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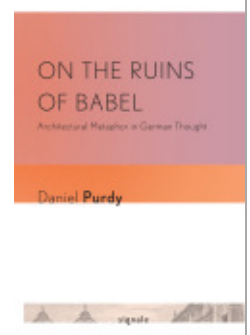
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The House of Memory: Architectural Technologies of the Self

The ancient world had its own tradition that organized thought in the form of buildings. As with architectural theory, the surviving sources are Roman, but the practice is unquestionably much older. Rhetoricians advised their students that in order to remember the many facts and stories that one needed to draw upon in public speaking, it was useful to construct a mental storage space.¹ The human body, however, was not the model for this space; rather, the mind conformed itself with some real or idealized building. The analogy between a house and memory appears in Roman rhetorical treatises in order to spur recollection, to allow an orator to quickly pull from his mind information as he is speaking. In modern writers such as Descartes or Goethe, the comparison becomes a metaphor for education, in which the self is constructed or renovated through the application of rational principles derived from architectural practice. To be sure, both ancient and modern connotations appear in the eighteenth century. German men trained in Latin since boyhood would have been quite familiar with Cicero and Quintilian, both of whom invoked architecture as an aid for memory and as a means to conceptualize

1. Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De oratore*, trans. E. W. Sutton and H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), II.lxxxvi.351-lxxxix.361; Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, trans. H. E. Butler (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), XI.ii; *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, trans. Harry Caplan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), III.xvi-xxiv.

subjectivity as an organic, intelligible unity. Indeed, as we shall see, the two analogies are thoroughly intertwined in Goethe's account of his trip to Rome, where the recollection of his childhood and his reeducation of himself at middle age are described in architectural terms. Both Kant and Goethe use architectural methods in their self-reflective examination of knowledge. They are concerned about how complete their knowledge is (have they left something out, forgotten or overlooked some feature?) or how well it can be recalled. Kant's architectonic urge to arrange all scientific knowledge as a whole, in order to determine whether some discipline has been dropped unaccountedly, derives from the ancient practice of storing information in the "treasure-house" of the mind. Kant's epistemology introduces modern accounting procedures into the ancient memory structure. In general, though, the dual problem of remembering and arranging knowledge for storage are legacies of the *ars memorativa*. They are derived from preliterate techniques for data storage and retrieval that Cicero and his immediate successors turned into writing.

Roman mnemonic practice understood thought as an activity within an imaginary space. The mind was described in spatial terms in order to address the problem of time. What became of perceptions and thoughts in the long run? Although memory seemed a natural faculty, it was also clear that it could be enhanced through a calculated exercise. In its most general terms, this exercise entailed creating a spatial order in the mind so as not to be overwhelmed by the flow of time. Memory was thus conceived as a space wherein perceptions could be held over time. Latin rhetoricians repeat the trope that memory is a treasure-house.² Spatialized memory entailed arranging the present moment into distinct entities that were then placed within a stable container, where they would be preserved until they were needed again. Within this practice, architecture was presumed to be a stable component. The mind flows, perceptions roll into consciousness, but the house of memory, within which these are contained, remains unaltered. The spaces that hold memories are conceived as outside the flux of quotidian consciousness, yet of course these structures are themselves imaginary; they are well-ordered, visual forms the mind uses to house other more chaotic impressions.

The basic technique works as follows: a speaker selects a physical space and imprints it upon his mind by walking around it, noting its features carefully. It is important that the space be divided up into distinct areas (*loci*). Having fixated upon the shape of these rooms, the speaker then creates striking images, which represent the information he wants to remember. They in turn are placed in specific locations within the framing space. For example, they could be set in different parts of the house, so that when they needed to be remembered, the speaker would imagine walking through the house until he stopped in front of the picture he wanted. Then by seeing the image with all its strange features he would remember what

2. Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, XI.ii.2; *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, III.xvi. 28.

he was trying to remember. The relationship between the *loci* and the images set there compares to the relation between wax tablets and letters that are written on them. The striking images correspond to the tablets because both are supposed to be stable over time. Like letters, the images can be erased when they are no longer needed.³

While the *loci* are meant to be stable features of the memory system, they are just as much a product of the imagination as the graphic images used to store data. The Latin works all begin by suggesting that students of this technique use a familiar, presumably real, building within which to arrange their images; however, it seems that more advanced users of the technique required more than one such structure, and so during the course of their lives would construct many memory buildings. Quintilian suggests at first one use a spacious house with many rooms. Roman domestic architecture would have been his readers' most comfortable milieu:

These symbols are then arranged as follows. The first thought is placed, as it were, in the forecourt; the second, let us say, in the living room; the remainder are placed in due order all around the *impilvium* and entrusted not merely to bedrooms and parlours, but even to the care of statues and the like. This done, as soon as the memory of the facts requires to be revived, all these places are visited in turn and the various deposits are demanded from their custodians, as the sight of each recalls the respective details.⁴

Later, he allows that the technique works equally well if one uses a public building, the places along a long journey, the defensive walls of a city, and even pictures or imaginary sites, an option that becomes important in the Middle Ages when monks start using Noah's ark, the temple in Jerusalem, or the city of God as the arena for memory.⁵ The author of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* also recommends fictional spaces as backdrops: "For the imagination can embrace any region whatsoever and in it at will fashion and construct the setting of some background. Hence if we are not content with our ready-made supply of backgrounds, we may in our imagination create a region for ourselves and obtain a most serviceable distribution of appropriate backgrounds."⁶ By allowing for fantastical spaces, these later writers separate rhetoric from some specific locality. Whereas Cicero was said to have relied on the physical presence of Roman buildings to argue many of his cases, Quintilian and the *Ad Herennium* make the exercise more a matter of the imagination, thereby separating the mental operation of creating a space from actual places.

3. *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, III.xvii.31.

4. Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, XI.ii.20.

5. Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

6. *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, III.xix.32.

Today we must rely on written sources in order to get a sense of the Roman, and the earlier Greek, memory arts.⁷ There were, presumably, many cultures that relied on recollection rather than writing. Memory, Cicero noted in *De oratore*, was a special property of the orator. Quintilian states that the two forms of retaining knowledge are not completely interchangeable, because a speaker will need to draw on memory in responding to his opponents in a debate without relying on a written text. Eloquence requires more than reading, and in extemporaneous speaking memory is the most important skill: "It is the power of memory alone that brings before us all the store of precedents, laws, rulings, sayings and facts which the orator must possess in abundance and which he must always hold ready for immediate use."⁸

Imbedded in the Roman discussion lies the mythical memory of the technique's origin. By recalling the legend of its discovery, the *ars memorativa* enacts its own technique. Cicero commences his discussion of the technique by retelling the story of how the poet Simonides of Ceos first discovered that memory could be enhanced by reconstructing the space of past events. At a banquet in honor of Scopas, a wealthy nobleman, Simonides chanted a poem in honor of his host. According to the custom he included a long passage praising Castor and Pollux. In a fit of mean-spiritedness, the host refused to give Simonides the agreed-upon fee for the performance, telling him instead to ask the two divinities he had included in the panegyric. As the banquet continued, Simonides received a message saying that two men urgently needed to speak with him outside, but when he stepped outdoors, he could find no one waiting for him. Just as he was outside, the roof of the banquet hall collapsed, crushing the host and all his guests. At this point the story amounts to a warning not to blaspheme the gods, as well as a demonstration that poets have a divine audience. But the story continues. When the relatives later wish to bury their dead, they find they cannot recognize the corpses, so horribly were they destroyed by the collapse. The only survivor, Simonides is able to identify the bodies because he recalls where each person was sitting when the roof fell in.

Cicero tells the story with a bit of skepticism and with the sense that it is already quite familiar to his audience, as is, indeed, the topic of memory techniques in general.⁹ Quintilian is just as sensitive about boring his audience with an old yarn, though after completing the telling he mentions all the discrepancies among its many sources, thereby making clear once again that the story had been told many times. This familiarity points to a most basic memory practice, the retelling of myths. By alluding to the story's all-too-familiar status, Cicero and Quintilian

7. Sabine Heimann-Seelbach argues that the tradition can be traced to the pre-Aristotelian rhetoric of the Sophists. Sabine Heimann-Seelbach, *Ars und scientia: Genese, Überlieferung und Funktionen der mnemotechnischen Traktatliteratur im 15. Jahrhundert* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2000), 417–425.

8. Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, XI.ii.2.

9. Later he cuts off his discussion, "in order that I may not be prolix and tedious on a subject that is well known and familiar." Cicero, *De oratore*, II.lxxxvii.358.

are presumably deploying the ironic gesture of the storyteller about to commence his performance. For a moment, they engage in the rhetoric of narrative performance. But both authors are careful not to call attention to the fact that they are also employing one of the oldest techniques of remembrance, namely storytelling. The trick is quite simple: in order to make it easier for the audience to remember the technique they are about to explain, Cicero and Quintilian retell the myth of Simonides, thereby associating the well-known narrative with the mental exercise of constructing and populating a memory space. The story of its origins reminds the audience how to engage in the complicated technique of memory storage. Yet even as they tell the story, these Latin rhetoricians distance themselves from mere rhapsodes, oral performers who have learned epics, such as the *Iliad*, through exact, line-by-line memorization. They expressly state that the technique they describe does not require word-for-word recollection. They make clear that rhetoricians compose speech without recourse to a mental script. Quintilian, who provides considerable advice on how to learn a speech by heart, nevertheless concludes that the best way to avoid making errors while speaking is to organize thoughts by dividing them into separate categories, a strategy that reiterates the mnemonic technique.¹⁰ The tale's conclusion makes clear their preference for the spatial model of recollection. Simonides had earlier in the evening engaged in the older narrative form of recollection, by reciting a poem he had prepared before the dinner. Only after the collapse of the building does Simonides discover the memory trick that the rhetoricians use for storing facts. The story implies that spatial recollection differs from narrative performance. Simonides recalls the identities of the corpses not by retelling the experiences of the dinner. His recollection does not come through narration, but instead through the imaginary reconstruction of how the bodies were positioned in the room. The myth of Simonides has a double function. Both Cicero and Quintilian cannily use it as a reminder of how the rhetorical technique of recollection works, even as the tale's conclusion quietly supplants this older mode of remembering with the newer spatial method.

The Simonides myth is memorable because of its fatalistic plot and its graphic violence. The image of bodies crushed beyond recognition—Quintilian reports that not only their faces but also their limbs were indistinguishable—provides just the type of graphic memory cue recommended by the *Ad Herennium*: “We ought, then, to set up images of a kind that can adhere longest in the memory. . . . If we somehow disfigure them, as by introducing one stained with blood. . . , so then its form is more striking.”¹¹ More than just relying on order to identify the corpses, Simonides reconstructs in his mind the space of the banquet. His recollection in the tale lays out the two-step process later writers recommend. The space of memory is based upon a real building but is shown to be wholly imaginary once the hall

10. Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, XI.ii.36.

11. *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, III.xxii.37.

has been destroyed. The space continues to exist only in Simonides' memory. The founding act of the *ars memorativa* entails the reconstruction of a ruined building. The mind restores what was knocked down by imagining the ruin as a whole again with its contents restored to life. That the practice of memory begins as the imaginary reconstruction is itself significant, given how many acts of memorialization attempt to perform the same miracle, to restore the dead through remembrance of their lived environment.

The tale of Simonides goes far beyond describing a disused rhetorical trick. Aside from being famous boxers, Castor and Pollux were, of course, twins. The towers that collapsed in New York were known by this name, too. The recovery from the September 11 attacks shows that now, too, the process of memory begins after the collapse. As in the Greek tale, the bodies in the World Trade Center were unrecognizable. The tireless urgency of relatives wanting to recover their dead was manifest in New York as much as in the tale of Simonides, and the solution lies in mental reconstruction. Simonides recalls what the building looked like before it was destroyed; he then locates the inhabitants within his figuration of the space. This two-step process has been reiterated by relatives of those lost in the World Trade Center on September 11, who stress where their family member worked in the building: "She was an analyst on the forty-first floor." Thus memorialization begins with simple statements about where the dead were when the buildings fell.

Both Cicero and Quintilian leave unspoken the tragic, religious significance of the story in order to focus on how the tale illustrates the techniques of memory enhancement. Cicero states flatly that tale shows "that the best aid to clearness of memory consists of orderly arrangement."¹² The parallel between rhetoric and architecture would have been evident to Romans. Classical architecture laid great emphasis on orderly arrangement. The Renaissance appropriation of antiquity likewise drew a parallel between orderliness in thought and speech and the five orders of architecture. The Roman *ars memorativa* allies itself with architecture in part because the placement of images in a mental space relies on the order that classical buildings have. The two methods overlap in the selection of an architectural abode for storing images. Thus Cicero advises: "One must employ a large number of localities which must be clear and defined and at a moderate intervals apart."¹³ The *Ad Herennium* gives the most elaborate advice on how to select a physical space for memory retention. In a sense rhetoricians are being taught the principles one might use in designing an art museum or a stylish retail space: the space of memory needs to have readily recognizable features. It should not be overly uniform with too many intercolumnar spaces; otherwise the individual *loci* will blur one into the other, thereby confusing the speaker. As in all matters, the principle of moderation should be practiced. The space needs to be built to a scale that frames the memory

12. Cicero, *De oratore*, II.lxxxvi.353.

13. *Ibid.*, II.lxxxvi.358.

images so that they are easily recognized: "And these backgrounds ought to be of moderate size and medium extent, for when excessively large they render the images vague and when too small often seem incapable of receiving an arrangement of images. Then the backgrounds ought to be neither too bright nor too dim, so that the shadows may not obscure the images nor the lustre make them glitter."¹⁴ Quintilian makes the more psychological point that recollection occurs more easily if it takes place within a familiar space: "For when we return to a place after considerable absence, we cannot merely recognize the place itself, but remember things that we did there, and recall the persons whom we met and even the unuttered thoughts which passed through our minds when we were there before."¹⁵

Modern writers on memory such as Walter Benjamin have made similar claims about the ability of memory to work once an old familiar space opens up before the subject. Benjamin's essays on his Berlin childhood correlate walking through the city with remembering his childhood. Space seemingly takes precedence over historical narration. Benjamin's passage through neighborhoods, past houses, and into specific doorways guides the sequence of reminiscences more than any biographical temporality. The chronicle of his childhood unfolds because of spatial markers, the *loci* of Roman rhetoric. Unlike the rhetoricians, Benjamin advises against an orderly approach to recollection. Quintilian also wondered at the fickleness of memory, asking some of the same questions that motivated Proust and Bergson: "And what, again, shall we say of the fact that the things we search for frequently refuse to present themselves and then occur to us by chance, or that memory does not always remain with us, but will even sometimes return to us after it has been lost?"¹⁶ Having begun to remember, the mind has an almost limitless duration of memories to explore: "Its capacity for endurance is inexhaustible, and even in the longest pleadings the patience of the audience flags long before the memory of the speaker."¹⁷ As with Proust's madeleine or the forgotten dog in Ludwig Tieck's "Der blonde Eckbert," the stream of remembrance can be unlocked by the smallest detail: "For even in cases of forgetfulness one single word will serve to restore the memory."¹⁸

In general, we can claim that the early modern connection between architecture and literature corresponds to the relationship inherited from Roman orators. During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in Italy, this model was often envisioned in theatrical terms, as a correspondence between an arena, its stage setting, and the actors performing upon it. Architecture provided the stage upon which the other arts performed. The fact that early modern architects sometimes also had careers as set

14. *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, III.xix.32.

15. Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, XI.ii.17.

16. *Ibid.*, XI.ii.7.

17. *Ibid.*, XI.ii.9.

18. *Ibid.*, XI.ii.19.

designers is not just a consequence of absolutist patronage and spectacle. This relationship of backdrop to action persisted even as architecture and literature underwent the aesthetic and ideological upheavals that preceded our own era. However, with the decline of the classical canon and the emergence of a subjective aesthetics of taste, architecture was brought to the foreground; it was compared to the other arts, judged like a poem, a statue, or a play. Architecture became an isolated object of contemplation and not just the stable frame within which the other arts performed. Yet even as it became an object of aesthetic judgment, architecture continued to hold its place as the structure that contains and reinforces the other arts. By the middle of the eighteenth century, canonical architecture served both as the arena within which the other arts performed and as one of the many media competing on the stage for the spectators' attention. When in his autobiography Goethe recollects the importance the Strasbourg cathedral had for his early writing career, he explains the complex aesthetic dynamic in theatrical and architectural phrases. He translates the emotions brought out by a building back into spatial terms, so that the sublime experience before the Strasbourg cathedral becomes itself a "backdrop" for writing a play. The relationship of the spectator before a building is doubled.¹⁹ The cathedral is both the object of contemplation as well as the backdrop for Goethe to write drama and poetry. This doubling of architectural metaphors becomes even more complicated when we consider that this passage is itself a recollection conjured up by the image of the cathedral. The image of the cathedral that persists in the old Goethe's memory allows him to call forth, that is, narrate, the lively scene of his youth. By remembering the contours of the cathedral in the ancient rhetorical manner, Goethe is able to describe both his fascination with the building and all the writing it inspired. Within the diegesis of autobiography, mnemonic recollection frames architecture's double function as object and backdrop. Thus the poetic representation of architecture occurs on three levels in *Poetry and Truth*. Only the mnemonic reliance on architecture is not called by name. It appears naturalized within the subjectivity of the autobiographical narrator as simple memory.

* * *

Roman memory techniques persist well into the modern era; however, they operate in the guise of psychology. They are transformed into a method whereby the subject examines him- or herself, as in the eighteenth-century *Bildungsroman*, or in the age of psychoanalysis as the object of another's commentary. Goethe's *Poetry and Truth* provides many examples of how the many traditions of architectural metaphors were layered on top of each other in one text. The most sustained example of Roman mnemonics in Goethe's writing appears in the first chapters of *Poetry and*

19. Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Dieter Borchmeyer et al. (Frankfurt: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1986), sec. 1, vol. 14, p. 553 [*Dichtung und Wahrheit*, bk. 12]. [*Sämtliche Werke* is cited hereafter as FA with volume number and page number.]

Truth. Within the backwards-oriented recollection of Goethe's narration, architecture frames his earliest childhood. The family house in Frankfurt appears as the first experience Goethe truly remembers. At the start of the autobiography, he addresses the ancient problem of how to sort recollections. He distinguishes between experiences we can recall through images, and family stories retold so often they have been grafted onto our memories as if they were our own. The narrator asks: how many of our earliest memories really amount to stories that family members have repeated so often that we take them as our own? Something must lie outside these stories, a more elusive authenticity. The retold stories have much the same status that English skepticism would grant habits; they are accepted as the truth about our lives without being based on experience. In contrast to these un-lived tales, Goethe stresses the visual perception of the world as the standard for his own self-knowledge, for his autobiography, and by implication for the reader: he is after that "which we really possess from own lived experiences." The juxtaposition alludes neatly to the fiction and truth of the title of Goethe's work. Perceptions have the security of property, they can be owned, Goethe suggests, but rather than enter what he considers a fruitless epistemological investigation of this proposition (in the manner of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*), he commences to recount what he thinks he remembers: his father's house. Before long it becomes clear that both *Dichtung* (poetry) and *Wahrheit* (truth) are framed by memory.

Goethe's research for his autobiography obliged him to gather fragmentary memories, stories, diary entries, and letters. From the start, he intended to form a coherent narrative out of these diverse sources. Many of his diaries and letters from his youth he had already burned in 1797, so he asked friends to send him their recollections. Bettina von Arnim repeated for Goethe the stories his mother had told her about him. Friedrich Klinger was asked for his reminiscences about the Sturm-und-Drang movement. The sources for Goethe's research into himself were far more diverse than *Poetry and Truth* suggests. Out of small stories he wanted to construct a unified narrative that showed the protagonist's development. This was by no means typical for memoirs of the early modern period, many of which were organized as a succession of anecdotes, maxims, and characterizations of historical persons. To make matters worse, in writing his autobiography, Goethe faced the fragmentary state of his many still unfinished projects. At the point when he was writing about his own life, Goethe did not believe that he would ever complete the bits of *Faust* he had written over his lifetime. The autobiography was meant to compensate for these unfinished projects by providing a personal context that at least explained the impulses that motivated the various attempts at completion.²⁰ As David Wellbery has noted, Goethe was always concerned to present his writing as a

20. Erich Trunz, "Nachwort," in Goethe, *Werke*, ed. Erich Trunz and Hans Joachim Schrimpf (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1981), 9: 608. [*Werke* is cited hereafter as HA with volume number and page number.]

coherent whole.²¹ In his earliest lyric poetry, he strives to avoid the impression that a work has been stitched together (*zusammengeflickt*). The seams that divide one stretch of text from another should not be obvious to the reader, Goethe insisted. A complete work of art integrated elements smoothly. Thus, for example, Goethe's thrill at standing before the Strasbourg cathedral is heightened by his discovery of a harmony and coherence that organized the Gothic ornamentation that so many others had found weird and alien. He sought a similar order and development among the fragments of his own childhood.

Descriptions of his father's house and of Frankfurt resonate as metaphors of the autobiographical subject. They also reveal the tensions that divide the self. It is not a great leap to read Goethe's description of his childhood house as a recollection of his own coming into being. Given that he relies upon a method of recollection that treats buildings as vessels for thought, how does Goethe's use of mnemonic techniques reinforce his larger project of self-referential *Bildung*? There are important differences between Cicero's and Goethe's reliance on architecture as a mnemonic technique. For a start, Goethe is writing after Descartes' own adaptation of architectural techniques for self-analysis. Like Descartes, Goethe uses architectural methods and metaphors to characterize his development. When Goethe in his *Italian Journey* refers to his self-education as comparable to the position of an architect who realizes he must alter his construction plan even though the building is already half completed, we should look to *Poetry and Truth's* narrative of childhood to uncover the foundation that later in Rome needs rebuilding. Because *Poetry and Truth* was written around the same period in which Goethe completed his revisions of the *Italian Journey* the two texts can profitably be read in relation to each other, each presenting problems to which the other has a response.

The opposition in *Poetry and Truth* between household tales and personal experiences allows Goethe to encapsulate the scattered sources for his childhood narrative within a single subject-object dichotomy. Given his strong desire to avoid retelling events he could not know from experience, Goethe tries to give a phenomenological account of his earliest perceptions. However, it soon becomes clear that these indistinct perceptions are determined by the structures (both walls and laws) within which they occur. The first cogent memories in *Poetry and Truth* are not of people or events but of spaces. The childhood house serves as the framework within which specific events are recollected, and then included in the autobiography. In writing about his childhood, Goethe follows the technique of Roman rhetoricians, first thinking of a space within which memories are stored, and then moving through the space to discover striking images that aid in recalling more detailed events.²²

21. David Wellbery, *The Specular Moment: Goethe's Early Lyric and the Beginnings of Romanticism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), 124–126.

22. Harold Jantz notes that, like most eighteenth-century intellectuals schooled in Latin, Goethe was thoroughly familiar with Cicero's work: "Wir wissen aus Goethes eigenen Äußerungen und

Details drift into Goethe's recollection that allude to his adult understanding of architecture. His first conscious memory is of an old house that, he explains, was really composed of two buildings whose walls had been knocked down to form a single entity. As soon as he names the space, Goethe alludes to the story of his father renovating the house and the antagonism this project created between them. In the middle of the building rose a staircase that joined the rooms of the two houses and compensated for the different levels of the two buildings. The staircase has a crucial function because it unites two separate quarters. There is much to be read out of a divided house, both in the eighteenth century and now, but Goethe proceeds to move the narration through the levels of the house, as if he is imagining a real house, not one already loaded with interpretations. His favorite location was the downstairs entranceway, where he and his younger sister could play while the women sat nearby, preparing food or sewing. In good weather, this entrance had a Mediterranean feeling, he adds.

The opposition between familial stories and personal experience softens once Goethe has sketched out the entranceway and the street life it attracted. He returns to one particular tale told by family members about how he and the neighbor boys got into a competition throwing pots and dishes into the street to see who could smash the most most loudly. Whether the tale is true, or whether Goethe really remembered its details, remains open, for he concludes by saying that after all the dishes were broken, at least the family had a tale that they loved to tell until the end of their days.²³ Goethe's willingness to drop his epistemological scruples to allow for his own retelling of the boyhood prank recreates the domestic space wherein the women worked and talked while the children played. The story played out in the foyer and, by implication, was retold there many times.

As the narration moves through different rooms, the house is populated with a gentle mother, grandmother, and maids. All stand in contrast to his father, who makes his first appearance in the narration as a terrifying authority who regulates movement within the space (of his childhood and his recollections). The flow of memory passes through divisions in the interior, which at first are explained as simply the differences between different women but then at a crucial point become sharply differentiated. Caspar Goethe separated his children from the comforts of the feminine body. The many corners of the old house became frightening at night, we are told, and when the children snuck out of their beds to find comfort with the

Anspielungen, daß er mit Ciceros philosophischen Werken wohl-vertraut war und daß er in ihnen häufig las, von der vor-Straßburger Zeit bis ins hohe Alter hinein. Dieser dokumentarische Beweis ist im übrigen, obwohl sehr gelegen, kaum notwendig, da diese Werke durch das ganze 18. Jahrhundert hindurch Gemeingut der Gebildeten waren." Harold Jantz, "Die Ehrfurchten in Goethes 'Wilhelm Meister': Ursprung und Bedeutung," *Euphorion: Zeitschrift für Literaturgeschichte* 48.1 (1954): 6.

23. Freud reads this specific story as indicative of the young child's angry reaction to the birth of a younger brother. Sigmund Freud, "Eine Kindheitserinnerung aus *Dichtung und Wahrheit*," (1917), in *Studienausgabe* (Frankfurt: S. Fischer, 1969), 255–266.

servants, the father frightened them back into their beds: "In this manner . . . father blocked our way and scared us back into our resting places." In his telling Goethe associates the children's bed with death and the grave. The division rounds itself out in the next passage, where Goethe explains that his mother had a more pleasant pedagogical method. She promised the children plums in the morning if they slept in their beds, thereby satisfying all parties concerned. Goethe mentions that the house actually belonged to his paternal grandmother, but in doing so he only heightens the sense that his father was the authority in the building. The space is filled with desirable women and a father who controls access to them. The classical rhetorical distinction between the architectural spaces within which striking images are stored overlaps with Goethe's Oedipal recollections.

Architecture is often associated with the paternal authority to control space and the movement within it. Much of the time it operates as the frame of the frame, the structure that stands around what Goethe narrates; it becomes almost invisible, the vessel that holds the people he desires. Both Goethe and the Roman rhetoricians almost look past architecture to concentrate on the figures within. According to the Roman model, memory operates when graphic images are set inside a familiar building, one that does not draw attention to itself yet organizes its contents. The memory building holds the recollections in a safe place, it anchors them; instead of drawing attention to itself, classical architecture allows the thought to contemplate the stunning pictures it holds, thereby becoming the apparatus that projects images while seeming to remain outside the gaze. The father and the architect intervene infrequently, allowing the autobiographical subject to fix on the interplay between mother and child. As the Vitruvian terms imply, classical architecture is foremostly authoritative and secure, only by exception desirable. In recounting his confrontation with his father's penchant for Italian architecture, Goethe maps the development for his own architectural tastes, from Gothic rebellion to classicist identification with the paternal order.

The Oedipal tension in Goethe's discussion of his childhood home appears in genetic terms as the difference between a haptic, sensual feeling for space and a detached, critical eye for architectural form. In "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Benjamin makes the point that buildings can be appropriated in a twofold manner: by use and by perception, which he correlates to the senses of touch and sight.²⁴ Ordinary domestic architecture is experienced as a given. Only the traveler recognizes the unusual qualities of a building. Benjamin famously distinguishes between the haptic and the visual appreciation of architecture. Ordinary usage of a building results in a nonvisual relationship to architecture. The inhabitants of a place do not view their surroundings as a framework; they instead perceive what lies within. With an allusion to Goethe's *Italian Journey* and

24. Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1982), 1.2: 504.

the many tourists it inspired, Benjamin contrasts the habitual use of space with the foreign visitor's contemplation of a famous building. Repeated use of a building creates an unself-conscious bodily relationship to the structure. The building exists as a backdrop to those within; they notice its contours only incidentally, not by considering it as an object of analysis. Kantian philosophy might understand these two modes of perception as a result of the subject's different interests in treating architecture as either an aesthetic or a utilitarian object. As Rodolphe Gasché notes, both Benjamin and Kant argue that aesthetic attributes are not inherent features of an object but refer back to the subject.²⁵ For Kant, aesthetic judgments are derived from experiences of pleasure or displeasure as they are set in relation to the free play of faculties of cognition.

Benjamin gives precedence to the habitual mode of understanding architecture as a contrast to a touristic view of buildings that emphasizes their art historical character, their style and importance in the development of art.²⁶ Imbedded in Benjamin's account of tactile perception is a preference for the consciousness of people who work in and around buildings, rather than those who contemplate them with an eye toward mastery, either stylistic or economic. As much as classical buildings were intended to impose a sense of awe upon their viewers, to make a strong impression upon first viewing, they lose their grandeur for those who live and work around them. The perception of ordinary inhabitants and neighbors becomes an example of unauratic appropriation. Here the reproduction of an image has nothing to do with technology; rather, it is daily contact that breeds the familiarity that wears away aura. The surest sign of an urban dweller is his disregard for the buildings on his street; only an out-of-towner would stand looking in front of a building.

The contrast between haptic and visual can be mapped onto the other juxtapositions that define Goethe's description of domestic space. He recalls the house because it contains the story of his childhood. He is far more interested in the events within than in the structure itself. Only once he confronts his father, and leaves aside his tales, does *Poetry and Truth* turn to the discourse of architecture. Through most of Goethe's writing, architecture is associated with knowledge and self-mastery, but not with possessing the desired object. The actual work of architecture concerns itself more with masculine self-discipline than with pleasure in the beautiful.

25. Rodolphe Gasché, "Objective Diversions: On Some Kantian Themes in Benjamin's 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,'" in *Walter Benjamin's Philosophy: Destruction and Experience*, ed. Andrew Benjamin and Peter Osborne (London: Routledge, 1994), 183.

26. In the *Arcades Project*, Benjamin compares the material historian with the ironworker, who from the scaffolding of a modern building enjoys a view unavailable to ordinary pedestrians. Here the vista that inspired celebrated photos of workers on the frames of New York skyscrapers is celebrated by Benjamin as distinctly unauratic. Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 124–126.

In his architectural encounters, Goethe does not seek a beloved so much as a peer and a rival. The architectural texts are marked by a male-male engagement that is more concerned with comparisons between different forms of the artist. The contemplation of buildings does not evoke the Beloved, who returns the look of the poetic subject, instead architectural epiphanies establish a masculine, mentoring relationship. The desire expressed in both the Strasbourg essay and the *Italian Journey* seeks to establish a mimetic relation between architect and observer. The observing subject constitutes himself as emulating the architect as an artist. The situation is overtly professional. Looking at a building sets a standard for artistic accomplishment quite distinct from the erotic relation of lyric poetry. This interconnection is brought out most famously in Goethe's fifth *Roman Elegy*, where he taps out poetic meter on the back of his sleeping lover.

Judging from its place in *Poetry and Truth*, the renovation of the family house defined Goethe's relationship with his father. The house became the pretext for heated debates when Goethe was a university student; its classical features allowed Goethe in Italy to identify with his father. The drawn-out labor of reconstruction becomes the template for Goethe's own processual self-understanding. Even in his most classical phase, Goethe explained his own identity in terms of constant revision and reconstruction. The construction site of the family home became the unintended lesson of his father's pedagogy. The long, drawn-out renovations his father undertook in Frankfurt were closer to the architecture of *Bildung* than the promise of a brief, intense construction effort resulting in a pristine monument. In *One-Way Street*, Walter Benjamin contrasts the chaos and refuse of construction with the careful monitoring of Enlightenment pedagogy in the aphorism "Baustelle." Children, he argues, are drawn to the remnants of workplaces; the extra pieces of wood or cloth that fall off the carpenter's bench and the tailor's cutting board become the fantasy material for children to construct their own world of things (*Dingwelt*). Benjamin's aphorism draws on the important passage in *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, Goethe's *Bildungsroman*, wherein the protagonist describes childhood desire as a swarming over domestic space looking for any opening that leads to pleasure.²⁷ While Benjamin describes children in a messy space, a construction site, and Goethe a tidy household, both recount how children work against the functional regulation of space by discovering value in things and places adults overlook. In both passages, architecture, whether under construction or completed, operates in support of the paternal law that childhood desire seeks to elude. Childish happiness is associated with the lowest place in a bourgeois household, garbage and rats, and with unseen lines of movement. Feminine figures in Goethe's writing operate within the paternal architecture and are obliged to obey its order, yet they provide those delirious exceptions that produce the happiness outside the law

27. Goethe, HA 7: 19.

(which the law requires), by occasionally leaving the pantry door open. Wilhelm Meister plays out the scenario, so that the delightful and forbidden puppet theater that the mother presents can be understood as an alternative space within the father's house that resists regulation by giving the boy a place wherein he can himself assume the position of mastery.

Goethe makes clear that his father was interested in architecture not as a science studied at university but as a craft acquired pragmatically. As a young student, Goethe railed against his father's attempt at recreating Roman spaces in a medieval German city. As a mature writer, long since converted to classicism, he chastises his father for not paying enough attention to architectonic form. So long as his mother was alive, Caspar Goethe refrained from altering the two old houses standing side by side in the *Hirschgraben*, but Goethe writes that everyone in the family knew that he was planning major alterations. By way of a preface to his father's construction project, Goethe describes the common practice in old cities of expanding the upper floors of houses so that they hung over the ground floor, crowding and darkening the street below.²⁸

His father undertook various "repairs" in order to expand the upper floors of the family house, thereby circumventing new restrictions on just such construction. This process of small alterations would result in a building with little overall coherence, no proportion or symmetry. As we have noted, Goethe describes his father as unconcerned with architectonic appearances.²⁹ Looking back, Goethe reports: "There was nothing architectonically elevated to be seen in Frankfurt then."³⁰ His father was foremostly concerned with building a comfortable interior. The two houses should be joined so as to afford him and the family open spaces. During construction, Goethe and his sister were sent to live with family friends, where they entered public schools for the first time. This removal from the family home becomes the moment in the text when Goethe narrates that he first discovered the wider city. He then moves through Frankfurt's major monuments and places. Again he follows the mnemonic practice of recounting childhood friends and adventures that he associates with specific locations. The city, he announces with the perspective of the mature narrator steeped in classical theory, was organized according to random chance and the shifting necessities of siege defense. Thinking back, Goethe reiterates Descartes' opinion about the chaos of cities built over time without a single principle. Goethe concludes that even the newest squares did not display a regulative spirit.³¹ The city as well as the family house lacked the open vistas and symmetrical lines seen in the prints that Goethe's father had collected of baroque Rome. Caspar is credited with understanding the technical details of construction, but the

28. Goethe, *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, HA 9: 15.

29. *Ibid.*, HA 9: 6.

30. *Ibid.*, HA 9: 18.

31. *Ibid.*

son reiterates the old distinction between masons and architects when he accuses his father of having little “architectonic” understanding. Goethe has nothing to say against his father as a builder; his architectural comments are always centered upon the aesthetic critique of building. Caspar, like the other good *Bürgers* of German cities, expanded his town house from the inside out. The one interior component with an Italian origin was the staircase, built wide and open in the manner of a palazzo rather than in the narrow winding style of cold German houses. Even this detail would become a point of contention for the young Goethe, leading him to flee Frankfurt into the arms of the Strasbourg cathedral.

All Goethe’s comments about his father’s building appear in his late autobiographical writings. Caspar Goethe had been dead for decades, his correspondence with his son deliberately burned, when his poet son, over sixty, began to revise his angry image of his father. The little that remained was architectural. As we shall show in the following chapters, the memory of the Frankfurt house, and what was done to it, came to represent the architectonic subject and the rebuilding (*Bildung*) Goethe had undergone since leaving his father’s house.