

“Architectures of Memory”  
Natalie McKeever and Helen Hyun-Kyung Park  
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The project was developed by the 2010-2011 Performative Technologies Project Group at UC Santa Cruz’s Digital Arts/New Media MFA program, under the guidance of supervising professors Jim Bierman, David Cuthbert, and Kate Edmunds.

Inspired by the location of Mitchell’s Cove in Santa Cruz, CA we began to research the differing aesthetics of personal memories. Our chosen site had a large boulder at the center that resembled a weathered profile, an enclosed amphitheater feeling, and waves crashing on the ocean inlet. It had the atmosphere of ruins and reflected a process of buildup and breakdown. This correlated with our artistic pursuit to explore the many complexities and poetics of the construction of memory, and its erosion within the human brain.

We approached memory as a creative act. It is an act of reconstruction. A memory is rarely the same twice. The very act of remembering weakens and destroys the original event.

How do *you* remember? In research, we conducted interviews in-person and through a survey distributed online. We asked questions to gain information about the sensorial qualities of individualized memories. Is the memory blurry, slow, from a first person perspective? Do images repeat, freeze, fade? Are there smells, sounds, and tactile components to the memory? Does an emotion overwhelm the memory?

We chose to focus on the polar extremes of memory with the idea that these remain above all else when our memory deteriorates. We asked for joyful recollections, painful moments, and memories you would never want to lose.

We created three channels of video resulting in a thirty-minute loop. We manipulated found footage to interpret and reconstruct the memories that were described to us. The imagery was very abstract, lyrical, and visually layered. Each memory corresponded with a character’s facial profile that was projected onto the center rock. The speed of the face was slowed. The final channel was composed of text and projected onto the ebbing waves. The text was from the survey responses and interviews. We selected short phrases from the interviews to focus on the essence and poetry of the reminiscence.

“a million memories of playing/ my backyard in Ohio/ feels so expansive in my head/ against the scale of my little self/ I remember/ where the puddles formed when it rained/ rolling down the hill/ I see constant movement/ a bouncy ball of energy/ a feeling of being free/ a brightness and happiness”

Viewers stood and sat on the overlooking cliff sides as they watched the memories play out and wash away into the ocean. Many people take walks and runs along the surrounding sidewalk, and unexpectedly stumbled across the piece. The imagery fused with the sound of the ocean and gave the event a meditative quality. Personal memories became public and a part of the audience’s collective memory.