

*Rem tene, imagines sequentur: Augustine and the Method of Loci in Confessions 10*

In this paper, I argue that Augustine's discussion of memory and recollection in Book 10 of the *Confessions* is intelligible with (and only with) the Method of Loci as its intertext.

Specifically, I argue that, while Augustine embraced the classical topos of memory as a house (the topos upon which the Method is built), he rejected the Method's imposition of a static one-dimensional route upon memory's metaphorical three-dimensionality (a move that is necessary for the Method to be functional). In so doing, Augustine presents the process of memory retrieval as necessarily dynamic and impulsive, rather than static and predetermined.

If the Method is to be functional, one must equate memory with a house, whether real or imaginary. Thus, qua house, memory becomes a familiar structure with a recognizable and clearly defined layout, known demarcations, and fixed decorations. Through this house, then, one is to establish a fixed route, associating visible objects along the way sequentially with each part of the speech one intends to memorize. In so doing, the three-dimensionality of the metaphorical house of memory collapses into a fixed hodology, as an object leads linearly either to the object that came before or to the object that will come next (as in Aristotle's alphabet at *De mem.* 452a). Thus, the Method attempts to remedy memory's metaphorical cartography by imposing a static one-dimensional line upon it.

In *Confessions* 10, however, Augustine embraces the indeterminate nature of memory by depicting it as a fathomless house that has no discernable floor plan, that is constructed with seemingly infinite rooms, and that is filled with seemingly infinite objects. Thus, Augustine's house of memory is a house with which we cannot have complete familiarity.

The Method works if and only if one object directs the observer to a specific, subsequent object, thus creating a concrete route through the house of memory. But, for Augustine, it is the

observer's state of mind and the topic at hand that determine in which direction (three-dimensionally) one object will proceed to the next. By rejecting the notion of a predetermined linear path through the house, Augustine implicitly promotes a truly cartological conception of memory: the *res* (i.e. the topic or theme one wishes to discuss) determines what course an individual will take through the house of memory and what memories will appear along the way.

Furthermore, I argue that, while the house of memory that Augustine constructs is intentionally vague, his language in *Confessions* 10 is not. The terms he uses to describe the house of memory (*thesauri, antra, recessus, sedes*, etc.) would have been understood by his audience to refer to a typical late antique Roman aristocratic villa. This is of especial importance when it comes to Augustine's use of the term *imago*.

Unlike his predecessors, who use terms such as *imago, simulacrum, and effigies* interchangeably, Augustine is unique in that he uses *imago* consistently and almost exclusively to refer to memories of past events. I suggest that he employs this term specifically to recall ancestral wax masks, wax tablets, and wax paintings—items which would have been carefully arranged either for viewing in public spaces or for safekeeping in storerooms in any ordinary aristocratic household.

However, all of these objects were mutable in three ways. First, *qua wax*, they could melt or be remolded: thus, for Augustine, individual memories can change. Secondly, *qua objects*, they can be arranged in one particular order, rearranged in another, and even lost: thus, for instance, the sequence of historical events can change, and memories can be forgotten. And finally, an object will appear differently, depending on where the observer is standing within the room: thus, the context in which one recalls a memory will influence the way one understands and interprets it.

By appealing to his audience's knowledge of familiar architectural structures and household objects, Augustine is able to reinforce his claim that memory is mutable and impermanent. Although memory has some definition, its structure is ultimately incomprehensible, the items contained within it are malleable, and the courses through it are fluid. While the Method attempts to direct one's path through the metaphorical house of memory along a predetermined course, Augustine, instead, suggests that it is the *res* with which we are currently concerned at the time of recollection that determines our path through memory. It is only in light of the classical tradition that gave rise to the Method of Loci—and in light of the Method of Loci itself—that this interpretation of *Confessions* 10 can be possible.