

Research Plan for Theory Paper – Archaeology of Nostalgia

Keywords: Nostalgia, Archaeology, Experience, Perspective, Speculation

Theme

"The Greek word for "return" is *nóstos*. *álgos* means "suffering." So nostalgia is the suffering caused by an unappeased yearning to return." ¹

Nostalgia refers to a process of recalling a relatable experience of an individual. The process contains not only the strong feeling of sadness but also pleasure, longing for return to an intimate moment or a desired place. The experience is neither limited to only a period, a space, an object, a person, or a climate condition. These are some factors associated with the environment where the experience is constructed.

My interest on Nostalgia will be examined through an archaeological study of material culture in terms of Remnants and Mementos. Through collecting relatable objects, it reveals the memories of individuals, which is an intimate experience bound to certain environments in the past.

Problem

I found the analytical research from a top-down approach to create a generalised understanding of a site limiting. For Thessaloniki group research, the mapping approaches for the collective border and territory mapping basing on cause-and-effect study is found to be limiting for understanding the site, in the way that emotionless study could not reflect ones' experience in the city. The site is analysed from the large-scale mappings as well as from the inanimate data of the governing systems. Only the basic relationships among different organizations and the places have been constructed.

Looking at the city from an outsider's perspective, we have developed our collective mappings, and understood parts of the systems that operate the city. However, one could not know the atmosphere, the potential, and the experience of living inside the city due to the limitation.

Aim

The theory paper will investigate nostalgia from an archaeological perspective, with the hope that an approach in perceiving the nostalgic experience in a site could be defined, to derive a unique and experience-driven psychogeographical perspective to examine the site. Afterwards, it could help inform a specific study area, and establish a set of guidelines on research of the area through the immersive perspectives of the individuals, and furthermore, found the base of the design in Thessaloniki.

RQ

How does the study of nostalgic experiences derive a unique and experience driven perspective to examine the site?

What could inform the nostalgic experience related to the site?

What is the importance of Nostalgia to the environment setting or to the site?

What is the role of Time in the study of nostalgic experiences?

In what way the approach is guided by the unique perspective, and then advises a theory for the base of the design?

¹ Kundera, Milan. *Ignorance*. Translated by Linda Asher. Faber & Faber, 2020.

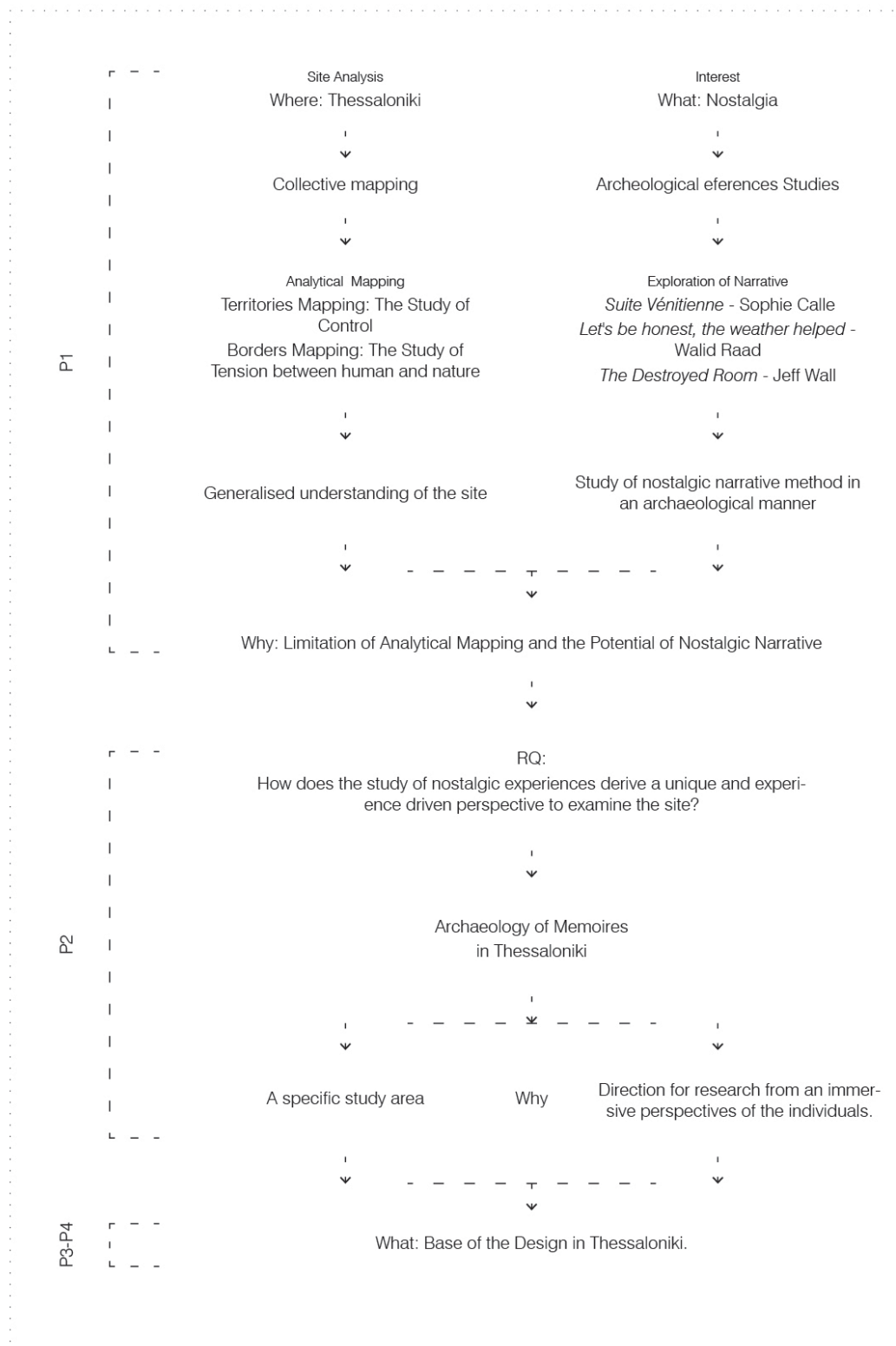


Figure 1 Research Diagram, Authors own diagram

Theoretical framework

The study of Nostalgia is strongly related to the concepts of Perception of experience and Archaeology; therefore, the theoretical framework would focus on the two main concepts.

Perception of experience

According to Guy Debord, *"Psychogeography could set for itself the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals."*² The concept could provide a basic idea of how one could understand a city through the lens of memories of the individuals as well as inform a possible method (Dérive) to get into the study of the city.

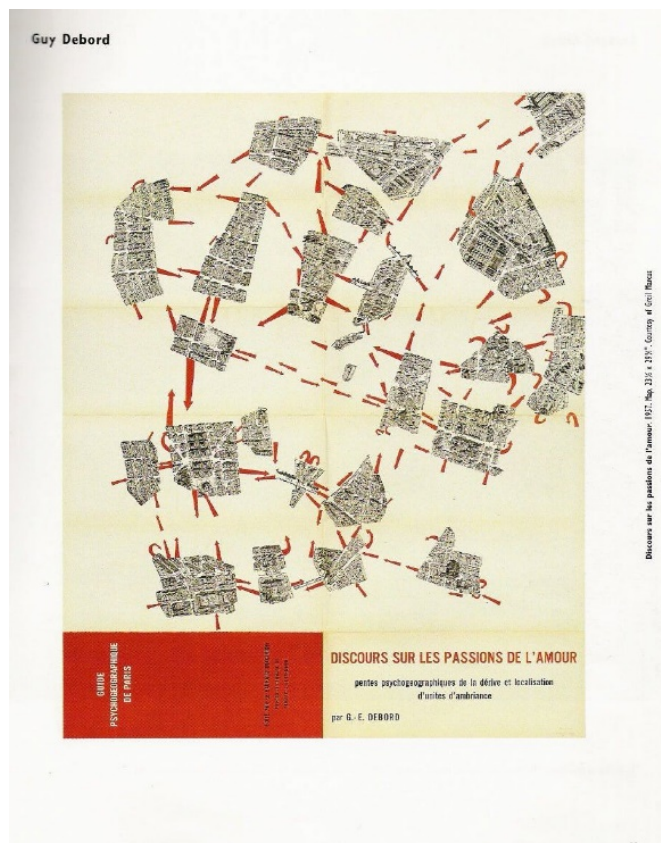


Figure 2 The Naked City by Guy Debord in 1957

Also, Gaston Bachelard looks into the meaning of space through phenomenology.

*"Maybe it is a good thing for us to keep a few dreams of a house that we shall live in later, always later, so much later, in fact, that we shall not have time to achieve it. For a house that was final, one that stood in symmetrical relation to the house we were born in, would lead to thoughts—serious, sad thoughts—and not to dreams. It is better to live in a state of impermanence than in one of finality."*³

It relates the living experience to the inhabited space, which provides to the paper a more spatial exploration of Nostalgia than the urban concept of Psychogeography.

² Debord, G. *Situationist International Anthology*; Revised and Expanded Edition. Edited by Ken Knabb. Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006, 8-11

³ Bachelard, G & Jolas, M. *The Poetics of Space*. Penguin Books Ltd, 2014, 5

Likewise, Kevin Lynch also study the urban fabric through the experience of the individuals, but in a less emotion and collective approach.

*"City design is therefore a temporal art... At every instant, there is more than the eye can see, more than the ear can hear, a setting or a view waiting to be explored. Nothing is experienced by itself, but always in relation to its surrounding, the sequences of events leading up to it, the memory of past experiences."*⁴

The five elements that he used to analyse the Imageability could provide a base for analysing a city from the idea of Nostalgia.

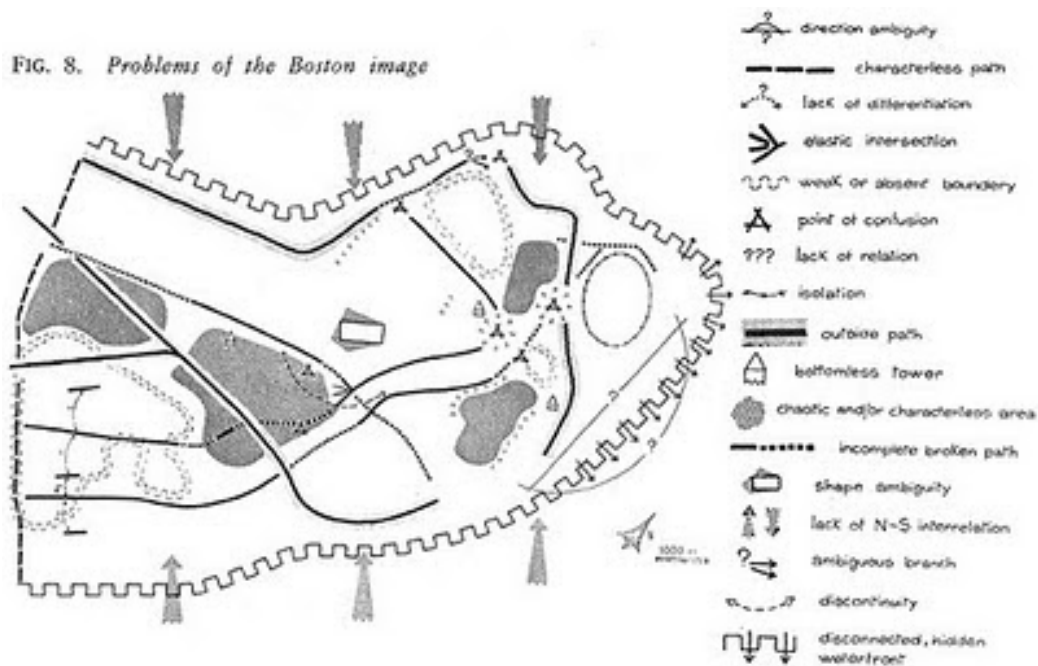


Figure 3 Problems of the Boston image by Kevin Lynch

Archaeology

Archaeology in the paper is about how to speculate and reveal potential experience through nostalgic objects. Ariella Azoulay in her book stated that,

*"Thinking about imperial violence in terms of a camera shutter means grasping its particular brevity and the spectrum of its rapidity. It means understanding how this brief operation can transform an individual rooted in her life-world into a refugee, a looted object into a work of art, a whole shared world into a thing of the past, and the past itself into a separate time zone, a tense that lies apart from both present and future."*⁵

The thinking behind the creation of a nostalgic object could reflect memories of individuals, which align with the study of Archaeology. It explains the potential of Archaeology to uncover a hidden or potential situation of a place.

⁴ Lynch, K. *The image of the city*. MIT Pr, 1979, 1

⁵ Azoulay, A. *Potential history: Unlearning Imperialism*. Verso, 2019, 6

Methodology

Nostalgia required methods for studying mental situation in different scales to represent the experience of individuals. The methods chosen for the research have the potential to explore the mental understanding of Nostalgia.

Collaging

"...The practice of collage has the capacity to capture spatial and material characteristics of the built environment..."⁶

Collaging can create juxtaposition, contrast, alignment, etc. The ability to illustrate perceptual experience, which could be space and activities, without the restriction of time. It could establish relations between different objects, which allows the exploration of the relationship between the space and the nostalgic experience in both past, present and future.

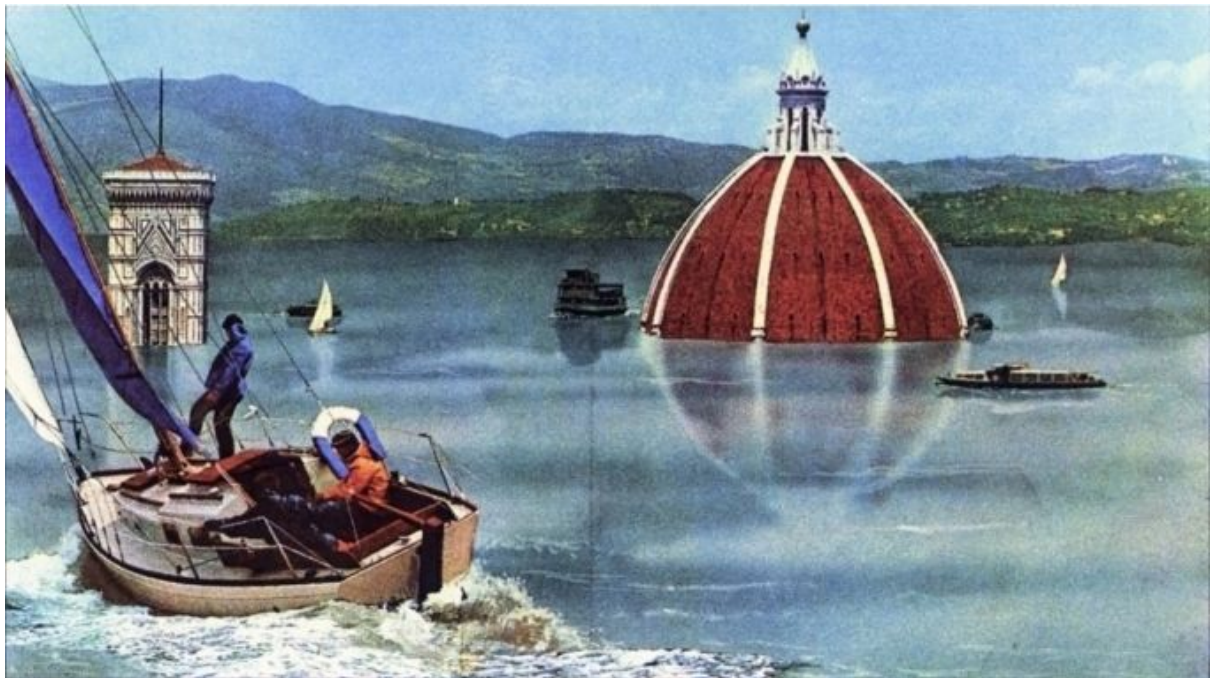


Figure 4 Rescue of Italian historic centres (Italia Vostra), Florence by Superstudio in 1972.

Derive and Psychogeography mapping

"The sudden change of ambiance in a street within the space of a few meters; the evident division of a city into zones of distinct psychic atmospheres; the path of least resistance that is automatically followed in aimless strolls (and which has no relation to the physical contour of the terrain); the appealing or repelling character of certain places—these phenomena all seem to be neglected. In any case they are never envisaged as depending on causes that can be uncovered by careful analysis and turned to account."⁷

⁶ Shields, Jennifer A. E. *Collage and Architecture*. Routledge, 2014, 2.

⁷ Debord, G. *Situationist International Anthology*; Revised and Expanded Edition. Edited by Ken Knabb. Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006, 8-11.

The Derive and Psychogeography mapping fosters the understanding of specific effects of the geographical environment from an experience-driven perspective, which is able to introduce a nostalgic understanding of the site.

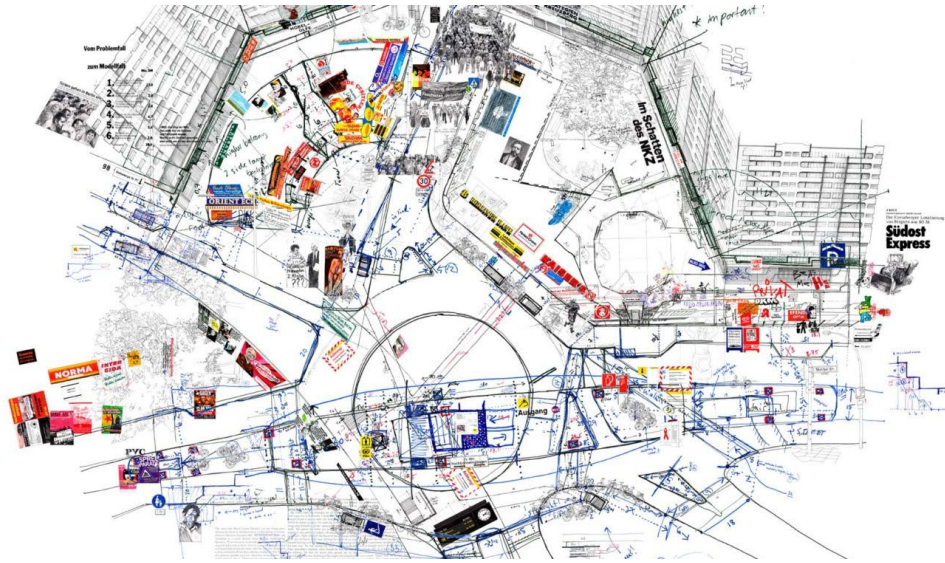


Figure 5 Berlin's Kottbuser Tor, as psychogeographically mapped by Larissa Fassler in 2008.

Archaeological Studies of Remnants and Mementos

The Remnants and Mementos could be the hints of a hidden story. Archaeological Studies, through the fragments of the records as the clues to impose a potential nostalgic experience, reveal the insights into the site from an experience-driven perspective. The collection "I might die before I get a rifle" by Hannah Mrad in 1993 is an example of archaeological studies to reveals a practice of Mrad to memorise the explosive devices after he was recruited into the Lebanese Army's Ammunition and Explosives division.⁸



Figure 6 I might die before I get a rifle by Hannah Mrad in 1993

⁸ Mrad, Hannah. "I Might Die before I Get a Rifle." Art: The Atlas Group: Lebanon: Walid Raad, <https://www.theatlasgroup1989.org/>.

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