



澳門大學
UNIVERSIDADE DE MACAU
UNIVERSITY OF MACAU



Memory, Meaning, and Value

INTERNATIONAL HYBRID SYMPOSIUM

Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, University of Macau

DECEMBER 9-21, 2022

(China Standard Timezone UTC+8)

This symposium explores the philosophically rich notions of memory, meaning, and value. These notions underlie a broad range of theories in multiple disciplines; for example, art, history, museum studies, architecture, archeology, philosophy, religious studies, and cultural studies. Memory, meaning, and value prompt questions about movement and preservation ('We carry on because of what we remember, understand, and treasure') but also practical questions of futurity ('How do we go about memory-making, seeking new meanings, and re-valuating?'). The symposium is joined by scholars and practitioners who bring a range of perspectives to bear on questions such as these which concern issues of fundamental importance to our lives.

ZOOM MEETING LINK:

<https://umac.zoom.us/j/99642525399>

Reception will follow at 7 pm (Dec. 21)

DECEMBER 9 | 3:45-4:00 PM
MEMORY, MEANING, AND VALUE
VICTORIA S. HARRISON (UNIVERSITY OF MACAU)

4:00-5:10 PM
MUSEUM ECOLOGIES RECONSIDERED:
CULTURAL VALUE IN THE WEB OF LIFE
COLIN STERLING (UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM)

In the face of rapid environmental breakdown and increased social and political uncertainty, cultural institutions around the world have mobilised to imagine alternative ways of living on and with the planet. This talk will argue that such shifts indicate more than simply a change in policy or practice, and instead point towards a fundamental reorientation of culture in the web of life. By focusing on the historical formation and evolving place of museums in this web, the talk will explore how museums have contributed to the planetary crisis through specific symbolic and material practices, but also how emerging approaches in the field might help to unravel some of the more destructive aspects of this entanglement. What might be gained if we begin to consider all museums as always co-constituted through nature? How can new museum strategies contribute to planetary flourishing?

DECEMBER 13 | 3:00-4:10 PM (IN-PERSON)
ARCHITECTURE AND MEMORY
LUI CHAK KEONG (ICOMOS MEMBER)

In addition to its basic use function, the building is also a space where many things happen. Buildings sometimes have a relationship with people's memories. Architectural heritage reflects some values of society or collective memory. The lecture explores the relationship between architectural heritage and memory with some examples.

DECEMBER 14 | 7:00-8:10 PM
THE VIRTUES OF MEMORY;
WHAT WE REMEMBER AND HOW WE REMEMBER
CAN BE SOUL-DESTROYING OR LIFE-ENHANCING
CHARLES TALIAFERRO (ST. OLAF COLLEGE)

Memory, meaning, and values are deeply interrelated. While memory enables us to transcend time through narratives, there is a sense in which we transcend time (the temporally present instant) every waking moment (and in dream states). We cannot live in temporal instants (the present "now" that has no duration); rather we live in durations, events or episodes that we are able to grasp and weave together through memory (re-cognition). Memory, as it shapes narratives and stories of ourselves and others-- plays an indispensable role in our personal identity and understanding of the meaning and values of life. I suggest that we have obligations to remember, especially in terms of moral accountability, and from the standpoint of gratitude toward benefactors (including ancestors and teachers), and from the perspective of Christian theism. Memory is a virtue (a good power) that can be abused or used to be life-enhancing.

DECEMBER 19 | 5:00-6:10 PM
TIME AS AIR OR PYRRHO'S TURBULENT REALITY
JEAN-PAUL MARTINON (GOLDSMITHS COLLEGE)

Today's understanding of time remains entirely Aristotelian and Newtonian: time is what has been abstracted from the mundane realities of life and exclusively offers itself to be measured. If it does not obey the punctual abstraction of the clock and occur in nanoseconds or eons, time does not exist. Any somatic, psychological, or other experience of time is deemed either irrelevant or secondary. The history of the vain attempts to provide alternatives to time as measurement is infinite. Amidst this vast field, two curious and enigmatic figures in ancient Greek thought stand out: Pyrrho and his disciple Aenesidemus, both of whom offer an unusual and overlooked way of apprehending time by qualifying it as similar to air, not as one of the four elements, but as our only true reality. While this idea had no purchase for over 2000 years, it can now be revealed in all its significance. In the last 120 years, we have indeed become aerial beings. We no longer scuttle around on the ground floor below an unsuspected ocean of air. We no longer have feeble aspirations to shin a tree or scale a peak. We now have made a habitation of the air. Such a new dwelling has its own unique time, one which accords with difficulty with the abstracted and calculated time that was formulated when we only dreamed of lifting ourselves off into the air. Can revisiting the few fragments that Pyrrho and his disciple left behind help once again articulate our independence from the law of the clock and give us a renewed sense of time? This paper focuses on early Pyrrhonism (as opposed to the later work of Sextus Empiricus), the Buddhist thought that is traditionally associated with it, as well as contemporary interpretations of time from the continental tradition, especially that of Quentin Meillassoux.

DECEMBER 21 | 3:00-4:10 PM (IN-PERSON)
GIFT DIPLOMACY AND THE JESUIT MODO SOAVE
IN CHINA-EUROPE RELATIONS, XVI-XVIII CENTURIES
MARIA CRISTINA OSSWALD (UNIVERSITY OF MACAU
POLYTECHNIC)

This paper explores the reciprocal exchange of gifts within the often complicated and intriguing relations of an era characterized by and increasing global interconnection Europe - China. The Jesuit Matteo Ricci was invited to enter the Imperial Court in 1601, inaugurating the so called *modo soave*, a model of mission based on the study and integration of certain aspects of the Chinese culture. Upon entering the Court, Ricci provided his hosts with clocks, paintings, and other valuable objects, as in the costume of China. Reference be made to the procurators sent to Rome to raise the interest of Rome and European royal houses and holders of political power for this mission. Martino Martini, the first of a line of twenty such procurators, took with him a list of wanted objects for the China Mission, and which were surprisingly varied and international in character. Indeed, the "packs" destined for China were characterized by a rich assortment of high - quality objects to demonstrate the virtuosity of European science, artistic taste and markets, and simultaneously symbolizing the European recognition of the cultural sophistication of China. The objects the members of the imperial house, the *literati* and *conversi* (a special word goes to Madame Candida Xue) dispatched with the procurators and their legacies to Rome, and to European royal and noble houses are illustrative of the economic and aesthetic values mutually intelligible across cultural boundaries.

DECEMBER 21 | 4:20-5:30 PM
FROM SHARING PAST MEMORIES TO PRESERVING
CONTEMPORARY ONES:
CONTEMPORARY COLLECTING VALUES AND MEANINGS
CHIARA ZUANNI (UNIVERSITY OF GRAZ)

This paper will focus on contemporary collecting practices, exploring how current meanings and values influence them and how museums approach the memorialization of the present time, its events and trends. Museums have a long story of collecting the contemporary, in social history, history, art, and science collections, and more recently the advent of so called “rapid response” collecting practices have further strengthened these activities. However, collecting the contemporary means now also to collect hybrid physical and born-digital objects, which require new form of curation.

The presentation will depart from the case-study of projects collecting memories of the COVID-19 pandemic, reflecting on the variety of these collections and the motivations for their development. Subsequently, the paper will examine how museums have dealt with the extraordinary conditions in which does collections were initiated, and how they have subsequently approached the recording, preserving, and display of these objects.

Ultimately, the paper aims to highlight how the ephemerality and quantity of memories created and shared on digital platforms are in need of new curatorial practices, and how museums could benefit from digital preservation and web archiving specialists and develop joint initiatives to understand, research, and mediate contemporary events, and their memories.

DECEMBER 21 | 5:40-6:50 PM
THE CELIBATION OF THE PRESENT
VIRGILIO RIVAS (POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY OF THE
PHILIPPINES)

I would like to draw upon a set of terms that will, in a great deal, inform the trajectory of my presentation – initially, these are the terms *plasticity* and *retention* derived from Catherine Malabou’s notion of plasticity and Bernard Stiegler’s concept of memory. I will then introduce a minor problematization apropos these two terms. This minor problem consists of a rhetorical conceit that I will attempt to resonate with the concept of the *future*. Within this framework, my self-understanding of this task is to pursue a positive, if I may say, functionally organic relation between *plasticity*, *memory*, and the *future* (similar to what many scholars have done to cover this field of study, notably the contemporary Chinese philosopher Yuk Hui). But also take note of the word ‘organic’, which broadly refers to a vital form of existence.

I will underscore this organic relation if only to bring to bear the difficult organicity that is in store of this relation, by which I mean its ambivalent opening into the ‘ahuman’. But this opening is not an inherent part of the organic relation of these terms. Rather, the ‘ahuman’ has become an emergent property of the relation within the very system designed to stall its progress. This is

accentuated by (what I call) an impasse between the human and the natural (which has acquired the term Anthropocene, despite its inclination to a human-centred geological framing). This impasse can be described today as undergoing what I assign the function of *celibation*, borrowing from Deleuze and Guattari.

As a backgrounder, the notion of the celibate machine in Deleuze and Guattari refers to the factory of desiring-production that is older than the two desires combined – the schizophrenic and the paranoiac. In a nutshell, the celibate machine lies at the intersection of life and non-life, or if you will, idea and matter, freedom and necessity. This celibation is now at the cutting edge of techno-capitalism, compounded by pressing climate emergency, global diseases and the rise of neo-fascist ideology, which threaten the impasse (in the sense mentioned) to be drawn into a zero-degree condition (which comes in various forms).

In terms of climate science, this refers to runaway climate change. In geopolitics, the collapse of democracies under the weight of post-truth. In terms of the fate of earth-bound humans, the complete takeover of second-order nihilism. The future is grim, but this is precisely what the abyssal condition of existence comes down to in every epochal turn of history. As Heidegger says, the abyss, without grounds, plays the play in its ‘productive estrangement as foreign’. But can the present avoid this estrangement, or can estrangement avoid the present?