

Removal of History

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ABSTRACT

In regarding history as a concept, the foundation of both the critical and the cultural historian relies on the metaphor selected to order the world. The acquisition of knowledge by inquiry, as in the Greek "historia", is related to the Latin "videre" (to see), and develops an historical sense which includes the perception of the past, the present, and the future simultaneously. These relationships of time usually move either horizontally as a chronological time line with clear regulations and overlaps; or vertically with the direct impact of a cut or incision that both divides and links at the same time. A ruin is a state of time where, for a moment, all three tenses collide as the past and the future crash into the present. In a ruin both the productions and the destructions of history reveal themselves as an opportunity to recognize the significance and signatures of events and the boundaries enclosing them.

Currently the war in Yugoslavia constructs the most unfortunate stage for the instant production of these ruins, begging questions of cultural ownership, geographic power structures and ethnic identity; the layers of which are all the more clearly evidenced in the catastrophic removal architectural monuments, the urban network and historical artifacts. In observation, war can be thought of abstractly as a condition or state where time moves backwards. Ideas of Kubler on the approach of the historian as one who portrays time in order to compose a meaning based on the reading of patterns in retrospect mingle with ideas of Nietzsche who saw the past as oracular: only those who understand the past as builders of the future and know the present can best use history.

The intellectual tools and instruments of the historian define the reconciliation of critical theory and historical research, as shown in both documents referenced and those produced for study. As in documentary film, an historical document functions as a lesson, a body of evidence and even as a warning constructed to seek out meanings, yet not to proclaim them. In this sense, the Association des Architectes DAS-SABIH produced a document of the destruction in Bosnia- Herzegovina entitled *Urbicide - Sarajevo* which functions as a multi-layered record, a testament, and a document of a ruin asking questions of past present and future historical facts.

This paper sets the publication of the current architectural destruction in Sarajevo as an accelerated model to regard history as something that returns to the world views of time as they are de-formed; asking questions of the understandings of time in history and the possibilities of an historical document.

In regarding history as a concept, a construct of particular instances in or through time is taken as an understanding from which a general idea may be brought forward. This beginning, or taking of a thought or thing to oneself, marks the word "concept" as a reference to that which is consciously represented in the mind through an ordering of past occurrences, a living within present boundaries, or a projection into possible futures. As various models are comprised by historical thinking, these records of movements through time-bound events are necessarily determined by a capacity to transfer historical knowledge into coherent constructions. It is from the reconciliation of critical theory and historical research that the product of the inquiry, *the document as made*, defines an approach to historical thinking regarded as something that is at once both unified and generative. The approach to the construct of time determines the making of a document. Once an understanding is modified to encompass a totality of times, an elastic boundary of the expansive capabilities of time may be thought of as a removal of the limits in historical making. It is in this clearing of an approach to time that certain boundaries are removed; boundaries which influence the making and the productions of history. An inquiry into the seeking of these facts becomes the question: how history is thought and how the documentary products of history are subsequently made as structural and flexible things may be employed as models for this investigation of the approach.

It is in the nature of one primary model of historical thinking that a set of particulars is selected and reconstructed in a form ordered by a scientific inquiry of empirically found facts and placed in a causal relationship. This assembly of events is not restricted to interpretation by a particular period view contemporaneous with the time frame under question, nor must it originate exclusively from an empirical manner

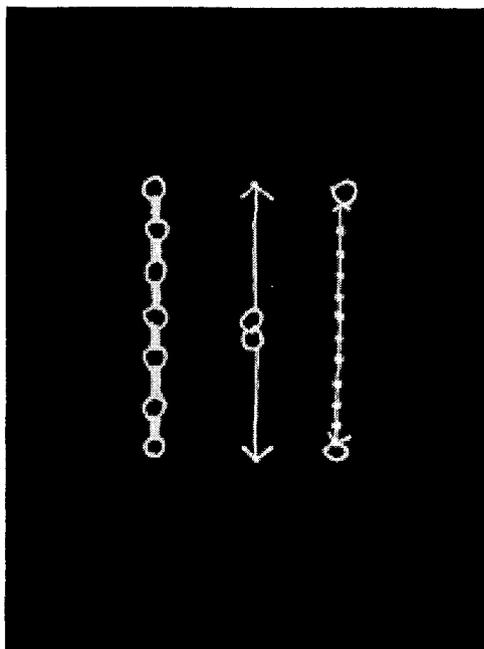


Figure 1. Timeline by Author.

of ordering in retrospect. In operation, the assembly typically links in a linear relationship selections designated as facts through an analytically based sequence which is informed by a natural order and pattern. Its documentation is dependent upon and includes the isolation of autonomous, unambiguous views treated as facts linking an effect back to a cause, or projecting a cause towards its ultimate effect. From this it follows that the formation of propositions and ultimately of judgments may lead to a truth or set of truths whereby the world may be again ordered. This manner of detection is informed by a process of inquiry framing found events as ordered facts. Yet a difficulty is encountered in the detection of these facts, and as Hayden White states, "we should recognize that what constitutes the facts themselves is the problem that the historian, like the artist, has tried to solve in the choice of the metaphor by which he orders his world, past, present, and future."¹ In ultimately making these selections, both the critical and the cultural historian review and recover texts as information and frame rules that bring this ordering to perceptions. Alternately, another principal model of historical thinking based on relative evaluation of events is not limited to the selection from past episodes and may be termed by the concept of "...living in the world...", whereby its view is "...infused with an historical consciousness, a sense of the temporality of existence; or an evaluation of the present compared with the past, or even the future compared with the present or past."² Here the sense of time is constant, yet non-linear in presented structures accessed as standards of inquiry. It is significant that this model is not dependent on the re-creation or re-construction of events in thought, word, or image, and bases its conception on a multiplicity of perspectives where past actions are seen as prospects to inform future judgments. The non-linear view-

point of time involves an openness in its nature, an ability to move about through time in sequences and loops.

As both described models of historical thinking utilize differing interpretations of the processes of basic time structures in their conceptions of historical representation, the component of a subject - object relationship may be at variance; yet both share the traditional text forms of representation. These resultant texts, both documents referenced and those produced for study, are constructs of the intellectual tools and instruments used by the historian to define either particular or multiple viewpoints. Texts as an existing referential document, and texts as a future product of a given study emerge in the forms of a reflection or of a projection. The sense of the present is frequently submerged in the reconstruction and in the construction processes. Even in the reading of thought found in the narrative manner, a certain reporting of events gives the sense of a past to those events, whether the events are recounted through either the first or third person case structures. The illusive relation of the present in chronicling history is a concern of both models, and the subsequent formations of events in time their challenge. This possible expansion of the present - and all that it may include - this flexibility of the present that at once encases both the acts of reflection and projection, is at question in the making of a document. It is in the nature of the approach to make these documents of text as compared to documents of film that an example of inquiry can emerge through the parallel.

As in documentary film, an historical document functions as a lesson, a body of evidence and even as a warning constructed to seek out meanings. Where the goal of the text is to find these meanings, the documentary film remains open to expose to the viewer what is possible as a totality of

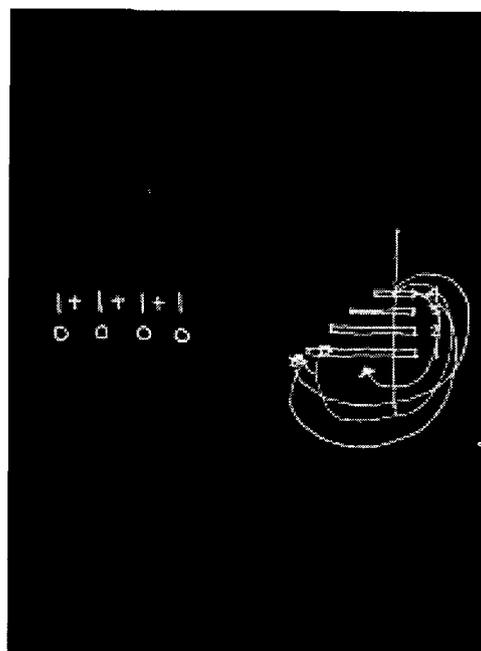


Figure 2. Timeline from discussion by Professor Olivio C. Ferrari.

these marks recorded in image sequences. At issue is not a proposed equivalence between the text and the film, but an investigation of their dual and opposing structural approaches to transcription of events in time. These comparative operations may be regarded as fields in which questions of and to history remain stated in the form of equations. Here, as Valery states, "the true, the false, shine equally in their eyes"³, and the allowance of interpretation is not singular, for the productions of history are not singular, nor are they absolute. The filmic treatment of time as a thing collapsible and expandable becomes a prototype for the study of not the interpretation, but the recording of history in the form of a flexible and spontaneous document.

In this sense, the Association des Architectes DAS-SABIH produced a document of the destruction in Bosnia-Herzegovina entitled *Urbicide - Sarajevo / Dossier*,⁴ which functions as a multi-layered record, a testament, and a document recording the production of a ruin while asking questions of past, present and future historical facts. In being termed a "dossier", the publication does not act at all purely as a negotiator, but chronicles a known and a not known simultaneously. It is this presented structure that provides a clearing to allow the possibilities of documentation to be open rather than fixed. Photographed with a typically objective viewpoint, the built structures are shown as things becoming ruins, and their respective locations are denoted through a series of notational mapping diagrams. A simplicity of the view's form catalogues facts of construction and usage as related to the past building of the city, and refers to possibilities of reconstruction in the future. The black and white format of the "dossier" document is wholly bounded in the present and allows revisions, reviews and updates to be made in red ink as new information is added and reprinted. This may even be added over the original document within mapping symbols and numeric codes. A readiness to rebuild in the future is obvious as the goal throughout the ongoing publication produced by this group. As the removal of built structures in the city are shown as pertinent facts to be addressed architecturally, these occurrences exhibit a remarkably difficult view from a distance, and it is only this detachment that allows such a clear view to the future. This distance is measured not by the media restrictions selected or by a narrative construction, but by the form best described as "kinetic documentation."⁵ The word *kinetic* used in conjunction with document gives the sense of an activity within a moment, and also the possibility of capturing that tension generated through the combinations of activities, and the cadences of systems utilized in their combining. A completeness or fullness of any duration as particular to itself, and a sense of an active moment found and transferred into something produced as a record is the contribution of this structure. The multiplicity here is not used in the sense of an ambiguity of meaning or interpretation, but to suggest the allowance of these characteristics of ambiguous or extended views employed as a model of making.

This openness, this *ambiguous eye*, this removal of the

archetypal tradition of the detective searching for the objective truth informs the production of historical documents of another kind and projects a parallel to the tradition of the documentary film. Fundamentally, this conception of regarding history is one that extends the possibilities of historical thinking and concurrent documentation. Particular to the filmic narrative is a series of events described in an ordered manner following a chain of cause and effect relation whereby the reconstruction of particular occurrences is an instrument ruled by non-continuous, or non-real-time formats. In documentary filmmaking, an openness of observation is dictated by the recording of events as things not remade by a filmic assembly, but made on film concurrently with the actual episode of the event. In examining the works of the director Michelangelo Antonioni, Sam Rohdie finds "an aspect of the documentary tradition is not that it presumes to tell the truth, nor that it seeks to be objective, but that fundamentally it doesn't know and in that sense is not in complete possession of the narrative; the sense of such documentaries is not in the presentation of the known; but in the investigation of a not known..."⁶ This re-making is overcome by an uninterrupted temporal structure, and the question becomes one of waiting for an event. The moments preceding and those to follow fall within the record of an expanded sense of the present. As the director Antonioni has stated, "I've always wanted to make...a mechanism not of facts but of moments that recount the hidden tensions of those facts, as blossoms reveal the tensions of a tree."⁷ These tensions are the vehicle for the range of possibilities to be understood and built upon. Here the truth of the event is in "... the disclosure of the merely potential, as the oak is the dynamic truth of the acorn."⁸

Part of the technique of that investigation is the openness in forms of approach to generating the record of time elapsed. "One function of this autonomous but non-dominant narration is to seek out meanings, not to proclaim them... the narrative remains open; and the camera regards it as it is formed. Without a finality known in advance, everything is potentially crucial, but nothing definitely so."⁹ It is this narration at a distance which is the critical operation. The distances fixed between events and observations created by a slowing down of elapsed time, and also the distances between multiple points of view. These views exist not only in the individual settings of the camera or viewpoints, but in the construct whereby multiple subjects combine to form a complete picture in an objective manner. By this fundamental origin, there is no privileged view in the documentary film. It has a willingness to make the image more full, the time less bound. The resulting message is one not necessarily given a particular weight or code as to which events are central, but views from an eye that watches as things unfold in time.

In the world of the text, the acquisition of knowledge by inquiry, as in the Greek "historia", is related to the Latin "videre" (to see), and sets aims toward the development of an historical sense which includes the perception of the past,

the present, and the future simultaneously. These relationships of time usually move either horizontally as a chronological time line with clear regulations and overlaps, or vertically with the direct impact of a cut or incision that both divides and links at the same time. In the world of the film, it is well known that time is not bound by chronological constraints. Time is purely expressive, and therefore can be exploited as there is no absolute time in cinema. Its suspension of what is known and not known is transitional, not translational, whereby the construct goes beyond the iconological power of the content of the image to the space and time around the image. The perception of the image itself is based on the construct of a pattern employing the progression of images as things sharing enough similarity and enough difference within each frame to constitute the appearance of motion, and therefore the passage of time. Reality is ordered exactly to the degree in which it satisfies one's thoughts cued by a persistence of vision. As screened, fully one third of the time black is projected, and both motion and time are purely illusory. From this one is encouraged to select readable time frames from a construct of non-time bound events. With the exception of the photogram, all photographic images not only require the existing machine of a camera/operation, but also of an existing reality in place whether staged or found and observed. As a prospective venture, a readiness to be alert to what is probable and what is possible, the documentary film structure contains an openness, a willingness not only to allow, but to encourage interpretation, remove opinion from the structure, and yield back to frame something larger than itself. In this sense, the construct has an unexpected quality functioning as that which may be alternately formed and read, giving to its temporality a multiplicity allowed through an operation in which one becomes a participant as viewer. This removal, either collapse or expansion of the constraint of time bound formulations, can be evidenced in productions that defy a one-way closed pattern of temporal arrangements in favor of a two-way bilateral pattern operating on both the horizontal and the vertical dimensional planes.

A built model of this illustration of time and tense can be found in a ruin. As a ruin is a physical state of time where, for a moment, all three tenses collide as the past and the future crash into the present, the ruin becomes an artifact of the nature of this model of inter-related intervals of means and measure. In a ruin both the productions and the destructions of history reveal themselves as an opportunity to recognize the significance and signatures of events and the boundaries enclosing them. The ruin also waits. Currently the war in the city of Sarajevo depicts the most unfortunate stage for the instant production of these ruins, begging questions of cultural ownership, geographic power structures and ethnic identity; the layers of which are all the more clearly evidenced in the catastrophic removal of architectural monuments, the urban network and historical artifacts. In terms of models regarding rhythms of time, war can be thought of abstractly as a condition or state where time

moves backwards. Ideas of Kubler on the approach of the historian as one who reads and composes patterns in retrospect mingle with ideas of Nietzsche who saw the past as an "...oracular voice. Only as master builders of the future, who understand the present, will you comprehend it."¹⁰ In defining the historical sense of time, Kubler found that the historian as an observer makes contributions to the discovery of the manifold shapes of time through a perception of the pastness of the past and of the present simultaneously. Both temporal and timeless, its shape is not located as a correspondence between a regular rhythm of event and duration. He suggests that, on the contrary, the nature of historical time can parallel filmic time in that it may be intermittent and variable where action can be non-continuous and one's knowledge of the referent indirect.¹¹ Although the filmic referent must be pre-existing, time moves through the utilization of a patterned set of properties eliciting recognition of something already known or understood, while conveying a new perspective of the subject. This movement of time remains open due to the manner in which the its document is regarded at the onset.

In the publication of the Sarajevo document, a simultaneous production and de-forming of time in the character of a cinematographic construct also indexes the event as non-time-bound. This "dossier" of the current production of ruins as a result of architectural destruction is an accelerated model to regard history as something that produces views of time as they are deformed. It poses a problem that maintains space around itself, and isolates the understandings of time in history and the possibilities of an historical document. As in the questions of Antonioni, the reading of the event is not approached as a critic, but as one who exposes the nature of the event and the space around the event. It can ultimately

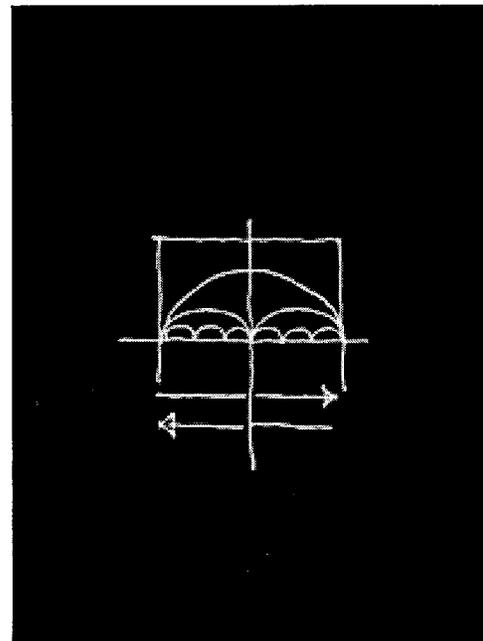


Figure 3. Timeline from discussion by Professor Olivio C. Ferrari.

guide interpretation to a degree, but as a method of historical documentation, the record, as Roland Barthes finds of writing, “put(s) an indirect question to the world that the writer, by ultimate abstention, refrains from answering.”¹² This space or room around the question is described by Virginia Woolf in writing *How Should One Read a Book?* The call is to read and “...take no advice,...use your own reason...”, and form a position where the reader “...asks from books what books can give.”¹³ This open structure as a property of not only reading, but also recording can be introduced as a means to build this room around the question. The spirit of that freedom is the mechanism on which the documentary film is based. The documentary filmic structure carries a malleable frame of time where timelines are nested within and through each other, and a treatment of tenses of time are speculative as physically demonstrated by a ruin.

In the particular warp of time presented by the active production of a ruin, these contradictions of tense can be seen as a fertile test to expand the structural method of historical recording. As history by its own definition does not intend to deal with invention, but with an accurate yet informed correspondence of the events occurring to and due to a subject, it is a reflective instrument and as such requires the pre-existence of subjects. Within the cinematographic im-

age, historical time is constructed through and by an ordering of referents. In comparison to the idea that a narration of history in which the document itself becomes the event and exists in participation with the subject; the widening of document as an idea in application to cinematography begins to state another model for the text. The allowance of interpretation, the remaining on a subject, the objectivity from the onset as opposed to the purposeful introduction of the subject into the record as the record itself, is fundamental to the documentary film. The filmic model of the making of the static timeline *kinetic* carries views of approaching history and its documentation as an unfragmented spatial event. Overlapping views of time as they are de-formed, and asking questions of the understandings of time in history, the possibilities of approach to the making of an historical document is explored. In finding one current textual and photographic document that operates with the interplay of documentary film’s reversal to subject and viewer in relation to time, this clearing of approach to time may be observed.

NOTES

- ¹ Hayden White, “The Burden of History” in *Tropics of Discourse*, pp.46-47.
- ² Robert Stover, *The Nature of Historical Thinking* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1967), p.157.
- ³ Paul Valery, “Eupalinos, or The Architect” in *Dialogues*, Bollingen Series XLV, No.4 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956), p.87.
- ⁴ Borislav Curic, Nedžad Delija, Igor Grozdanic, Mirsad Hadzirovic, Nazif Hasanbegovic, Boran Hrelja, Nedžad Hrelja, Adia Kalauzovic-Mandic, Ahmed Sadikovic, Darko Sefic, and Sabahudin Spilja, *WARCHITECTURE: Urbicide Sarajevo Dossier* (Sarajevo: Asocijacija arhitekata DAS-SABIH, 1994)
- ⁵ William Arrowsmith, trans., *That Bowling Alley on the Tiber: Tales of a Director*, by Michelangelo Antonioni, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), xviii.
- ⁶ Sam Rohdie, *Antonioni* (London: British Film Institute, 1990), p.149.
- ⁷ Michelangelo Antonioni, *That Bowling Alley on the Tiber: Tales of a Director*, p.103.
- ⁸ Arrowsmith, p.xx.
- ⁹ Rohdie, p.148.
- ¹⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, “History in the Service and Disservice of Life” in *Unmodern Observations*, ed. William Arrowsmith, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), p.118.
- ¹¹ George Kubler, *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), pp.96-122.
- ¹² Roland Barthes, *On Racine*, trans. R. Howard, (New York: Performing Arts Journal, 1983), ix.
- ¹³ Virginia Woolf, “How Should One Read a Book?” in *The Second Common Reader*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1932), p. 282.



Figure 4. Composite photograph Mosque (Rikard Larma) and Tower (Vecernje Novine), from *WARCHITECTURE*.