

Resonant Presence Act II

Narrative, Memory, and the Afterlife of Place

Reza Assasi

University of Hartford / Hartford / United States
assasi@hartford.edu

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Introduction

When a musical phrase returns after a story or a silence, what returns with it? The listener encounters the phrase again, but also the interval that has passed and whatever has entered attention. *Resonant Presence Act II* takes this possibility as a point of departure for an architectural question: how might music and narrative participate in remembering a place, and how might that remembering enter a later encounter? The afterlife of place names its possible continuation in experience after departure. It does not imply that a building survives only in memory, or that a remembered atmosphere remains unchanged.

This is the second act of a single project bringing my architectural interests together with live music, poetry, storytelling, and silence. Developed for the second Salon morning at the Church of St. John the Evangelist, known as Red Roof Church, Montréal, it is complete in itself. Attendance at Act I is unnecessary. Where the first act explores bodily presence through sound, this act asks how an encounter acquires another life through recollection and interpretation.

Remembering beyond the image

Edward S. Casey's phenomenology of remembering provides a basis for this question. In the preface to the second edition of *Remembering*, he distinguishes body memory, place memory, and commemoration from accounts that confine remembering to mental representations. Remembering through the lived body is not simply recalling an image of that body. In the original preface, Casey also argues that remembered experience is transformed rather than merely repeated.¹ These distinctions allow the project to approach memory as an active relation to a past encounter, without assuming that recalling a sensation demonstrates bodily memory in Casey's fuller sense.

A remembered place may be approached through a sound, a phrase, or a bodily orientation as well as a visual image. In this workshop, the return of a musical passage offers a concrete occasion to consider that possibility. Participants may notice recognition, a new association, or no significant difference. The episode offers a reflective practice; it does not test a general mechanism of memory or establish the lasting effects of a brief encounter.

The histories of the place we remember

Personal recollection meets a building with a history of its own. Montréal's heritage assessment connects St. John the Evangelist's interior to its religious use, noting alterations associated with changes in worship.² A participant's memory of the room is therefore distinct from the material evidence of its alteration and the community's accounts of its significance. These forms of continuity can inform one another, but they should not be collapsed into the claim that architecture simply stores experience.

¹ Edward S. Casey, *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000), "Rethinking Remembering: Preface to the Second Edition," sec. I, and "Preface," closing paragraphs.

² Ville de Montréal, *Site de l'église Saint John the Evangelist, 137, avenue du Président-Kennedy: Énoncé de l'intérêt patrimonial* (May 2022), 11.

This distinction also shapes the role of storytelling. A narrative offered within the church adds a temporary interpretation; it does not replace the histories and practices through which the place has become meaningful. The workshop approaches the sacred as a question arising within this encounter between personal response and inherited significance. It invites contemplation without treating the building's religious identity as a mood that can be detached from its community.

A practice of return

The musical and literary material will be chosen through connections among instrumental character, performance tradition, poetic language, and the stories I bring to the gathering. Timbre and phrasing matter because they give the return of a passage a particular character; music is not intended as an anonymous background to reflection. Short introductions will locate the selections and identify authors, translators, and adaptations. Connections across traditions will be made through particular works and their contexts, allowing differences to remain audible and meaningful.

The episode moves between live music, spoken passages, and silence. A musical phrase introduced early may return after a poem or story. Participants are invited to consider what, if anything, they recall of the room's audible response and their own listening position, as well as the phrase itself. They may also bring to mind a place associated with sound, whether encountered during the Salon or elsewhere in their lives. A voluntary word or brief phrase can enter the shared space, while private reflection remains equally welcome. No personal disclosure is expected, and participants may remain seated or step out. The invitation is to notice what comes to mind, not to retrieve a prescribed memory or reach a common feeling.

From the church into another encounter

At the close, participants are invited to notice whether anything from the gathering returns to their attention after leaving. A phrase might be recalled in the street; a pause might make another room's sounds newly noticeable. These are possibilities rather than expected outcomes. Not recalling anything is also a legitimate response. The interval between the gathering and a subsequent encounter belongs to the question of how architecture continues to matter.

Within the Salon, this invitation connects with my Discussion Circle, *Carrying the Sacred: Architecture, Embodied Presence, and the City*, where recollections may become material for conversation. The broader proposition stands independently of that event: architectural experience can be considered through both an encounter and its later reinterpretation. Act II proposes musical return and narrative as ways to explore that relationship, while keeping the remembered place distinct from the place itself. What participants carry away remains theirs to recognize, question, or let go.