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Dreaming the Archive: Immersive Heritage and the Design of Historical Perception

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Abstract

Immersive media artworks that transform cultural archives into large-scale, real-time visual environments offer a newly promoted framework for heritage experience. This paper examines this phenomenon through Refik Anadol's *Archive Dreaming* (2017) and *Rumi Dreams* (2022), situating his practice at the intersection of design, art, heritage, and media theory. Methodologically, the paper integrates conceptual analysis with documentation-based close readings of the two works. The central inquiry investigates whether these environments engage the inferential processes that traditionally construct historical consciousness or substitute an immediate, pre-inferential affect. Grounded in film theory, embodied phenomenology, and philosophy of memory and affect, this analysis demonstrates that the binary between historical reconstruction and sensory experience is unsustainable, as perception constitutively unites memory and sensation. Dissolving this opposition invalidates the charge that immersive works reduce heritage to pure spectacle. Instead, Anadol's installations function as environments engineered to render a cultural past present. On the basis of the two cases examined, the paper concludes theoretically that immersive media art of this kind redesigns the conditions under which historical memory is experienced, establishing historical affect as an engineered object that places cultural heritage within design practice.

Keywords: immersive heritage, visual perception, experience design, cultural memory, Refik Anadol

Introduction

Recent years have witnessed an increase in immersive media artworks that convert cultural archives into large-scale, real-time visual environments, enveloping the viewer within spatial light rather than projecting onto a bounded screen. Refik Anadol's practice provides prominent examples of this shift. *Archive Dreaming* (2017) processed roughly 1.7 million archival documents into a navigable visual field (Refik Anadol Studio, 2017), while *Rumi Dreams* (2022) dissolved a corpus of manuscripts, images, and audio recordings related to 13th-century poet Rumi into an enveloping audiovisual environment (AKM, 2022). Although operating within the lineage of the moving image, these installations depart from cinema by abandoning photographic indexicality, montage, and narrative progression. Institutional framings position both post-cinematic environments as novel heritage experiences that make the past somatically felt, casting *Archive Dreaming* as a reframing of memory, history, and culture for the contemporary museum and *Rumi Dreams* as an affective immersion into Rumi's poetic universe (Ars Electronica, 2017; GoTürkiye, 2022). Such claims call for a critical examination, as asserting that an archive can be felt implies a specific claim about visual perception: namely, how a subject experiences an environment as belonging to the past. Traditionally, historical consciousness is constructed through memory, inference, and the interpretation of documents. Immersive media art appears to bypass this interpretive labor, presenting the past instead as an immediate, ambient sensation. The central question is whether these works recruit the perceptual and inferential processes that construct historical consciousness, or replace cognitive inference with pre-reflective affect.

By examining these installations, this paper argues that immersive media installations of the kind Anadol produces actively redesign the conditions under which a past is perceived, moving beyond traditional models of historical reinterpretation. Instead of resolving the binary between historical reconstruction and immediate sensation, these works expose its theoretical instability. By detaching moving images from cinematic syntax and regenerating them through database algorithms, they frame historical affect as an engineered product. What remains at stake extends beyond an individual artistic methodology to a broader theoretical question concerning the degree to which immersive design reshapes the perceptual foundations of collective memory.

Anadol's practice clarifies this design logic by using the archive as both subject and material. Converting historical documents into spatial environments exposes the mechanisms through which records become sensory experiences. *Archive Dreaming* and *Rumi Dreams* each take a bounded archival corpus as their source, providing documented material for analyzing how determinate heritage functions as immersive affect. Rather than dismissing critiques of visual spectacle, this paper treats such charges as symptoms of an underlying theoretical tension between reconstruction and sensation. Integrating film and media theory, embodied phenomenology, and the philosophy of affect, this inquiry addresses a foundational problem: how immersive media artworks alter the perceptual

conditions of historical experience, and what consequences emerge for heritage and design when historical affect is engineered as a spatial condition.

Methodologically, the paper integrates conceptual analysis with documentation-grounded close readings of two works. The cases were selected purposively as paradigmatic examples based on three criteria. First, each engages a bounded archival corpus: the 1.7 million documents of SALT Research in *Archive Dreaming*, and a curated repository of *Masnavi* translations, imagery, and audio recordings assembled with the Konya Metropolitan Municipality in *Rumi Dreams* (Refik Anadol Studio, 2017; AKM, 2022). Second, both were produced by the same studio utilizing comparable machine-learning workflows and presented within Istanbul cultural institutions, holding authorship, computational technique, and civic context constant. Third, the installations diverge along a key design parameter: *Archive Dreaming* incorporates an interactive mode permitting legible document retrieval, whereas *Rumi Dreams* forecloses spectator interaction. The pair establishes a contrastive comparison to examine structural variations in perceptual design. The empirical material comprises publicly available studio specifications, exhibition texts issued by the host institutions, festival and media coverage, and photographic and video documentation. Given that *Rumi Dreams* has subsequently been restaged in alternative formats, the analysis focuses specifically on its 2022 presentation at the Atatürk Cultural Center (AKM), and the 2017 staging of *Archive Dreaming* at SALT Galata.

The documented design parameters are evaluated against both inferential and affective models of historical perception, testing critiques of spectacle and simulation against the resulting conceptual account. Three primary mechanisms that emerge from this theoretical analysis, namely immersive scale, archival tethering, and semantic suspension, form the analytic categories for the close readings. Accordingly, the conclusions advanced concerning historical perception represent theoretical interpretations of documented media environments, distinguishing this inquiry from empirical audience reception research.

The Moving Image without Cinema

Contemporary art history applies the term "moving image" as an expansive rubric, encompassing film, video, projection, and generative software under the shared parameter of temporal visual movement. Anadol's installations sit firmly within this domain, yet they diverge from cinema as defined by film theory: an indexical, photographic recording structured through montage and narrative progression (Bazin, 1967; Bordwell, 1985). Anadol's environments are generated algorithmically, rendered in real time, and spatialized as ambient flow. Precise taxonomy functions as an analytical entry point rather than mere formality, as the theoretical category assigned to these installations dictates the perceptual expectations brought to bear upon them.

This distinction relies on the concept of the post-cinematic. Shaviro (2010) defines post-cinematic media as works that preserve cinematic bodily immersion while relinquishing indexical recording and montage syntax. Denson and Leyda (2016) expand

this definition to encompass media organized by computational, algorithmic, and environmental operations. The post-cinematic thus defines moving images operating outside cinematic conventions, providing the theoretical grounds for examining what Anadol's environments do to perception. *Archive Dreaming* and *Rumi Dreams* retain cinema's capacity to move spectators through duration, intensifying engagement with embodied perception while discarding the primary mechanisms through which cinema historically constructed time: the photographic trace testifying to what once was, the cut juxtaposing discrete moments, and the narrative organizing events into history. In their place, Anadol substitutes a continuous generative flow drawn from a database, where no single image indexes a real-world event and no temporal shift functions as a montage. The archive persists as data and sensation, stripped of its function as a narrative record. Removing traditional historical markers exposes how historical affect can be engineered independently of cinematic tradition, converting the installation into a space where historical perception is constructed anew.

From Narrative to Database

Displacing montage requires an alternative mechanism for organizing historical experience, embedded in the architecture of the database. Manovich (2001) identifies narrative and database as contrasting cultural forms: narrative enforces sequence and closure, whereas the database organizes items as a non-hierarchical collection open to spatial navigation. Anadol's practice embeds this database structure, framing archives as vast visual fields and turning documents into spatial coordinates. This structural transition directly impacts cultural memory, illuminating Aleida Assmann's (2010) distinction between the passive archive and the active canon. While the archive holds uncirculated material in reserve, the canon comprises the selected texts actively reinterpreted by a culture. Anadol's concept of the "living archive," a phrase that has since become the title under which his studio presents its practice (Serpentine Galleries, 2024), targets this division, reactivating latent records and returning them to sensory circulation.

The specific mode of this reactivation remains critical. Anadol does not return the archived document to circulation as legible text for canonical analysis; he converts it into data, extracting visual features to compose an environment in which no single item remains distinct. The archive re-emerges as pattern, texture, and flow. What enters perception is an aggregate sensation generated from the collection rather than specific manuscript content. The living archive persists as an atmospheric presence rather than as historical testimony, regenerating the past as an environment in which traditional reconstructive paths are suspended. Evaluating whether such spatial environments can cultivate genuine historical consciousness requires examining how historical perception operates and the inferential labor it inherently demands.

Constructing the Past: Perception as Inference

Evaluating how immersive environments engage historical perception requires specifying what that perception entails: a sense of the past is never immediately given. Nothing within a sensory field is intrinsically historical; pastness is a status conferred through cognitive construction. Perceiving an object as historical requires placing it within a temporal context absent from the immediate stimulus, drawing on memory that vision alone cannot supply. Historical perception operates inferentially, achieved through a subject who integrates absent context into present sensation. Henri Bergson's (1896/1991) account of memory supports this model, asserting that perception is never unmediated by memory. Immediate perception draws upon stored experience to generate meaning; the past persists as a virtual reserve, pending actualization within the present. Experiencing a cultural past requires actualizing a virtuality, performing the cognitive labor needed to transform stored records into felt presence. A felt past is thus produced through actualization, not transmitted as raw material from the archive to the senses.

Heritage studies arrive at a parallel conclusion. Smith (2006) displaces the view of heritage as a physical site that inherently contains pastness, framing it instead as a performance of memory, interpretation, and valuation in the present. Lowenthal (1985) similarly demonstrates that the past is continually reconstructed from inherited fragments to serve contemporary needs. In both cases, the perceived authenticity of a heritage site is the product of mental and discursive construction rather than proof of direct contact with historical artifacts.

These frameworks converge on a single principle: historical perception is inferential, reconstructive, and active. It is a cognitive labor performed by the subject upon materials that do not inherently possess historical status. This proposition establishes the first pole of the core theoretical tension. If historical awareness is built through this inferential process, the immersive environment can be interrogated on two fronts: whether it engages in this constructive labor to transform the archive into felt history, or whether it delivers an immediate experience that requires no reconstructive effort. This second possibility, wherein the past is experienced as an immediate sensory encounter, establishes the counter-model of affective presence.

Delivering the Past: Affect, Haptics, and Presence

Challenging the inferential model is an alternative framework that immersive environments seem explicitly designed to fulfill: that these works deliver the past directly to the body as sensory affect prior to intellectual reconstruction. Supported by affect theory and the phenomenology of embodied perception, this counter-account reflects what Anadol's installations are designed to perform and what their institutional framing promises on their behalf (Ars Electronica, 2017; GoTürkiye, 2022).

Affect is distinct from emotion in its autonomy: it represents the body's pre-personal registration of an encounter, an intensity that precedes and exceeds cognitive recognition, interpretation, and narrative synthesis (Massumi, 2002). Affect is felt prior to

understanding and often remains uninterpreted. In post-cinematic media, generative and computational moving images function primarily as engines of affective intensity, addressing the spectator's body directly rather than through narrative comprehension or representational reference (Shaviro, 2010). Under this model, the immersive environment solicits somatic absorption rather than narrative decoding. It saturates the sensory field with intensity, producing physical resonance independently of cognitive inference.

Embodied phenomenology grounds this direct address within vision. Moving images are encountered by a sensorially integrated body, rendering viewing an act of carnal contact rather than detached observation (Sobchack, 1992, 2004). Marks (2000) formalizes this through haptic visuality, a mode of vision where the eye operates like an organ of touch, grazing surfaces and dwelling in luminous texture, grain, and materiality. Haptic images privilege tactile immersion over optical mastery. Anadol's abstract, high-resolution environments can be read as a limit case of the haptic, offering the eye pure luminous texture.

Synthesized, these theories describe an experience directly opposed to inferential reconstruction. The immersive environment envelops the spectator, flooding the sensorium with affective intensity and presenting a haptic field that solicits tactile immersion over optical interpretation. This produces a heightened sense of presence: the conviction of being physically situated within an encounter, even in the absence of identifiable objects or linear narratives. Immersive media art of this kind is designed to generate historical affect by delivering an immediate, affective presence that precedes inference and bypasses reconstructive labor. Examining this perspective exposes the theoretical foundations underpinning the primary criticisms leveled against Anadol's practice.

The Charge of Spectacle and Its Limits

The suspicion that Anadol's installations substitute surface sensation for historical meaning stems from two critical traditions, both of which require examination to identify the shared premise that underpins them.

The first theoretical foundation is Guy Debord's (1967/1994) critique of spectacle, which posits that advanced capitalism systematically replaces lived experience with representation. The spectacle represents a social relation mediated by images, immobilizing subjects in passive contemplation while substituting surface illusion for historical reality. Interpreted through Debord, Anadol's practice reduces the archive to a luminous surface of passive absorption, reconfiguring the viewer as an enveloped spectator rather than a critical interpreter. Consequently, the rigorous labor of historical engagement is superseded by frictionless visual splendor. Heritage collapses into spectacle, where the past is consumed as a commodity image, and its historical specificity dissolves into the sensory apparatus designed to revive it.

The second framework draws on Jean Baudrillard's (1981/1994) theory of simulation. The simulacrum operates as a copy without an original: a sign that no longer refers to an underlying reality, but circulates as a self-sufficient hyperreality more compelling than the real it replaces. Anadol's regenerated archives fit this description cleanly. His environments depict no concrete historical events; archival manuscripts become raw data for hyperreal simulations that replace historical reference with pure sign value. The result is a hyperreal past without an original: a simulation of heritage that feels more immediate and affecting than an encounter with physical records.

These critiques carry significant weight, yet they rely on an unexamined assumption: that sensation and meaning are mutually exclusive. Both Debord and Baudrillard presuppose that affective immediacy exists in direct opposition to historical understanding. Spectacle pacifies because sensation is assumed to preclude active cognition, while simulation falsifies because affect is assumed to lack reference. When sensation and inference are recognized as interdependent dimensions of a single cognitive act, the charge of spectacle loses its theoretical footing. Dissolving this opposition reveals the immersive installation as a designed environment where affect and historical consciousness operate in tandem to reengineer the conditions of perception.

Redesigning the Conditions of Perception

The opposition between reconstruction and the sensation rests upon a false dichotomy. Bergson's (1896/1991) account permits no such separation: pure perception does not exist, as every concrete perception is interpenetrated by memory. Sensation is never isolated from the virtual past, nor is the past actualized except through sensation. Feeling and perceiving operate as constituent moments of a single indivisible act. To feel is already to invoke the past; to perceive the past is already to feel. By presupposing that sensory absorption excludes meaning, the critique of spectacle misapprehends the mechanics of perception (Debord, 1967/1994; Baudrillard, 1981/1994). Affective immediacy serves as the primary medium through which the virtual past is actualized into felt presence. Phenomenological accounts hold that carnal viewing is an inherently meaningful mode of contact (Sobchack, 1992, 2004), while haptic visuality discloses dimensions of meaning that optical inspection misses (Marks, 2000). The felt and the understood operate as dual facets of a single perceptual accomplishment.

Rather than transmitting a determinate past or generating affect decoupled from history, Anadol’s works reengineer the conditions under which a cultural past is experienced. This perceptual engineering unfolds through three primary mechanisms: first, manufacturing the haptic baseline necessary for felt presence through immersive scale; second, tethering this intensity to a discrete archival corpus so that the emergent affect retains the signature of a specific heritage; and third, systematically withholding legible historical documents to convert evidentiary records into spatial atmosphere.

Theoretically, this operation yields a mode of historical consciousness that is somatically real and culturally grounded, yet semantically indeterminate. Anadol's practice represents a redesign of perceptual conditions rather than a reinterpretation of history. Where traditional reinterpretation offers a revised narrative while leaving underlying heritage intact, Anadol's environments bypass narrative entirely, transforming the spatial arrangement of sensation, reference, and indeterminacy through which a past is experienced as present. Historical perception becomes an explicit object of design, composed and calibrated through parameters of scale, tempo, luminosity, and abstraction.

Consequently, the felt sense of the past becomes an explicit object of design, capable of being composed and calibrated like any other spatial experience. This outcome contests the charge of spectacle, suggesting that sensation was never antithetical to historical meaning. A designed affective past represents the construction of heritage through alternative modalities. At the same time, framing historical perception as a design problem raises critical questions regarding how these perceptual parameters are modulated in practice. Examining Anadol's specific installations clarifies these broader consequences for contemporary heritage design.

Two Archives, Two Dreams

Examining specific archival installations illuminates how differing design parameters reconfigure historical consciousness. *Archive Dreaming* (2017), commissioned for the SALT Research collections at SALT Galata, Istanbul (Refik Anadol Studio, 2017; SALT, 2017), and *Rumi Dreams* (2022), presented at the Atatürk Cultural Center (AKM) during the 2022 Beyoğlu Culture Route Festival marking the 750th anniversary of Rumi's death (AKM, 2022; GoTürkiye, 2022), both employ Anadol's signature methodology: processing vast documentary datasets through machine-learning models to generate immersive spatial environments. Nevertheless, each installation structures the spectator's relationship to the archive differently, deploying distinct strategies for engineering historical perception. The operational readings that follow draw on these documented design specifications to establish a theoretical account of each environment.

Archive Dreaming (Anadol, 2017) stages the transition from historical record to sensation with spatial clarity. Consisting of a six-meter-wide circular room whose mirrored floor and ceiling multiply four channels of wall projection into an apparently infinite space, the installation surrounds visitors with the visualized contents of 1.7 million documents from the SALT Research archive (Refik Anadol Studio, 2017). The work operates across two distinct functional states. In its user-driven mode, visitors operate a tablet interface to query the collection (Daily Sabah, 2017), prompting the environment to retrieve legible documents addressed through optical reading and identification. When idle, the system enters its secondary state in which it dreams (Ars Electronica, 2017), generating algorithmic correlations that correspond to no single document and dissolving the legible archive into a flowing, luminous pattern. The searchable state presents the past as

testimony, subject to reconstructive inference; the dreaming state presents the past as atmosphere, a haptic field of texture in which individual items are subsumed. *Archive Dreaming* materializes this structural shift between record and sensation as an interactive operational mode.

The dreaming state represents a deliberate reengineering of perceptual conditions rather than a retreat into pure spectacle. The three mechanisms configure this state. The architecture synthesizes haptic intensity, immersing the body within a high-luminance spatial field that privileges somatic affect over optical reading. Concurrently, it indexes this intensity to a discrete archive, ensuring the emergent affect retains the structural specificity of Istanbul's cultural heritage. Finally, by withholding legibility in its autonomous mode, the installation transforms historical testimony into ambient presence. Generated through spatial scale, algorithmic motion, and semantic suspension, the resulting historical sensation transcends both direct archival extraction and purely subjective viewer construction. The inclusion of an interactive search mode reinforces this dynamic, suggesting that atmospheric immersion operates as an intentional design setting within the perceptual field.

Rumi Dreams (Anadol, 2022) eliminates the interactive state entirely, presenting what this paper reads as the engineered perceptual condition in its pure form. Institutional documentation describes no user navigation or interactive interface; the installation instead subjects the spectator to a fixed six-and-a-half-minute sequence of light, motion, and sound (GoTürkiye, 2022). The work synthesizes a vast archival dataset comprising translations of the *Masnavi* across 19 languages, more than 180,000 images of dervish lodges, manuscripts, and documents, and recordings of Sufi music and performance (AKM, 2022), processed through machine-learning models. Accounts of the corpus vary across promotional sources, with one tourism-board release citing *Masnavi* translations in 26 languages (GoTürkiye, 2022); the figures cited here follow the host institution. Where *Archive Dreaming* permitted a toggle between reading and feeling, *Rumi Dreams* operates exclusively in the affective register. The historical archive is stripped of semantic legibility, present only as atmospheric residue and abstract currents of motion that evoke dervish iconography without offering representational stability. On the present reading, historical consciousness is thus configured as pure sensation, and inferential reconstruction is foreclosed within the work itself.

Foreclosing historical reconstruction entirely, *Rumi Dreams* brings the critique of spectacle to its logical breaking point. Evaluated through the lens of spectacle and simulation, the installation seems to reduce heritage to a pacifying surface, producing a hyperreal Rumi severed from historical reality (Debord, 1967/1994; Baudrillard, 1981/1994). Yet the phenomenological model developed above contests this verdict. The affective and haptic presence generated by the work functions not as an impediment to historical consciousness, but as its primary medium (Sobchack, 1992). While the dynamic projections do not identify a historical subject, they actualize a somatic presence

specifically inflected by the *Masnavi* and the Sufi archive. The conventional question of whether this designed presence constitutes an authentic encounter or a seductive substitute reflects the very binary that this framework dismantles. *Rumi Dreams* bypasses the choice between feeling and understanding, engineering a condition in which a culturally specific past is felt as present without being reconstructed as record. This operation yields a third theoretical category: heritage constituted as designed perception.

Together, these installations map the operational parameters of engineered historical perception. *Archive Dreaming* externalizes the underlying design decision, encoding the dialectic between evidentiary record and atmospheric immersion into a user-controlled interface. *Rumi Dreams* internalizes this logic, stabilizing the media environment within a permanently non-representational state. The felt presence of the past across both works operates as a calibrated function of scale, motion, duration, and semantic suspension rather than technological fortuity or aesthetic reduction. Evaluated across these operational paradigms, both installations transform historical consciousness into a pliable, computational material, raising fundamental questions regarding the institutional stakes of treating collective memory as a design problem.

Heritage as Designed Perception

The theoretical frameworks derived from these cases illuminate a fundamental shift in heritage display: the transition from representational presentation to the architectural modulation of historical consciousness. As these cases suggest, creators of such environments actively construct the sensory and epistemological conditions through which collective memory is perceived. Consequently, historical affect emerges as a formal object of design. Treating the felt sense of the past as an engineered artifact elevates experiential heritage from passive technical decoration to an intentional practice with profound institutional and ethical stakes.

Framing historical perception as a designed condition fundamentally transforms how immersive heritage is evaluated. Conceived through the false binary of reconstruction versus sensation, immersive works are subjected to an evaluative standard they inevitably fail to meet: the criterion of documentary fidelity. Under this metric, dissolving an archive into spatial atmosphere appears as an epistemological loss, a devolution from evidence into affect that automatically triggers the charge of spectacle. Reframing historical affect as an intentional design outcome renders documentary accuracy an inadequate evaluative standard. The inquiry shifts from how faithfully an environment reproduces the archive to what perceptual relationship to the past it constructs, reorienting the evaluation of immersive heritage toward design intent and socio-cultural efficacy.

This framework reveals a second critical imperative: the ethics of mnemonic engineering. Modulating the perceptual conditions through which a cultural past is experienced exercises substantial hermeneutic power. To the extent that an installation's engineered atmosphere lacks legible documentation against which to test its claims, that

sensation becomes, for the spectator, the definitive encounter with the past. Design choices regarding immersive scale, archival tethering, and the systematic withholding of evidence are never ideologically neutral; they govern how heritage is somatically processed and culturally retained. Suppressing evidentiary records in favor of spatial atmosphere can transform a transient perception into an enduring memory. To the extent that such installations become a primary point of public contact with an archive, reconfiguring historical perception effects a structural redistribution of institutional power, transferring authority over collective memory away from traditional archives and critical historiography toward digital artists, technologists, and institutional curators.

A third consequence addresses what constitutes a critically responsible practice of immersive heritage. Because withholding legible records is a deliberate design choice rather than a technical constraint, alternative configurations remain possible. *Archive Dreaming* illustrates this potential through its dual operating states. By pairing an autonomous dreaming mode with a searchable interface, the installation delivers atmospheric affect while permitting the spectator to restore legible documents and engage in reconstructive inquiry. This architecture models a vital design principle: immersive heritage need not force a choice between somatic feeling and semantic legibility. Instead, environments can be engineered so that affective presence remains open to interrogation against its underlying dataset. Responsible heritage design does not reject immersive sensation in favor of document display, which would merely reinstate the binary dismantled here; rather, it calibrates perceptual conditions to enable movement between somatic experience and critical inquiry.

Synthesizing these implications repositions immersive media installations within the broader discourse of heritage, design theory, and contemporary aesthetics. Anadol's environments achieve significance by exposing historical consciousness as a site of design: an engineered synthesis of spatial conditions, computational parameters, and deliberate aesthetic choices. Theoretically, this shift marks the design of historical perception as an emergent domain of critical practice, demanding that technical innovation be accompanied by ethical accountability regarding how collective memory is spatialized and experienced.

Conclusion

Beginning within the sensory immersion of Anadol's archival environments, this study interrogated the assertion that media installations can render historical consciousness somatically felt rather than merely visually decoded. Investigating this claim revealed a core epistemological problem: whether immersive art relies on the inferential labor through which a sense of the past is ordinarily built, or replaces it with pre-reflective affect. The inquiry has argued, on theoretical grounds, that the opposition between historical reconstruction and sensory affect is illusory. Perception is neither a raw sensation devoid of memory nor an inferential synthesis detached from feeling. Once this binary dissolves, the charge of spectacle loses its analytical force. Analyzed through this framework,

Anadol's installations function as media topographies that systematically engineer the perceptual field through which historical memory is experienced.

The comparative analysis of *Archive Dreaming* and *Rumi Dreams* illustrates this perceptual engineering across two operational configurations: one that structures the passage from record to atmosphere as an interactive mechanism, and another that stabilizes the environment permanently in the atmospheric register. In both cases, the felt sense of the past is neither retrieved from archival records nor spontaneously generated by the spectator. Instead, historical affect is composed through calibrated parameters of scale, duration, algorithmic motion, and semantic legibility. The two cases thus indicate that immersive media environments of this kind do not merely reinterpret historical narratives; they redesign the perceptual conditions through which the past is experienced. Bypassing settled historical accounts, these installations reconfigure the pre-reflective field itself, re-staging the archive as a condition of perception rather than a repository of facts.

The stakes of this framework, while derived from two cases, extend beyond individual artistic practice. Once historical affect is recognized as a designable object, the perception of cultural heritage becomes a domain of active spatial composition, configured through the deliberate modulation of perceptual parameters. Insofar as spectators receive immersive atmospheres without the tools to interrogate their computational mediation, engineered perception functions as a primary surrogate for collective memory. To design historical perception is to assume an active role in mnemonic production, potentially shifting hermeneutic authority away from archives, historians, and canon-formation toward the architects of immersive media. Whether such a shift manifests in visitors' actual experience remains an open question for empirical reception research. Ultimately, Anadol's work forces an inescapable confrontation with the ethics of spatialized memory: what happens when a culture's historical consciousness becomes a spatial artifact, and who is accountable for its design?

AI Declaration

During the preparation of this work, the author used Claude and Grammarly for limited language editing, including grammar and punctuation correction and sentence-level refinement for fluency and clarity. After using these tools, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed and takes full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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