

Epilogue
The Fragility of Memory and its Remedy
Through Spatial Practices

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At the corner of Hayrkon Street they are destroying the house. The sea salt has eaten its iron tendons. Fifty two years old at its death. The workers begin, obviously, at the top, in the opposite direction of the house's creation. Already with the first hoe's hit, the upper room is exposed: it is the color of ideal flesh, the pink of the Twenties. Two or three prostitutes stand in the street in the morning, bored. The Mediterranean sea crouches in the distance, lazily licking itself. Just one important man, probably the contractor, carefully examines the grave being dug right in front of his eyes and foresees the future: here a square, multi-storied memorial will be built to the memory of the house.

(*Planning*, by Dan Pagis)

The poem *Planning*, by Dan Pagis, portrays the daily human process of erasing, constructing, modifying, forgetting and remembering places. Given that this process is a routine reality for so many people, why does it still have so much significance? Although there is no simple answer to this question, it is evident that a re-conceptualization is currently taking place – collective memory in social science and citizenship in planning practices – as two realms converge that together are creating a new engagement of citizens with memory in cities worldwide.

Associated with the debate on the limits of historical representation, the re-conceptualization of collective memory led to a body of knowledge that unsettled the established conventions of historical narration. Correlated with the work of the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, the contemporary definition of collective memory is conceived as a function of social power, and its expression varies with the social settings in which we find ourselves. For Halbwachs, studying memory is not a matter of reflecting on the properties of the subjective mind; rather, memory is a question of how minds work together in society, how their operations are structured by social arrangements (Olick, 2008). Halbwachs proposed that social groups – families, religious cults, political organizations and other communities – develop strategies to hold fast to their images of the past through places, monuments and rituals of commemoration (Halbwachs, 1992). Halbwachs's theory was rediscovered during the 1970s and 1980s with the expansion of collective memory studies, which became the debris of lost or oppressed identities, with scholars and citizens engaged in the excavations and genealogy of these identities.

This shift changed the role of collective memory, which became the raw material of social actions. As a result, collective memory became an elastic material, often remodelled, distorted, and hence made unreliable as a guide to the realities of the past. Memory became significant, not so much for its true representation but more as a social, political and cultural power and influence (Hutton, 2005). This led to the understanding of the role of memory in the making of political identities, as discussed in the work of Pierre Nora, for example, which addresses the making of the French national memory in the making of political identity (Nora, 1996), the work of Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983), which explored the political uses of tradition in the construction of collective identity, and the study by Benedict Anderson (Anderson, 1983) of the way “imagined communities” are constructed as public memories to give concrete affirmation to otherwise abstract ideals. The contribution of these scholars, and others, is critical to thought on the interlinked relations between memory and politics.

Parallel to the discourse on collective memory, and in association with it, we witness a shift in the conceptualization of citizenship. Generally, citizenship refers to a membership in a polity, contributing to the tension between inclusion and exclusion, between those deemed eligible for citizenship and those who are denied the right to become members. Three crucial features characterize the democratic political system: (1) the right to participate in the public sphere; (2) limitations in the power of government over the individual; and (3) a system based on the rule of law, not the arbitrary rule of rulers. With the turn of the twenty-first century, these features have been developed and enforced with governments focusing on the enhancement of civil participation and civil engagement as a tool, which reinforces democratic legitimacy and power. This approach to “the citizen” has significantly changed the planning discourse – from a passive subject whose projects are being planned for him to an active agent who participates in the development of the built environment.

The adoption of the participatory approach should be seen in the context of the failure of the utopian realization in the twentieth century, resulting in the disassociation of planning from the promise of utopia. This postmodern opposition to utopian projects championed everyday life and celebrates the civilian society (Chase et al., 1999; De Certeau, 1984; Lefebvre, 1984). Since the 1960s, planning has focused on the “here and now”, objecting to all the concepts of utopia. Thus, planning adopted a dynamic framework influenced by a pragmatic approach to creating new visions. This has also affected the relationships between the professional, the citizen and the state. The citizen became a reference point, a player, an individual participating in the process of place-making, an approach that became part of the general agenda of inclusiveness and civic engagement enhanced by governments. This participatory, idealistic approach of the later 1960s has recently been replaced by a cruel realization that the target citizen of this approach is a member with legal status, whose support is needed to legitimize governance dominance by creating sanctioned space for participation (Mirafitab, 2009: 43). Along with this, a rival approach in planning has developed focusing on the *idea of insurgency*. Coined by James Holston (Holston, 1998), the *insurgent*

citizen refers to the individual who is challenging the hegemonic discourse and is able to initiate counter-hegemonic methods and tactics, by choice (or as last resort) in the process of place-making. Insurgent practices are often being hosted or encouraged by NGOs that gives the support, power and knowledge to actors in formal practices. Spatially, as argued by Ananya Roy, insurgency is closely associated with the idea of informality that is defined as a mode of production of space defined by the territorial logic of deregulation (Roy, 2009: 7–11).

Both discourses, citizenship and collective memory, are rooted in presentism – a counterpoint to the historicist idea of “progress”, which dominated thinking about historical time during the modern age. The price paid for progress was the destruction of past ways of living and being in the world. Liberation meant active destruction of the past, which brought forgetting (Huysen, 2003: 2). Presentism negates this by offering interpretations of the past that contribute to morally responsible, critical perspectives on the present age. From this perspective, history is no longer conceived as a grand narrative, or as a continuity that has informed the understanding of historical time in the modern age. The convergence of these discursive changes gave rise to numerous spatial practices of different actors (citizens, professionals and authorities) that transformed memory into an active, planned activity in cities worldwide.

How does collective memory become a tool in modifying space? With the growing significance of collective memory, places became the concrete sphere of negotiation over meanings. Moreover, citizens have the opportunity to negate or challenge the representation of future places and the way their symbols, memories and images will be conceived by professionals. Yet, in its essence, urban development often accentuates the power differences between groups because, by planning for the future, it challenges contemporary everyday life, and calls for transformation. This process entails change that relates both to the concrete construction of place and how it is integral to the cultural, national and political discourse of space. Thus, evolution of groups in the process of imagining place is often contested. These complex relationships between place, memory and spatial practices are infinitely repetitive and reversible, characterizing many of the processes of place-making.

Throughout the book, the authors offer various examples of relationships between collective memory and place, and comment on the use of spatial practices as a tool for different actors to establish meaning. Furthermore, fighting over meaning through spatial practices can take place through numerous methods, in particular by using practices of negotiation, reconstruction and performance.

Negotiation

The process of negotiation is inherent to most contemporary urban developments, as they are as much about forgetting as they are about remembering the past and present built environment. An example of negotiation over contested meaning is

presented by Johan Lagae, in Chapter 10, when he discusses the recent debate over the built legacy of the former colonial city of Lubumbashi in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The issue of the colonial legacy reminds us that Johan Lagae is not only talking about the conservation of physical remnants of the past but also about negotiating meanings embedded in these artefacts. Lagae calls for developing an approach that includes addressing both tangible aspects of the built environment (conservation, restoration) as well as the intangible aspects (memory, history). Another example in the book, which led to the active participation of rival groups, is the story of Yaad and Miaar in Galilee, Israel as presented by Tovi Fenster in Chapter 5. This urban development project aimed at erasing the memory of the Palestinian group in favour of an Israeli group of inhabitants, as part of the national project. Resisting the plan and bridging the process of collaborative planning, where both sides have learned to acknowledge the memory of the other, serve as a basis for change and future planning. In the process of negotiation over memory, often a mediator plays a significant role in bridging the gaps. In this particular case, and in most contested spatial developments, the professional or policy-maker often plays a crucial role in mediating between contested meanings, and integrating spatial production with political discourse.

Reconstruction

Spatial practices assist in reconstructing heritage, memories and, above all, a sense of (local/national) community. Yet, as noted by Richard Bauman, community stands for the kind of world that is, regrettably, not available to us – but that which we dearly wish to inhabit and to repossess. Community then becomes another name for paradise lost – but that which we dearly hope to return, and so we constantly seek roads that may bring us there (Bauman, 2001: 3). Reconstructing memory and a sense of community through the concrete environment is illustrated by Efrat Eizenberg, in Chapter 1, who offers an example of residents reconstructing elements of their past landscape in the community gardens of New York. In her study, Eizenberg shows how past landscapes that were part of the “environmental autobiography” of gardeners are treated by gardeners and in turn how these spaces create a positive connection to the gardeners’ living environment. The gardens thus become spaces where individuals express their aesthetic and culture, typically not expressed within urban spaces.

Yet, parallel to the reconstruction in the scale of the community, we also witness processes of reconstructions at the scale of the state, which uses various methods to redefine its imagined sphere. An example of reconstruction at the scale of the state is presented by Damiana Gabriela Otoi, in Chapter 8, who discusses the expropriations that affected the Jewish community after the installation of the Socialist regime and the reinstatement of urban property after the fall of that regime in 1989. During both time periods, the process of reconstruction of collective ideology was taking place using political and legal mechanisms that appropriate and

then reinstitute property. In both cases, these mechanisms were used to reconstruct a collective national ideology and history. Here, property and the concrete space serve as a means to enhance the regime’s legislative framework.

Performance

Speaking, listening and remembering are practices by which people transmit information. The capacity for speech and the associated capacities for learning and remembering might be thought of as the defining elements of human consciousness. The tradition of oral history served as a means to pass on knowledge and provide refuge for a group in some way marked as different from the rest of society. Acting out these stories publicly, through spatial practices, is a performing memory. As Elena Trubina reminds us, in Chapter 6, memory is no longer a transparent record of the past but rather a performative act. It is not neutral, morally or pragmatically, but place gives memory its contemporary meaning. Studying the case of Volgograd’s built environment reveals an example of the Socialist tradition in modernist planning. Trubina illustrates how, for many, memory becomes the repository of “Soviet” memories, both by virtue of its urban structure and by the traumas of the Second World War. This state of affairs results in daily rituals through which works of memory have been performed in the city.

Performing collective memory could also be used as a tool of resistance as presented in the case of the Negev Bedouins. Safa Abu-Rabia, in Chapter 4, looks at how forcible spatial change (the war of 1948) has structured the Bedouin identity and how their attachment to their original lands serves as the basis of construction of their displaced identity, building feelings of conscious and physical alienation from the new space, which becomes an arena of resistance and protest. Abu-Rabia elaborates on the way Bedouins have attempted to build an exile identity with the intention of protesting and opposing their present situation, and expressing their continuous aspiration to return to their previous way of life and original land.

Whether using negotiation, reconstruction or performance to mark memory, the act of remembering is always in and of the present (while its reference is of the past and thus absent). Thus, inevitably, every act of memory carries with it a dimension of betrayal, forgetting and absence (Huysen, 2003: 4). So, is this practice new? What characterizes the contemporary spatial processes of forgetting and remembering? First, the expansion of imagination’s scope, with our horizons of time and space extended to include the local, national and international spheres, all defined elastically and undergoing constant changes. The elasticity of spheres allows creating new group coalitions, bypassing formal or existing borders. This is the beauty and the drawback of the imagination: it is flexible – a flexibility that generates a large umbrella under which more actors, organizations, citizens, communities, state authorities and international coalitions are included. Second, spatial processes of forgetting and remembering are used as tools for mobilization, and for the fight over resources and power. It is not the idea of “progress” or collective good in an abstract future that has driven these

actions, but rather the temporal access to resources. Here, space plays a significant role, as it is visible and becomes a testimony, a manifestation of gained resources. Third, the role of memory and its spatial practices are in relation to historical trauma, when people try to come to terms with violence. In the twentieth century, we have witnessed episodes of genocide and mass destruction on a scale that has traumatized entire populations into a state of collective repression. Efforts to reckon with these horrifying memories have resulted in the creation of public memory spaces, including monuments, memorials, parks and collective rituals. Investigations of this phenomena have recalled Freud's thesis about the necessity of "working through" the trauma of repressed memory to uncover harsh and painful truths about crimes against humanity. In this context, urbanity plays a central role in the production of symbolic representations of the event and the place (Hatuka, 2009).

Finally, memory of all stripes remains a methodology involved in political. The complex and reciprocal interactions between space and memory not only create our urban landscape; they also transform our cities into a social property whose symbolism and iconography are constantly defined and recreated by its users. And yet with these characteristics of memory as an *active* spatial practice, it is important to recall the future, particularly when we try to envision alternatives to the contemporary situation. As Andreas Huyssen puts it:

We need both past and future to articulate our political, social, and cultural dissatisfaction with the present state of the world. And while the hypertrophy of memory can lead to self-indulgence, melancholy fixations, and problematic privileging of the traumatic dimension of life with no exit in sight, memory discourses are absolutely essential to imagine the future and to regain a string temporal and spatial grounding of life. (Huyssen, 2003: 6)

In other words, buildings and monuments – designed by architects, planners and policy-makers in an endless process of production – define and change our landscape and establish a spatial array. This socio-spatial array forces us to adjust to particular social contexts, behavioural codes and political regulations. But, at the same time, this spatial array also provides us with a space in which to negotiate, oppose and resist. This particular dialectic of constraint and freedom is what makes urban spaces so crucial to memory practices, so strategic as a tool that allows people to negotiate their past – for, in the end, it is only through the imagination that we can envision a better future.

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