

Cones Intersecting Planes: Four Diagrams With Accompanying Anecdotal Comments

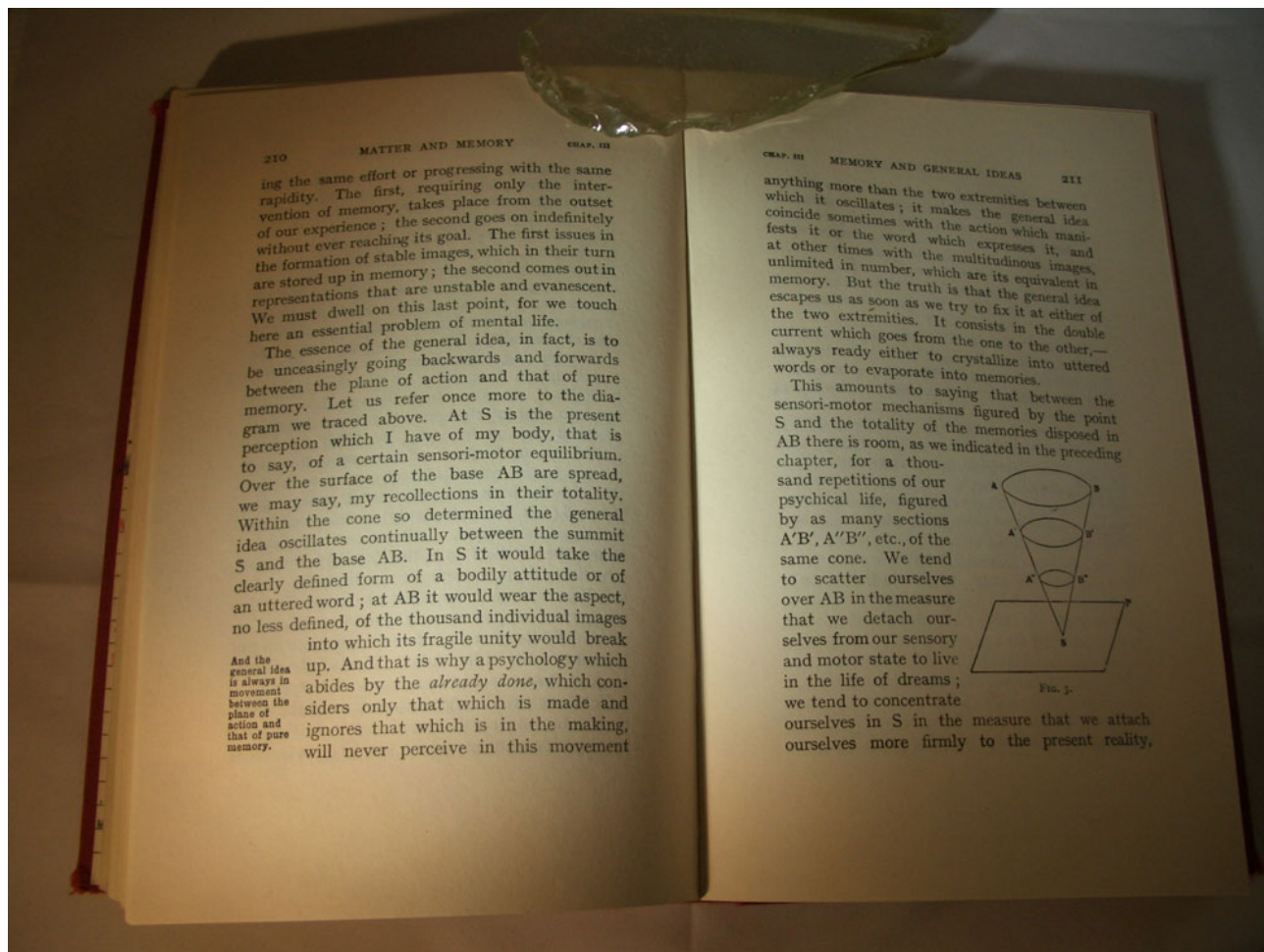


Diagram 1

I will attempt to proceed chronologically, and will be constantly thwarted throughout. The first diagram is from Henri Bergson's *Matter & Memory*. As with diagrams two and three, I took this image in my studio with a digital camera under bad florescent lighting. The picture is of pages 210-11 of "the authorized translation" by Nancy Margaret Paul and William Scott Palmer, published in 1912 as part of the "Muirhead Library of Philosophy" series by G. Allen & Unwin Company of London. In the diagram on page 211, the present is depicted as an isometric plane (why always isometric?) which intersects an inverted cone of memory.

Bergson's theory of memory is more like a theory of massively selective forgetting. He comes very close to proposing that all our memories, from the earliest to the most recent, are accessible by us in the present. The reason we don't have instant and total recall of all these memories is that such total recall would flood us with an overwhelming tide of affective feelings and pragmatic options, rendering us unable to function in the present. So our

memories are effectively filtered by the matter surrounding our bodies in the present. If a large rabid dog is running toward me very fast, baring its fangs and growling, I will rapidly access any memories I have of being pierced by sharp objects or knocked down by rapidly approaching large objects. These memories are then experienced by my body in the present as a kind of affective force that colors and informs my present actions. In every present moment, the matter surrounding my body acts as a prompt for relevant memories and a filter for irrelevant memories -- massively selective forgetting.

Marcel Proust and Henri Bergson shared a similar understanding of memory, although Proust's was less an explicit philosophical theory and more an implicit literary approach. Bergson was married to Proust's second cousin, and some Proust scholars like to argue about whether or not Bergson's philosophies of time and memory influenced Proust's writing. Chronologically, Bergson had written his first three books before Proust began working on his epic *Remembrance of Things Past*. Proust and Bergson did correspond, but Proust says in an interview (which I think I remember reading) that he doesn't remember being exposed to Bergson's philosophy. Proust's forgetting thus becomes the guarantor of his originality.



Diagram 2

The second diagram is a photograph of a t-shirt that I purchased online from the Museum of Jurassic Technology's gift shop. The t-shirt memorializes the exhibition, "Geoffrey Sonnabend: Obliscence, Theories of Forgetting and the Problem of Matter." According to the museum's website, Sonnabend is "a neurophysiologist and memory researcher who's three volume work *Obliscence: Theories of Forgetting and the Problem of Matter* stands a milestone in the field."ⁱ As with most things at the Museum of Jurassic Technology, this is not entirely true in a way that is more interesting than it merely being false.

The website gives only one direct quotation from Sonnabend's "milestone" three volume work: "We, amnesiacs all, condemned to live in an eternally fleeting present, have created the most elaborate of human constructions, memory, to buffer ourselves against the intolerable knowledge of the irreversible passage of time and the irretrievability of its moments and events."ⁱⁱ Sonnabend is portrayed as a kind of un-Bergson, proto-Alfred North Whitehead: believing in a kind of immediately decaying short-term memory, but doubting the real existence of any long term memory. Sonnabend's diagram resembles Bergson's, except the cone represents short term memory rather than all memory. Sonnabend's "experience plane" is also isometrically depicted, but here we are given a reason: "Every Experience Plane has a pitch or attitude as well as an altitude. The pitch of a plane can be thought of as the angle at which it comes into contact with a particular cone. This pitch effects the length of the decay of the experience. Similarly, the altitude of a plane can be seen as the elevation of the plane in relation to a particular cone. The altitude of the plane effects the apparent intensity (or brightness) of the experience in question."ⁱⁱⁱ I wore this t-shirt frequently as a graduate student in Portland, Maine.

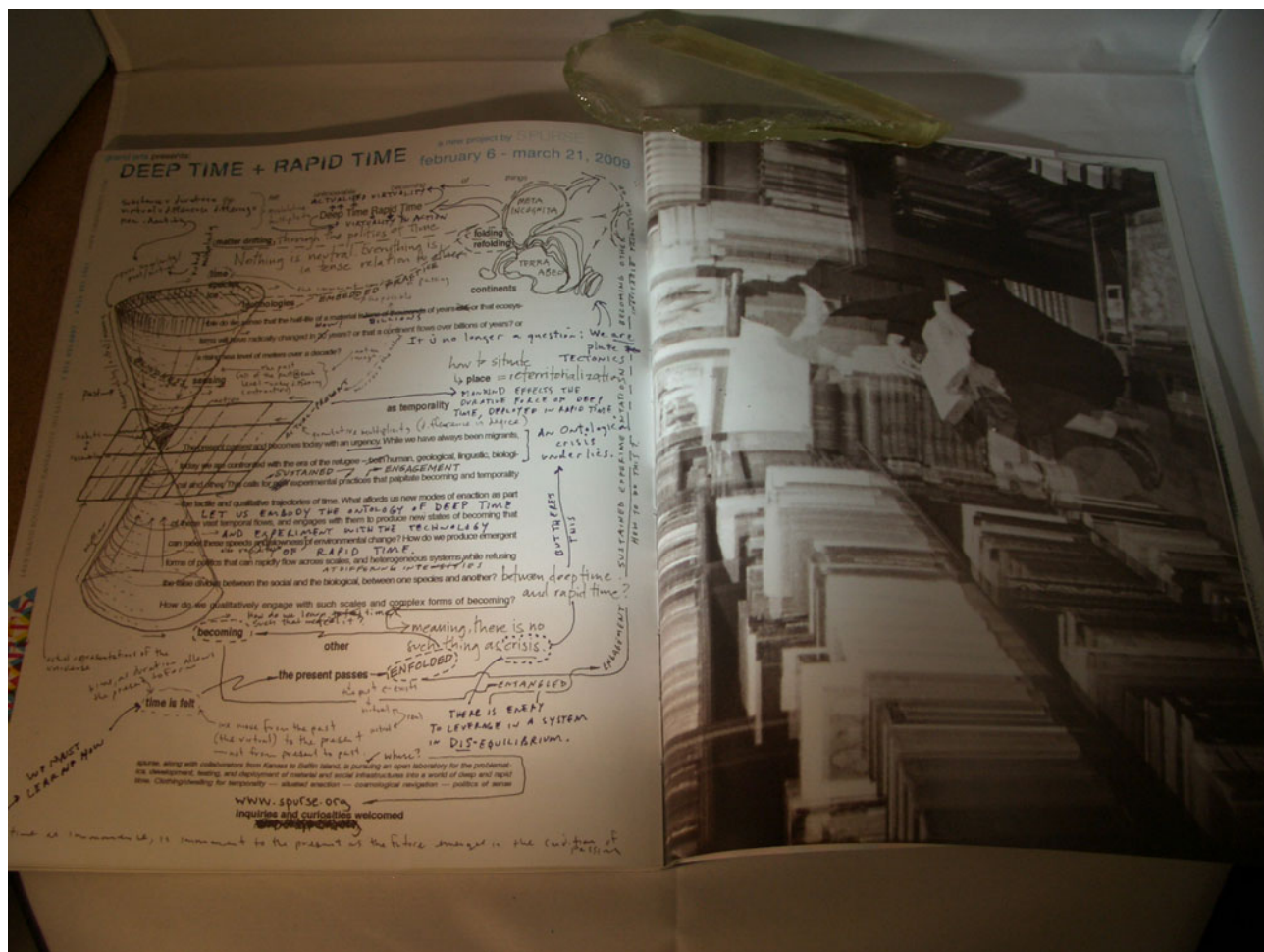


Diagram 3

This is a picture of an advertisement for an exhibition by the art collective Spurse entitled "Deep Time + Rapid Time" which took place at Grand Arts in Kansas City in 2009. The advertisement ran in the back of the winter 2008-9 issue of Cabinet Magazine. According to Spurse's web site, "*Deep Time Rapid Time* is a laboratory/training site for sensing and rethinking temporality. At the center of the investigation is a philosophical question about how we sense time which, spurse argues, holds deep practical and political implications for our contemporary situation and for our rapidly changing future."^{iv}

The cone and plane diagram on the left side of the advertisement resembles a combination of the Bergson and Sonnabend diagrams. I mention this in relation to my Sonnabend t-shirt because the co-founder of Spurse (Iain Kerr) was my professor in Portland, Maine, and we had a brief conversation about my t-shirt in the elevator of the Maine College of Art. I forget the exact details, but *Matter & Memory* was mentioned. If I remember correctly, this would have been in the summer of 2007.

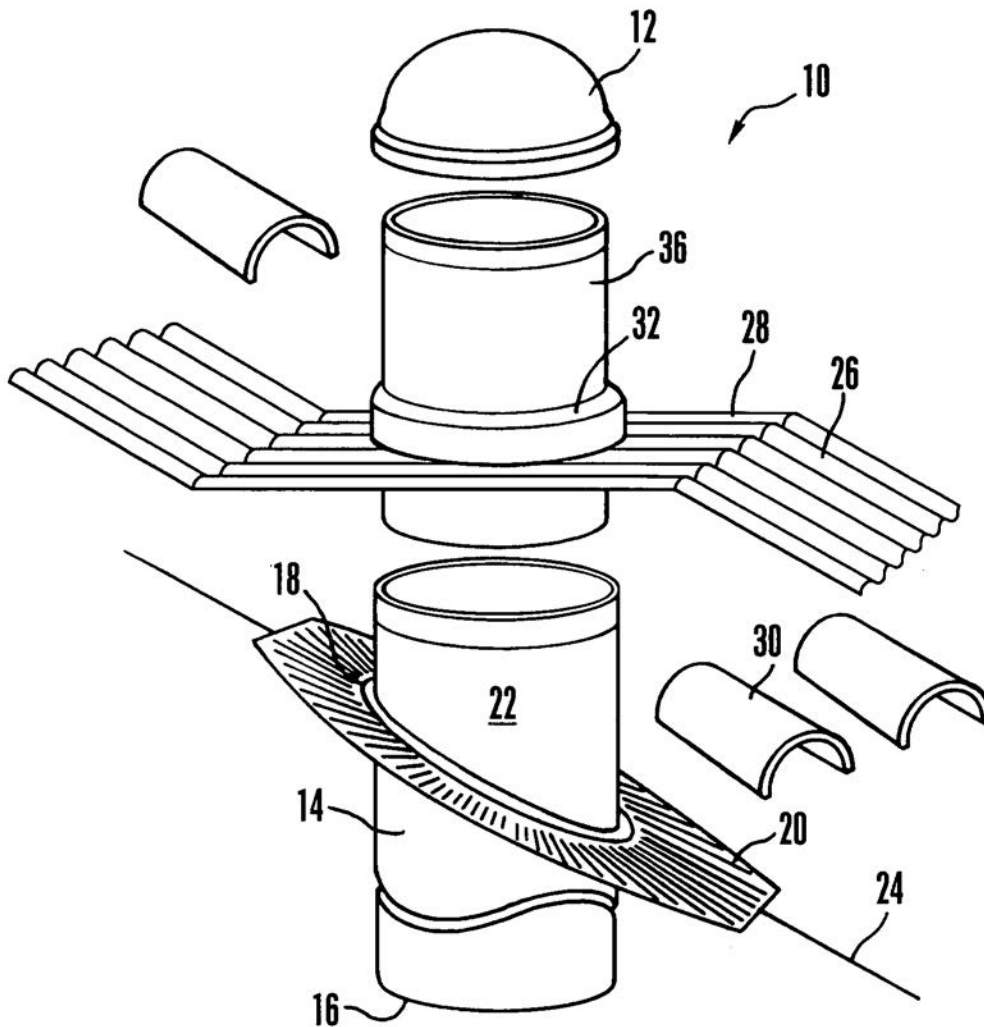


Diagram 4

This is a picture of U.S. Patent #7168211: "Tubular skylight with dome flashing and protective waffle pattern corrugation," authored by Joseph W. Prenn (San Diego, CA), David W. Rillie (Cardiff, CA) and Christian P. Stevens (Oceanside, CA) in January, 2007.^v This diagram is also related to the Sonnabend t-shirt. I was wearing said t-shirt while walking into a bar in Portland during the summer of 2007 when two guys stopped me and asked to look at it. They were roofers, and they said the diagram looked exactly like the installation instructions for an attic vent. I performed a Google image search for various permutations of "attic vent diagram" and the most intriguing diagram turned out to be this one of a tubular skylight (with dome flashing and protective waffle pattern corrugation). The cone has become a tube, but the isometric tilt of the plane is still evident. In this case, the "plane" is simply the roof, slanted so that water can drain.

Prenn, Rillie, and Stevens acquired their patent in January 2007 so that the tyranny of chronology might be legally maintained, so that none would forget that they were the first to conceive of Tubular Skylight with Dome Flashing and Protective Waffle Pattern Corrugation. Indeed, these California inventors were so thorough in their linearity, they beat my encounter with the Maine roofers by at least half a year.

- Curt Cloninger. Asheville. February 2011.

ⁱ mjt.org/exhibits/delson/oblisci.html

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} spurse.org/spurse/intro.html

^v cf: freepatentsonline.com/7168211.html