

The revelation of open space's mnemonic idioms. An investigation of mnemonic procedure and order

Konstantinos Gounaridis

National Technical University of Athens (NTUA), School of Architecture, Greece

kgounaridis@mail.ntua.gr

Abstract

The present is an attempt to emerge an interpretative order for open space based on mnemonic events and repurposed architectural fragments. Emphasizing the spatio-temporal qualities of objects and their interwoven existence within various contexts. Moving beyond traditional notions of structured wholes, it embraces a nuanced understanding of open space informed by architectural theory. A recall of philological, and other references beyond the field of practice have been incorporated, seeking opportunities of reading manifestations of time through memory incised in existing built forms of material presence. By reinterpreting mnemotechnics, the essay explores memory embedded within open space, enabling non-linear interpretations and revealing the unfolding of time. This mnemonic approach offers a resilient intellectual framework for understanding the evolving nature of open space and its significance for architectural practice.

Il tentativo consiste nel far emergere un quadro interpretativo dello spazio aperto basato su eventi mnemonici e frammenti di architetture riadattate. Enfatizzando le qualità spazio-temporali degli oggetti e la loro esistenza intrecciata all'interno di vari contesti. Superando le nozioni tradizionali di insieme strutturato, accoglie una comprensione sfumata dello spazio aperto informata dalla teoria architettonica. Un richiamo filologico e altri riferimenti al di fuori del campo della pratica sono stati incorporati, cercando opportunità di leggere le manifestazioni del tempo attraverso la memoria incisa nelle forme costruite esistenti di presenza materiale. Reinterpretando la mnemotecnica, il contributo esplora la memoria incorporata nello spazio aperto, consentendo interpretazioni non lineari e rivelando il dispiegarsi del tempo. Questo approccio mnemonico offre un quadro intellettuale resistente per comprendere la natura in evoluzione dello spazio aperto e il suo significato per la pratica architettonica.

Keywords

Memory as a time incision in open space, Spolium, Memory and objects, Mnemotechnics, Pragmata

Memoria come incisione del tempo nello spazio aperto, *Spolium*, Memoria e oggetti, Mnemotecnica, *Pragmata*

While investigating an attempt to a common ground between open space and memory, an intriguing contribution at a theoretical level by Sebastien Marot (2003) proposes a memory-conscious perspective to design. Through a series of readings from different disciplinary origins, Marot articulates a clear argument for re-establishing a design orientation towards landscape and the traced memories. Placemaking, and memory are of high relevance to contemporary space dialectics. Memory, in his interpretation, serves as a critical precept, engaging layered histories from the contextual and landscape presence.

The paradigm of Pikionis path to Acropolis, as a collection of material presence of memories and temporalities in present space, constructs a material mnemonic procedure. The memory of the past, in architectural form, is the substance to fabricate a landscape, where time is not involved. Parts of past constructions are placed carefully to a composition towards a timeline landmark.

Through the proposed narrative of the mnemonic aspect of *pragmata* (the greek word for 'things', etymology derivation of *pragmatikotita* that means 'reality') which are transforming reality through time and space, it is a difficult challenge to summarise for a conclusion. The present essay should rather pose a question for further investigation and understanding of the open space and the form to be given on memory during the new era of the cities.

The First Trace. Memory as the Measure of Space

Trying to reach a subject as vast as the open space, the following text will immediately accept the human perceived open space, as the one willing to narrate. Memory is the first convention human beings practice to establish their perceptive presence in a place. Non utilitarian structures with the single aim to highlight human presence, are abstract forms of spatio-temporal remembrance. The present writing it is a clear attempt to describe open space through memory, instrumentalizing all possible intellectual means. The proposal seeks to perform a collage of references from a variety of disciplines, in order to emerge architectural procedures with a mnemonic significance to the landscape.

Moreover, it is of high importance to provide at least a generic framework of the present's idea for memory. Surely there is no intention to describe a pure historicist position to describe the past. The conceptual interpretation of memory, the one that generatively provides compositional features, it is genuinely close to what George Perec intends with "W ou le souvenir d'enfance" (Perec, 1975). Memory for Perec is a fragmented, elusive, reconstructive procedure, deeply shaped by trauma. The inherent instability of remembrance, is describing how subjective memories are incomplete, constructed, and affected by tangented narratives through time. The structure proposed, illustrates the operation of memory as a narrative fab-



Fig. 1 - Atypical residential structure in Prosotsani, Drama. Three facades (photo: Konstantinos Gounaridis, 2022).

rication, a strive to force consistency on experiences that refuse to be articulated. Fiction becomes a vital tool for expressing the unspeakable, allowing Perec to confront historical and personal trauma indirectly. It is not of any interest which story is true. An interpretative dialectic, and creative presence referred to a narration in relation with spatiotemporal phenomena.

Collage

Through contemporary cinematography a series of films willing to describe a certain absence of human existence are instrumentalizing landscapes of vastness and desolation. Anything could exist by the time it is captured as a cultural element. Landscape

and open space exist only as underworlds or places of exile when they are not culturally defined by the social perceptual dimension. It is interesting enough that even in recent and generally popular science fiction series objects in the form of artifacts are the mnemonic vehicles to different timelines and/or the proof of the presence of another universe when the living one is malfunctioning. Objects are dedicating their being to define space and time.

The concept of 'memory machine', and 'heritage terrorism' developed by M. Christine Boyer (2012) are an emphatic outcome of her analysis on the role and instrumentalization of memory through the historical context. From the failure of pseudo-objectivity to



Fig. 2 - Church of Saint Zacharias, Early Christian Basilica of Eleusis (5th c.). Facade detail (photo: Konstantinos Gounaridis, 2024).

narrate the past, establishes an important notion of terminology on memory events in a social and political background. Offers insights of society's remembrance, understanding the ideals and the relationship intersected in memory and political context. Memory inside its political context, is the direct protagonist of history manipulation events. It is maybe obvious that a universal quality, needed in social encounters, such as memory, when 'objectified', performs a continuous narration not only to a present, but to any present society, landscape, space on the timeline.

An attempt to define open space could refer us to the condition that defines space. A reference that has a central role also to Marot's work, is the case of mnemotechnics (Yates, 1966), the incident described with Simonides of Ceos as the protagonist of the narration, the relation between objects is the one which drives Simonides to the clear understanding of space and render him able to detect position. The question to pose, referring seemingly to 'open space', is certainly if a vast and characteristically permanently recurring expanse of (open) land constitutes (open) space. Spatial perception occurs through finding elements that define itself. One's position in relation to an object, thing or element in a larger spatial sys-

tem or context. The first step in defining a space is the ability to detect its location, study which is extensively responded by the *ars memoriae*.

Interesting coincidence could be followed by the inevitable connection between objects, space and utopias. Highlighting Doxiadis' affirmation of entopias (Doxiadis, 1968), as a place of agreement to rationality and narration, it is subject to further investigate the role of objects in such entopia. If entopia regards a place which emerges from the genius loci, a repetitive form of objects which only absorb uniqueness by its subject, it is not clear if this generic space of repetitiveness is genius enough to contain objects.

Understanding nature as an object performed ontology, and referring to the semantics on which architecture is based imitating primordial forms, it is crucial to remove possible definitions of open space from the generic proposition to declare as such "whatever it is not built". Proceeding to the proposed suggestion, the significant entity of open space lies on the existence of limits. The space where something is differentiating itself from something else. This transitional condition is the one of great importance while open space is seeking for a definition. A profound source of connotation from the etymology of the word abso-

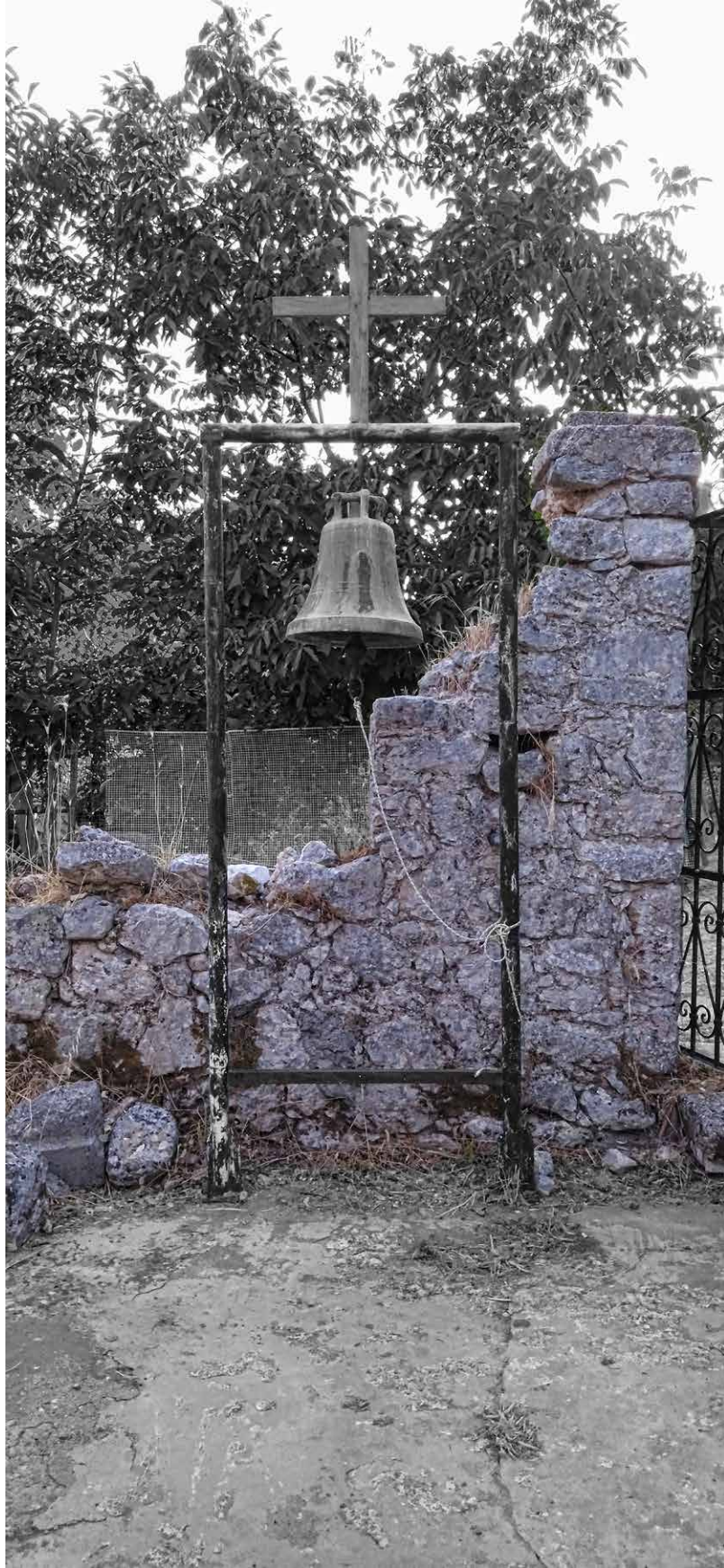


Fig. 3 - Church of Saint Spyridon in Alexandros, Lefkada. "Belfry"
(photo: Konstantinos Gounaridis, 2022).

Fig. 4 - Informal structure and a well, Pyrgi, Chios. Frontal
(photo: Konstantinos Gounaridis, 2024).



lute, ab-solvo, (Aureli, 2011) could be helpful to investigate these spaces of division, and understand the morphology of the 'open' from the three dimensional footprint that rises from the 'closed'.

Expanding a constant investigation on possibilities to 'objectify', the artist Ahmet Doğu Ipek (*Proposition for an alternative square*, 2024) proposed an installation based, and not only, on the geometrical presence of natural entities. The white boards are justifying each presence incisioning each limit. The burnt tree trunks, result of the incident that took place in the surroundings of the proposed installation, placed over the pedestals, are memorialized actors of a condition to be narrated. Besides the performance of natural elements presented on account of their material aspect and form, these natural objects are imposed by an intellectual intention. Trunks, as a sequence of ruins, are able to constitute an archive providing a memory of a very certain past.

Objects and/or artefacts, part of natural or the built regime, while transformed into ruins are becoming the most complete form of architecture, as it is intended by Peter Eisenman in the introductory text of the translated edition of Aldo Rossi's "The Architecture of the City" (Rossi, 1982). A material synthesis which fulfills its scope, and investigates its own

presence through different realities in time. Through the above, it should be considered a possible scenario driven by object oriented ontology in architectural forms. If so, open space is clearly a natural symbiosis of objects. A composition of ruins and human-perceived sophisticated objects are travelling through time, occupying a differential space, being precisely there (whichever 'there' is), assuming alternative roles of their essence.

While for Loos a naked object sterilized to its basic form is certainly a figure of cultural evolution against ornament, it is noticed the ornamentless contemporary object as an ornament per se. Consequently, objects are absorbing ornament's idiomatic properties. Objects are a new holistic form of existence.

A critical examination of the usefulness concept is proposed by Adorno, advocating its transformation to a conciliatory, anthropocentric ideal. This comprehension of usefulness surpasses practicability and highlights a relation between subjects and material environment. Following this perspective, objects, once stripped of their alienating distance and oppressive coldness, are harmoniously integrated into human existence, allowing both the dissolution of alienation and the restoration of essential purpose. Through the above described state, objects lose their limiting ob-



Fig. 5 - *Proposition for an alternative square*, 2024, Vessa, Chios. View of the installation (photo: Konstantinos Gounaridis, 2024).

jectivity, no longer incite feelings of shame or discomfort, and instead enter into a reciprocal relationship with subjects, facilitating mutual self-realization and emancipation from instrumental rationality. Adorno's conceptualization entails a dialectical reconciliation where human subjects and material environment co-exist in liberated, intentional harmony.

Usefulness could be something high, a humanized thing, it could be reconciliation with objects, which no longer fortify themselves against people, nor cause them shame [...] The thought that the new objects, which have become absolutely useful, would lose their coldness can serve as a vanishing point of evolution. For then not only would men cease to suffer within a realised world (i.e. With things): things would also meet themselves, once they had succeeded in finding their purpose, free from their realised state (Dinglichkeit). (Adorno, 1965, p.40).

In Aristides Antonas' novel "The pulp of things", things are the protagonists in the hero's painful circumstance, they appear to dominate his personal reality, joining in his tragic course. The material condition of things, their position, the way they arise, af-

fect the hero's perceptual capacity to the extent that he anticipates his liberation from them. Memory happens because things exist.

We never have things [...] what I will have will not be something that I control but because it will control me and will require from me some behavior of commitment to it[...] memory is the problem and mainly, of course, not memory but oblivion. The only problem is that I want to forget. I belong to things, things have me as long as I remember things. (Antonas, 2020, p.41)

The last line of Antonas' novel is the link to one of the episodes of Merleau-Ponty's 1948 radio lecture series. Things come as elements that complete the concept of space in the search for and examination of it. Things, Ponty suggests, are a system of qualities that respond to the alternation of human senses as a unified system through some dialectical process. Things are possessed of attitudes through the body and the self. The conformity of human experience, through emotional excitement, of the qualities of things and the interrelationship between them emerge into existence.

next pages

Fig. 6 - Church of Saint Athanasios, Doxato, Drama. Column A (photo: Konstantinos Gounaridis, 2024).

Fig. 7 - Church of Saint Athanasios, Doxato, Drama. Column B (photo: Konstantinos Gounaridis, 2024).

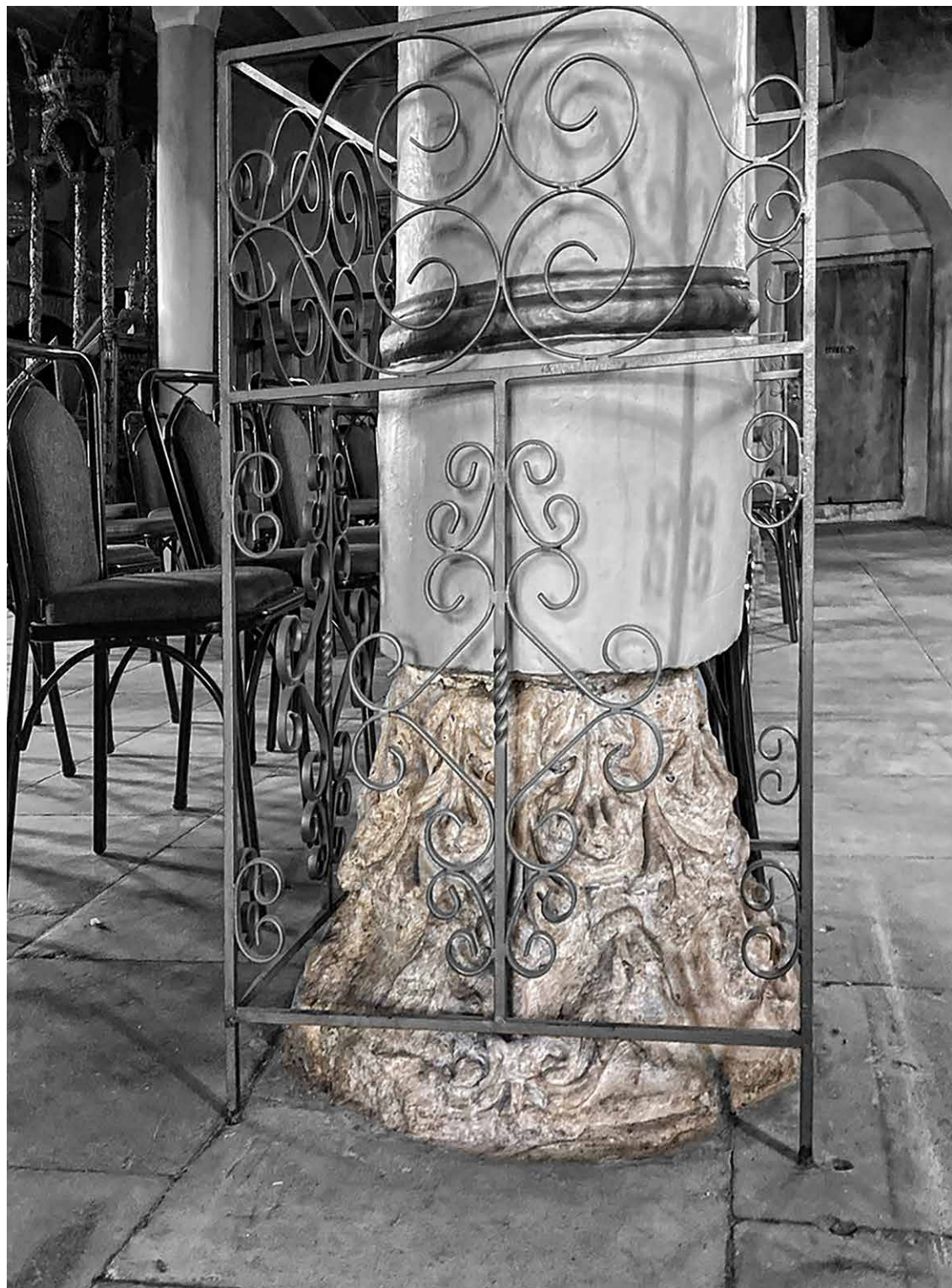
Synthesis. An anthem to a new order

Opposing Lars' idea of sympathy with the philosophical dimension of object-oriented ontology (Harman, 2018), sympathy is the direct tension of an object to become a concrete part of the subject by a force of imitation. To further develop the concept of sympathy, it could be declared that subjects and objects are forming this other kind of species when they arrive to this point of sympathy. Lars Spuybroek with the sympathy of things proposes Gothic architecture as a whole of fragile and delicate singularities, recognising the essence of things. According to Spuybroek classicism is the idea of the well structured whole, where repetitive extremely identical objectives dedicate their existence to the whole.

The proposed singularities, investing to object's unique identity, is the bridge between the two above referenced circumstances. The forced uniqueness of architecture objects, that Lars Spuybroek investigates, is perhaps the beginning of the object's path to autonomy. Non anthropocentric interpretations

of the object's essence, is the key to their existence through the traces of time. In addition, objects exist in architectural performances without being able to maintain their initial form, relation, and ostensibly structure. Emerging a non linear presence in space and time, excluded from the typical narrative, this impure series of elements are tracing introverted mnemonic events.

Through the above proposed interpretations, the present essay is willing to add a new form of order which starts from the being of things in order to define open space. The proposed order is strictly based on the spatio-temporal characteristics of things and their plural symbiosis in different contexts. An utter form of assemblage, according to time, spatial, structural, compositional, physiological parameters, is formed as a practice existing for centuries, mainly read as an not sophisticated or intellectual gesture. Sampling and investigating the presence of a series of mnemonic events through the above described assemblage, in the very nature of existence of determined territories, this essay seeks to define this



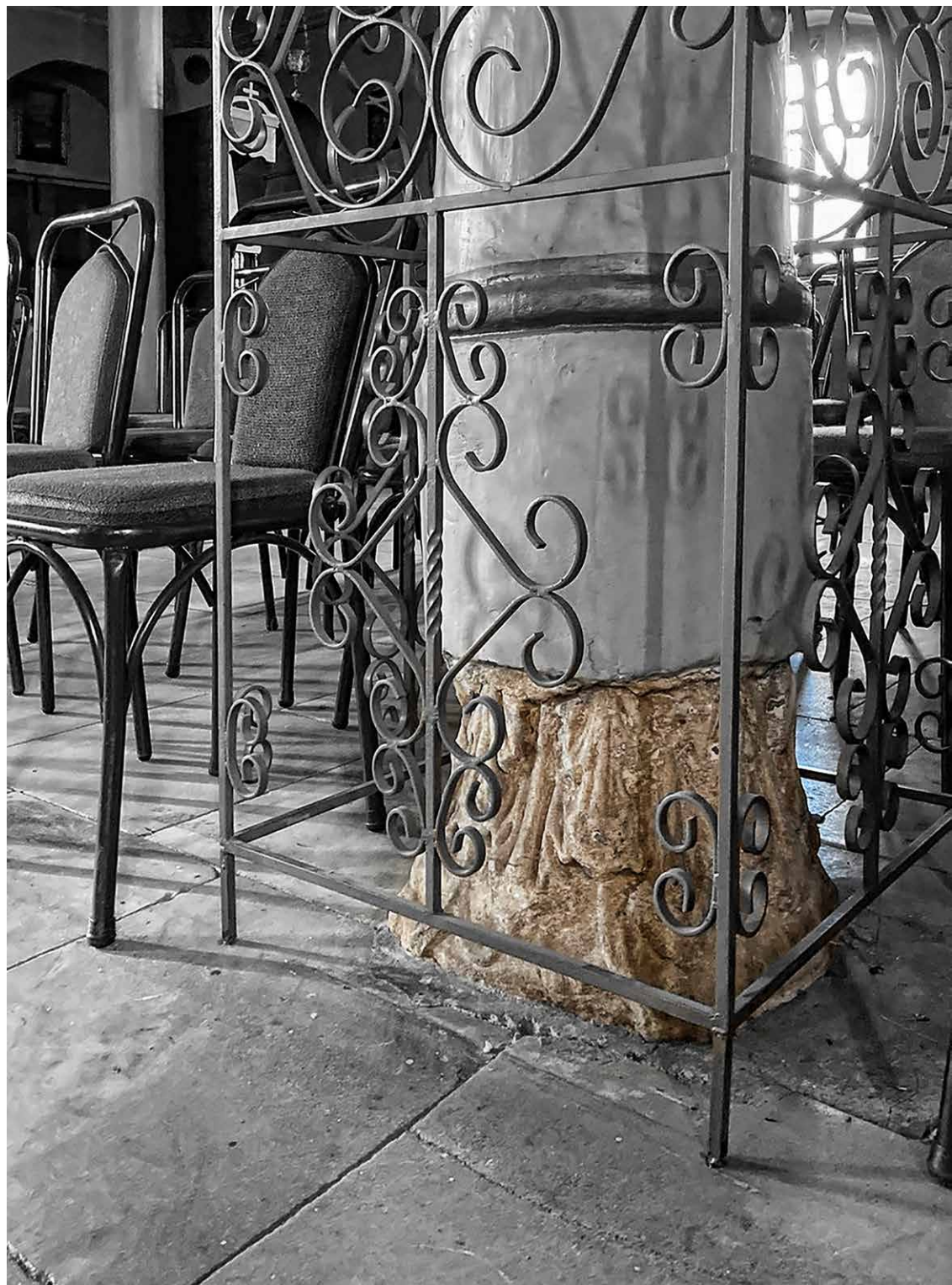




Fig. 8 - Church of Saint Athanasios, Doxato, Drama. Column C (photo: Konstantinos Gounaridis, 2024).

significant order. Interestingly, this order has effects on its own neo form. As polykatoikia vastly dominating the open spaces of Greek cities, it is clearly a pure form of random memories, magnetising elements from its surroundings without any filter on the significance of their material or immaterial essence, and finally forming an assemblage of controversial things charged with different memories through space and time.

The ancient art of mnemotechnics as a field of narrative itineraries lies on a plural self of future expansions. This new order of past forms and architecture procedures is a fortunate tool to narrate muted memories. Open space will host itineraries that were not able to be described. Non linear presences, constituting open space can embrace their future interpretation. The plural mnemonic existence of open space will appear, and time could be unfolded.



Fig. 9 - Chapel of Saint Marcella over the Sanctuary of Apollo Phanaïos, Pyrgi, Chios. Detail (photo: Konstantinos Gounaridis, 2024).

It is obvious that while reading the present proposal to establish a new post ancient/past architecture order based on *spolia* as an architectural gesture, someone could easily lose the connection to open space. As open space is perceived by objects, seen as hybrid forms of existence, stating as such natural and artificial entities, the described mnemonic configuration is subject to existence per se. When Pikionis investigates the genius loci of local architecture tradition, while working in Acropolis, he certainly follows a design process based on an instinctive understanding of memory. The fragments of demolished neo-classical constructions are becoming not only a tool to reframe the paths towards Parthenon but also a theoretical statement of both spoliation as a method to re-propose, and classicism as a subject personalized as a time flaneur.

At the same time the process followed, maybe stands also as a statement to the decided remained history of the Parthenon. The aspect of Acropolis, while a church or a mosque through the ages, has completely disappeared. The remained form should supreme the magnitude of a past generative force of Western Culture.

The objects, ruins, or pure architecture forms are part

of an holistic assemblage towards the city's most significant inhabitation. Willing to render a ruin/artifact successively part of a city in transition. Certainly a form of *in situ* spoliation, is rendered as an architectural gesture, reassembling not only material pieces of different timelines but whole architectures, ideas, memories, time.

The word 'spolia' originates from the Latin word *spolium*, meaning 'spoils' (of war). It's related to the verb *spolio*, meaning "to strip, rob, or plunder". The plural form is also *spolia*, and it's commonly used in English. While the Greek word *διασπορά* (*diaspora*) shares the related sense of 'scattering', it has a broader meaning than the specific act of taking spoils.

Unfolding Memory-Oriented Order of Open Space

Definitely mnemonic procedure is a field and/or a method to read open space which needs further elaboration. Both at the level of spatial nature and range of openness, memory constitutes a work in progress toolkit, driving to the potential instrumentalization of them. Space and landscape are subjects to constant transformation, which is the obvious human linear understanding of time. Memory on the other

hand is a perceptual(?) condition lying on more than one dimension and timelines addressed on linear transformations. This inevitable connection of time, transformation, and memory emerges the above hypothesis: does every single transformation on space and landscape provokes memory, and at the same time which are the mnemonic parameters called to establish open space?

Memory, as a dynamic force shaping our perception and understanding of space, acts as a unique language spoken by the built forms. It imbues open spaces with a significant substance, weaving together the plural narratives and experiences that define their essence. This intricate interplay between memory and space reveals a resilient and adaptable intellectual perspective, crucial for addressing the evolving needs of architectural practice. Open space, is in constant flux, shaped by natural processes, social interactions, and the passage of time. Memory anchors these ephemeral experiences, providing a sense of continuity and identity to otherwise ever-shifting landscapes. The traces of past events, whether physical remnants or intangible cultural imprints, become embedded within the fabric of open space, enriching its meaning and informing future interventions. Time is described through memory, and mem-

ory through *pragmata*, things that constitute reality and signify open space.

The understanding of memory comes as an understanding of objects, as the present proposal highlights their role in space through time. The typological interpretation and taxonomy of the above described order (spoliation) could potentially be a beginning to the recognition of a memory oriented architecture procedure. Certainly the above does not emerge clearly from the present work, as it remains a question to pose rather than to investigate the role of objects or *pragmata* in space and time context.

Bibliographic references

- Adorno T.W. 1967, *Functionalism Today*, Plethron, Athens.
- Antonas A. 2020, *The pulp of things*, Antipodes, Athens.
- Aureli P.V. 2011, *The Possibility of an Absolute Architecture*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Bartholomew H. 2019, *Enstranged Strangers: OOO, the Uncanny, and the Gothic*, «Open Philosophy», vol. 2, n. 1, pp. 357–383.
- Boyer M.C. 2012, *Collective memory under siege: The case of “heritage terrorism”*, in C. Greig Cryslar, S. Cairns, H. Heynen (eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Architectural Theory*, SAGE Publications, Los Angeles–London–New Delhi–Singapore–Washington DC.
- Buchloh B. 1999, *Gerhard Richter’s “Atlas”: The Anomic Archive*, «October», vol. 88 (Spring), pp. 117–145, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Derrida J. 1995, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, MD.
- Doxiadis C.A. 1968, *Ekistics: An Introduction to the Science of Human Settlements*, Hutchinson, London.
- Friedel H. 2006, *Gerhard Richter Atlas: Photography, Collages and Sketches 1962–2006*, D.A.P./Distributed Art Publishers, New York.
- Marot S. 2003, *Sub-Urbanism and the Art of Memory*, Architectural Association Publications, London.
- Mitchell W.J.T. 1995, *Narrative, Memory, and Slavery*, in Id., *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago–London, pp. 184–207.
- Perec G. 1975, *W ou le souvenir d’enfance*, Denoël, Paris.
- Ponty M. 1948, *Exploration of the Perceived World: Sensible Objects*, *Causeries* radio lecture series.
- Rossi A. 1982, *The Architecture of the City*, transl. by D. Ghirardo and J. Ockman, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Spieker S. 2008, *The Big Archive: Art from Bureaucracy*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Spoerri D. 1994, *An Anecdoted Topography of Chance*, Atlas Press, London.
- Spuybroek L. 2011, *The Sympathy of Things: Ruskin and the Ecology of Design*, Bloomsbury, London.
- Stewart S. 1993, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, MD.
- Yates F.A. 1966, *The Art of Memory*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London.