recognizing the activities *surrounding* the monuments in addition to the monuments themselves. Entering the Second Life simulation, we are confronted with an animated, interactive and thought-provoking virtual model that provides a different perspective on the past in which the existing documentary sources and a long path of research into Lisbon's urban history is tested in an immersive environment. Not only does the model gather aspects that are usually studied individually, it simultaneously embodies the empirical experiences of each user and

their social interaction, from both an individual and a collective standpoint. To some extent, virtual historical environments are notional places that provide shape to a non-verbal scientific domain. The deconstruction of memory is part of the very essence of historiographical practice and the contribution emphasises this process by changing the paradigm of historical research, from both methodological and epistemological points of view.

How can we depict socially relevant historical events and their effect on space and urban structures? What artistic strategies can be used to 'recreate' the past through archival records? What are the possibilities of fiction, and how can we define its space within this practice? Setting out from the idea of two cities existing in spatial juxtaposition, one real and the other a mythic 'Thirdspace' (Soja 1996) – an alternative critical spatial awareness in which all social, historical, imagined, and experienced spatiality are interwoven – Karina Nimmerfall highlights the possibilities of a fictional space within a documentary practice. Nimmerfall describes in her contribution an experimental approach to the interpretation of archival records – one that deals with the reverse aim not to portray a supposed truth in history, but instead to highlight the possibilities of the imaginary and its space within our practice of rendering history and memory. Incorporating on-location research through moving images, a script based on archival material, and strategies of historical conceptual art, we are invited to challenge accepted historical representations through a discussion about artistic strategies and their possibilities of offering new forms of recollection and new perspectives.

A question Maria Dmitruk poses comes to mind here: where are those who were before us? Are they present in our documentation, in our representations? As Dmitruk writes, processes of decay occur vertically; generation above generation pile up in layers but are not always still and ordered. They move around. They seep through to one another. But so do also memories of a city. Memories that are told in filmic representations, in manuscript fragments, in buttons and bones sifted from the soil, and in multi-sensuous engagements of past and present.

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An anthology about making representations of a city

Presented at the international conference *Challenge the past / diversify the future*, the contributions collected herein deal with ways of challenging accepted historical representations of the city by offering modes of recollection and perspectives that capture both multi-sensory and multi-layered aspects of urban context. As such, they offer new empirically grounded research on the experiences of the inhabitants, both past and present, whether individually or as a collective.

With a focus on the city as a space that is performed by a host of actants reaching across time through both materiality and memory, the authors critically address modes through which visual, audible, and multi-sensory representations can challenge, diversify or uproot conventions of urban representation.

Four projects. Four takes on making representations of a city.



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