

How translating a memorial through the interior whilst encouraging participation can be most effective in communicating current tragedies and complex histories whilst providing a space for collective remembrance.

by

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Contents

1.0 Introduction	5
1.1 Theme.....	5
1.2 Hypothesis.....	5
1.3 Focus and Limitations.....	6
1.4 Research and Sources.....	6
1.5 Key Writers and Sources.....	6
1.6 Structure.....	7
2.0 The history and importance of memorials	8
2.1 Introduction.....	8
2.2 Memorial Architecture.....	9
2.3 Modern Western Society.....	10
2.4 Memory.....	11
2.5 Collective Remembrance and Mourning.....	12
2.6 Spontaneous Memorials.....	13
3.0 Holocaust Memorials and their significance in contemporary society	15
3.1 Introduction.....	15
3.2 Case Study 1: Holocaust Memorial by Rachel Whiteread.....	15
3.3 Analysis.....	16
3.4 Conclusion.....	17
4.0 Participation in Contemporary Memorials	19
4.1 Introduction.....	19
4.2 Case Study 2: Gun Violence Memorial by MASS design group and Hank Willis Thomas.....	19
4.3 Analysis.....	20

4.4 Case Study 3: Let it Burn by David Best.....	21
4.5 Analysis.....	22
4.6 Conclusion.....	23
5.0 Installation Art as Memorialisation.....	24
5.1 Introduction.....	24
5.2 Case Study 4: Fallen by Emma Leahy.....	25
5.3 Analysis.....	26
5.4 Case Study 5: War Room by Cornelia Parker.....	26
5.5 Analysis.....	27
5.6 Conclusion.....	27
6.0 Conclusion.....	28
6.1 Hypothesis and Rationale.....	28
6.2 Key Findings.....	28
6.3 Reflections on Research.....	29
7.0 Bibliography.....	30
8.0 List of Figures.....	33
9.0 Additional Material.....	35

“Memorials are an undeniable part of both collective and personal memory, since they provide a framework through which memories are localised (Tanović, 2022, p.83).”

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Theme

A memorial serves to preserve remembrance, of an event or person, in an architectural or material form. Memorials are used in order to communicate the loss we experience in day to day life or through historic events, both of which require going through a process of grief and mourning. Having grown up in Northern Ireland, where political and religious tensions remain prominent to this very day, memorials to lives lost in the Troubles and murals that run deep through the towns and cities, are all I have ever known. Memorials throughout Northern Ireland are very prevalent and whilst they quietly remember people who have passed, some create a narrative for observers to arrive upon. Having moved away from home, I was separated from the normalisation of such memorialisation. I then began to ask myself, that if such memorials were designed in the interior form, would there be more respect, more commiseration? Memorials are at most times a tangible representation of all we have lost. The importance of memorials can be often overlooked due to the sheer amount that exist today, which then speaks for their necessity, although can understandably desensitise us to their existence when they are designed inattentively or thoughtlessly.

1.2 Hypothesis

A memorial that you can walk into or through, physically place your body inside of, can be more effective, in comparison to a static structure that cannot be accessed. In a unique way, the individual is inside of that memory rather than looking at that memory and thus are not displaced from the event or person. They are not immersed, as it is not possible to feel the way the victims or the victims families feel, or how it feels to lose someone you haven't yet lost. However, they are transported to a specific time and thus participating in their remembrance. Contemporary memorials are beginning to grasp this fact which will be reflected in my case study of The Gun Violence Memorial, Washington D.C. by MASS design group and Hank Willis Thomas. Although it must be noted that many memorials are designed to not be able to access the inside of, to communicate the horror or tragedy such as The Holocaust Memorial by Rachel Whiteread in Vienna. I briefly touch upon spontaneous memorials and how their manifestation is proof of humanity's need to materialise memory. "With regard to emotional pain, it is proven necessary that individuals who have suffered need to have their pain and suffering recognised by other individuals (Tanović, 2022, p.99-100)".

I argue that the interior of a memorial is just as important, if not more important, in creating a new culture of remembrance and understanding. As well as memorials translated through the interior, art installations are strong examples of guiding a viewer through the memory, demanding their attention and respect, discussed in chapter four. Participation is a progressive design approach that should be recognised as influential, of which I will discuss in chapter three.

1.3 Focus and Limitations

Memorial architecture includes a broad range of design phenomena, varying from paintings, sculptures, architecture and so forth. To limit the scope of this dissertation, I will discuss three different forms; memorial architecture that cannot be accessed, memorials translated through the interior and art installations as a form of memorialisation. To further refine these investigations, I am choosing to focus upon participation in memorial architecture. Participatory design is becoming increasingly more popular in the design industry which validates my choice of focus.

1.4 Research and Sources

This dissertation consists of secondary sources, ranging from; books, academic texts, online articles, scholarly and design journals.

1.5 Key Writers and Sources

A piece of literature I have found extremely informative and influential when it came to forming an argument for this dissertation is *Designing Memory*, by Sabina Tanović (2022). The first and second chapters ‘Commemorative Architecture since 1914’ and ‘The Dual Role of Memorial Architecture’ were found to be most informative.

1.6 Structure

The structure of this dissertation is combined of four chapters, each undergoing an investigation into different areas of my research. The first chapter introduces the origin of memorial architecture; the Holocaust, exploring its influence upon calling for a material manifestation of memorialisation. The first case study, by Rachel Whiteread will follow. This chapter will also underline symbolism in memorials and will argue the detachment of the viewer with the structure.

The second chapter delves into contemporary memorials, beginning with a case study of the Gun Violence Memorial by MASS design group and Hank Willis Thomas (2019), followed by a case study of Let it Burn by David Best (2015). Both case studies provide an insight into the process of participation and walking into a memorial rather than the simple process of observation, indicating that participatory design is key to memorial architecture.

The third chapter aims to demonstrate how the act of participation can be portrayed through art installations that can encompass the viewer. The case studies, discussed in the forth chapter include; Fallen by Emma Leahy (2021) and War Room by Cornelia Parker (2015) are especially important in the argument whilst one and the other indicate that considerate design in an interior are greatly impactful on the viewer.

2.0 The history and importance of memorials

2.1 Introduction

Commemorative architecture was developed in reaction to the first world war which called for the search for a symbolic structure that religion and existing rituals were unable to provide (Tanović, 2022). Such architecture consists of a landscape or site “set aside and marked by a culture to recall, celebrate, honour, or memorialise significant people, places, ideas, or events in its history (Commemorative landscape, <https://www.tclf.org/category/designed-landscape-types/commemorative-landscape>, no date).” This need was expressed across the globe in new forms that wished to provide such symbolism.

What ensued the First World War was a global attempt at building monuments ascribed to celebrating victory which were understandably problematic as it implied the trivialisation of the suffering of millions of families of the deceased. An unforeseen reaction was observed in the completion of such monuments, according to Tanović (2022), “This difficulty led to a fundamental shift in the purpose and form of war monuments, of great significance for later commemorative projects. The bloodbath of the First World War required attention not to us but to them - the endless armies of the dead. They were owed a debt that could never be repaid. In that simple statement we find the key to the commemorative revolution that followed the First World War (Tanović, 2022, p20).” Thus, it is clear to see that commemorative architecture became not only significant in their present day but influenced the monumental world as we know today.

2.2 Memorial architecture

Although similar, it must be noted that when referring to ‘commemorate architecture’ and ‘memorial architecture’ in this essay, they represent different phenomena. Commemorative architecture is generally symbolic and can therefore be more open to interpretation. Whereas memorial architecture is quite literal, such as a structure built in memory of an event, person or group of people. Memorial Architecture is what I will be referring to throughout the upcoming chapters.

It is important to understand the etymology of specific words used in this dissertation as the deeper you go, the more they become intertwined in each others roots. ‘Grief’ originates from the anglo French ‘gref’, which is from the classical latin ‘gravis’ that means heavy, painful, important. The word ‘grief’ then refers to carrying a burden. However, ‘grief’ in English is often described as very great sadness and in many languages, the word does not exist. ‘Grievance’ means a complaint, objection, even an accusation, thus a person so burdened is ‘aggrieved’. Before the middle of the 20th century, grief and mourning were treated as equals until the idea of grief narrowed by the 21st century in which grief was defined by Klass (2014) as a “primarily emotional response to loss”. ‘Mourn’, however, comes from Old English ‘murnan’ which describes a feeling or to express sorrow, grief, or regret. Grief and mourning can therefore be understood as not two different things, but two different interpretations of a single practice in which "it is really difficult to provide specific examples of grief, since the moment it is expressed it becomes mourning (Klass, 2014, pp3-4)".

‘Mourn’ and ‘memorial’ have the same root word ‘mer’ which is the root meaning; to remember. One would argue, that in today’s vocabulary and architecture, memorials can feel completely separate from mourning despite their correlation in meaning. Therefore, an argument begins to form; Why and how have we strayed so far from mourning in memorial architecture?

2.3 Modern Western Society

Tanovic (2022) expresses the notion of building for ‘Memory Boom’ which is one that Western societies today are complacent to, in which monuments and memorials are becoming an aid due to the media culture embedded in contemporary society, to help fight against amnesia and an “enlightened false consciousness (Tanovic, 2022, p72).” The insensitivity of today’s generation with some historic memorials is highlighted ingeniously by Berlin-based Israeli satirist Shahak Shapira. His project name “Yolocaust” displays an array of photoshopped images of what were once people taking selfies and joyous pictures on the concrete slabs of the Holocaust Memorial, Berlin, to show the disrespect and insensitive treatment of the memorial and who it represents. This may be detrimental to contemporary monuments as we start to design for aesthetics rather than value and meaning to which it loses its entire purpose.



*Figures 1.0 and 1.1: Images of tourists jumping on Holocaust Memorial, Berlin
(Hartley-Parkinson, 2017)*

Who do we place the blame on for such behaviours? There could be an argument that the symbolism of the memorial is so abstract that it gets lost in translation and so interpretation is lost in the process. Or do we look at contemporary western society and how far removed it is from historic events. Perhaps the sensitivity and respect that they deserve fades as generation pass. Perhaps due to the ready availability of knowledge and information provided by the internet, it creates a desensitised society, one of endless scrolling, not processing one piece of information before moving onto the next. Is it the fault of the designer and their thought process in how the

memorial will travel through time or is it the fault of media culture? Therefore, I begin to ask the question; can contemporary commemorative architecture successfully communicate such tragedies and losses whilst providing healing spaces to mourn, without getting lost in the upheaval of media culture?

With the surge of media culture and a generation whose attention spans are decreasing (King's College London, 2022), public participation may be a concept worth introducing into contemporary memorials. In an article about reduced attention spans in *The Guardian*, Phillip Lorenz-Spreen of Max Planck Institute for Human Development notes that “Content is increasing in volume, which exhausts our attention and our urge for ‘newness’ causes us to collectively switch between topics more regularly (McClinton, 2019)”. We no longer consume information; information consumes us.

2.4 Memory

Ultimately, memory is archival. It relies entirely on the materiality of the trace, whether it was recorded immediately or not. Memorials have become the physical manifestation of this, adapting the role of remembrance and how we do so collectively. Collective memory refers to how groups remember their past, “memory endures only through the frameworks and spaces provided by social groups (Tanović, 2022, p79).” For example, the Northern Irish remember the Troubles as a turbulent time in their history, while Americans will remember 9/11 more distinctively and many nations will recall the Second World War. Collective memories may occur at more local levels too, such as a loss of a grandparent in a family. Each of us has some sort of collective memory for any important social group to which we belong. Thus, we can describe monuments as “material tools for the establishment of identity, encouraging the feeling of belonging and continuity (Tanović, 2022, p88).”

2.5 Collective Remembrance and Mourning

The term ‘collective memory’ is widely scrutinised and terms such as ‘multidirectional memory’, or ‘collective remembrance’ appear. Memorials are the connecting tissue in collective remembrance. “They ask for participation and can evoke emotions in its participants. In this way, collective memories can influence or even become personal memories (Tanović, 2022, p79).”

Collective mourning, such as the very public funeral of an individual in which all people from their village attended, has shifted over the course of a few centuries, to individual mourning, changing the burden of grief from a once community level, to a personal level. Individual mourning, is arguably due to Westernisation and the significant decline of mourning practices. Also in response to the recent global COVID-19 pandemic, in which we had no choice but to mourn alone in the confinement of our homes, has led to spontaneous memorialisation that called for the materialisation of memory.

Laura Tanner underlines the importance of a ‘materiality of the body’ in the mourning process. Tanner explains that the bereaved “witness that loss again and again as our minds construct the absent presence of bodies we can no longer hold through images we are unable to touch (2018, p.13).” Spontaneous memorials can have a communicative value due to their materiality and immediacy that help the transition from grief to mourning. Jack Santino coined the term ‘spontaneous shrines’ whilst describing the processes of public mourning for the victims of political assassinations in Northern Ireland (Tanović, 2019, p95).

2.6 Spontaneous Memorials



Figure 2.0: Photograph of the spontaneous memorial in St Ann's Square after the Manchester Arena Attack. (Manchester City Council, 2017)

The photo above shows hundreds upon hundreds of flowers and balloons laid out for those lost to the Manchester Arena attack. A spontaneous memorial, is described as “a rapid public response to publicised, unexpected, and violent deaths, typically involving the accumulation of individual mementos to create a shrine at the death site (Arvanitis, 2022).” This reiterates the importance of such memorials in contemporary culture that lies their material existence, “which signifies the process of mourning and intimates an individual’s relationship with the deceased in the public space (Tanović, 2022, p.95).”

Whilst such acts of memorialisation are not thoughtful in the conceptual sense but rather in the traditional sense such as the use of flowers, which are what one would often bring to a funeral, they show just how much humanity has come to need a material manifestation of a memory, of acknowledgement of the happenstance of an event or the loss of an individual or group of people. Whether the memorial is designed architecturally or not, the community come together and create some version of their own, symbolic or literal.

Santino explained that these offerings have come to represent what cemeteries used to represent before the 19th century, before collective mourning became individual mourning. Tanović references Santino who deemed that “spontaneous memorials emerged as cultural phenomena, reviving the ritual of public mourning in new conditions (2022, p.95).” What should be taken from this is their significance, their necessity. Harriet Senie stresses that spontaneous memorials are more so linked to the need of having a private loss acknowledged publicly (Senie, 2021). Spontaneous memorials echo the desire of participation in memorials which will be further discussed in chapter three.

3.0 Holocaust Memorials and their significance in contemporary society

3.1 Introduction

“By the 1960’s, Holocaust memorials were established as a new genre of commemorative art (Tanović, 2022, p.49)”, founding modern representation of memory and memorials in which the Holocaust plays a pivotal role. Many architects have been set the challenge of designing such memorials, whether to portray the horror of the Holocaust or for it to be a place where the survivors and survivors families find some sort of solace. Peter Eisenman, an architect who designed the memorial for the murdered Jews of Europe, was convinced that “instead of producing meaning, a memorial should question the conditions of horror by creating a powerful and evocative spatial experience that will precipitate discussion about the past so as to ensure that it will never be repeated (Tanović, 2022, p.64)”. In other words, a memorial should be thought provoking, not comforting. This approach is valid however it has its limits. A memorial’s design is dependent on the event, group of people or individual it is remembering. Therefore, in the instance of the Holocaust, is it more effective to be brutal; in an attempt to echo the horror of the event.

3.2 Case Study 1: Holocaust Memorial by Rachel Whiteread

Dame Rachel Whiteread, born 1963, is a British artist known for her monumental sculptures that represent what is usually considered to be negative space. She won the Turner Prize in 1993, becoming the honour’s first woman recipient (Kuiper, 2021). In the memory of the horrendous murder of 65,000 Austrian Jews in the Holocaust, Whiteread designed a 10m x 7m x 3.8m reinforced concrete block off to one side of the open square Judenplatz. The choice of the place in which the memorial resides is important as it was the centre of Vienna’s medieval Jewish community, and home to one of Europe’s largest synagogues where important rabbinical leaders taught their students. In the 1421 pogrom, the Jewish community were murdered and the synagogue destroyed. Discovered in 1995 were the foundations of the medieval synagogue which lies directly below the memorial (Lee, 2020).

The unveiling of the memorial took place on the 25th of October 2000, a significant date for the intersection of history and memory on Vienna's Judenplatz, the eve of the Austrian National Day that marks the date 1995 when the country's official neutrality became law, reestablishing Austria as an independent state (Pages, 2003, p.106). The Judenplatz presented itself as an inspiration and a challenge to Whiteread.



Figure 3.0 Photograph of The Judenplatz Holocaust Memorial, Vienna. (RTF, 2022)

3.3 Analysis

Whiteread is well known for her expressionist sculptures that typically take the form of casts. The memorial was not taken lightly at first due to its obvious brutality and contrast to the Baroque art and architecture of Vienna. Abstraction and symbolism is crucial to the design of Holocaust memorials, as it is an awareness of how such a tragedy cannot be communicated so literally that makes them successful. Pages argues that Whiteread problematises the issue of public memorials. Firstly, he outlines how it raises the issue of access to the past as a process of remembering and secondly, it complicates the extent to which a memorial can function as a 'working through' of the past. One could agree with what Pages highlights in not being able to enter the space and how it can

isolate the viewer. It can also become an obscure form of remembering as no viewer would be able to work through the past while observing this memorial. The nonexistence of interaction further isolates the viewer.

It is difficult to come to agreement upon if a memorial can function as a ‘working through’ of the past at all times, or rather a space for healing. Tanović describes spaces for healing as “spaces in which individuals can visit to assist in moving through processes of grief and mourning, opposite to the once aggressive re-evocation of traumatic experiences (2022, p.53).” This is a comment on the bleak and harsh designs of war memorials essentially creating more trauma than bringing peace.

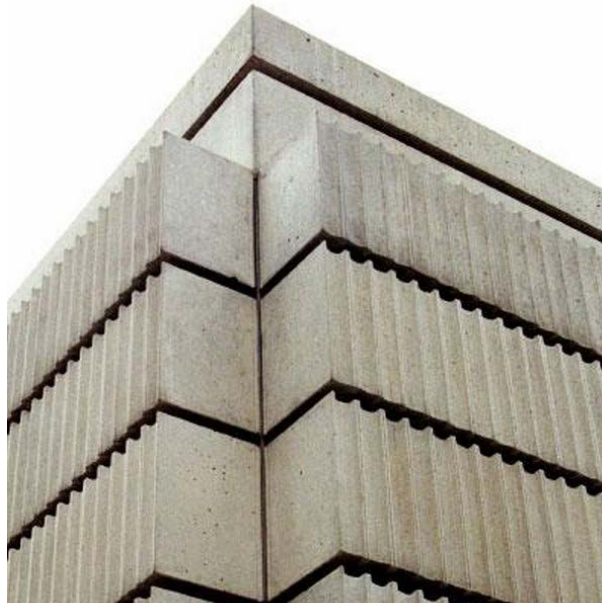


Figure 3.1 Photograph of The Judenplatz Holocaust Memorial, Vienna. (RTF, 2022)

3.4 Conclusion

Arguably, a Holocaust memorial is not supposed to be beautiful, which is what this memorial imitates - discomfort. The memorial is a windowless, inaccessible bunker, closed off from everyone. It is a library turned inside out, showing pages of nameless books. It symbolises the immense number of victims and tells a story without saying anything. The stories we cannot read symbolise the lives we cannot know of as they were cut short. The sealed shut doors that can never be opened could be a metaphor of finality.

“For the memorial, showing it as an inaccessible library is more than enough to say: this place holds the stories of some unforgotten past. The trace is visually present (Khanam, 2022).” As mentioned in the first chapter, this is the symbolism that was searched for after the First World War. A memorial that you cannot enter parallels how we cannot access the past. For this reason, Whiteread’s work can be seen as incredibly successful and thought provoking given its context.

However effective Holocaust memorials may be and Whiteread’s in particular, now may be the time we move past the separation we enforce between the memorial and the individual. As previously mentioned, we must look at how generations today respond to former memorials and if the design approaches used are still as effective as they always have been. I will introduce contemporary memorials that I believe are the way forward and influential in memorial design practices.

4.0 Participation in Contemporary Memorials

4.1 Introduction

It is important when designing a memorial to understand grief and consider what it means to ‘work through’ grief. In Freud's essay ‘Mourning and Melancholia’ (1917), he argued that in order to avoid melancholia, it was necessary to experience a period of mourning (Tanović, 2019). Of course, there is a broad set of specific forms of grief in which the understanding of such conditions is a continuing field of research in which the designer will derive their own meaning from. What I am interested in is the interior design of memorials, more specifically, how they may come to be more effective in collective remembrance and the ‘working through’ of grief. Furthermore, how participation through the interior memorial is an influential design approach.

I mention in the first chapter how societies today are complacent to how monuments and memorials are becoming an aid due to the media culture embedded in contemporary society, to help fight against amnesia. We use memorials to remember. This does not necessarily mean that without them we would forget, nevertheless, their design is critical in relation to how viewers respond emotionally. The following case studies are reflective of this.

4.2 Case Study 2: Gun Violence Memorial by MASS design group and Hank Willis Thomas

MASS Design Group partnered with Hank Willis Thomas as well as gun violence prevention organisations ‘Purpose Over Pain’ and ‘Every town for Gun Safety’, with local community based organisations across America to create a memorial for the victims of Gun Violence. The Gun Violence Memorial Project is a space of remembrance and healing for individuals impacted by gun violence. Gun violence is an ongoing national epidemic that touches every community in America in which the sheer scale often reduces victims of gun violence to statistics and ideas of change to empty promises (MASS, 2019). The memorial “seeks to preserve individual memories and communicate the magnitude of the gun violence epidemic in built space, hoping to foster a national healing process that begins with a recognition of our collective loss and its impact on society (MASS, 2019).”

The memorial design consists of four houses, each built out of 700 glass bricks, representing the average number of lives taken to gun violence each week in America alone. The design included bringing together families who have been impacted by gun violence who then contribute remembrance objects placed within each glass brick, displaying the name, year of birth and death of the person being honoured. It was not mentioned the reason of selection of those who are honoured.

Upon entering a house, visitors will hear audio recordings from interviews conducted by MASS and StoryCorps. On an adjacent wall outside of the houses are video clips from *Comes The Light*, a documentary about the effects of gun violence which capture stories about the lives that have been cut short and the objects chosen to represent them.



Figures 4.0 and 4.1: Photographs of *The Gun Violence Memorial Project, Chicago*. (MASS, 2019)

4.3 Analysis

It is an interesting approach, to have family members contribute an item that belongs to a loved one that they lost as it “preserve(s) individual memories (MASS, 2019)”. The glass houses offer an interior experience of a memorial so that visitors are walking into the mourning process with the victims family and friends. It introduces a wider sense of community and understanding and places emphasis on the amount of lives lost so to create a larger impact. This memorial is successful in highlighting both issues - the lives that have been lost due to gun violence and the millions of people who will continue to suffer due to gun violence. This memorial makes a political statement whilst demanding respect and understanding towards the loss of the victims loved ones.

4.4 Case Study 3: Let it Burn by David Best

David Best, an American artist and sculptor, is known for his incredible cathartic temples, set alight as a ritual of letting go of our past. By discussing one of his works, I will establish a successful design approach in memorial architecture; how the act of participation comes to mean more than we may believe.

‘Let it burn’ (2015), a temple in Derry, Northern Ireland, was a controversial structure that burned brightly on Kelly’s Field. Years after the Troubles, it is clear to see that the violence it ensued upon thousands has left deep wounds that are far from healed (Harper, 2020). The temporary pavilion was a collaboration between David Best and arts trust Artichoke, is described as a temple. The purpose of the temple is to address over three decades of sectarian and religious tensions that claimed the lives of more than 3,500 people (McCarthy & Richter, 2019). The structure of the temple is interesting in that the tall spire is reminiscent of Derry’s Catholic and Protestant cathedrals, a framework of a post and beam pyramid. Covering every single surface are layers of plywood ornamentation. These embellishments were then adorned with messages and poems from victims of the Troubles.



Figure 4.2: Interior Photograph of the Let it Burn Temple, Derry. (Harper, 2020)
Figure 4.3: Photograph of the burning of the Let it Burn Temple, Derry (Harper, 2020)

4.5 Analysis

Kelly's Field is a deeply controversial site due to its predominantly republican territory. Due to this controversy, "Nearby community centres chose to withdraw support for the project, uncomfortable with the location (Harper, 2020)." Although, to the director of the art trust Artichoke, the site was crucial in its design. "Spaces that are never considered to be shared never become shared" says Helen Marriage (2020). Best shares his agreement in the importance of process over product, "it's more important who goes inside it. A building itself should never be more important than the people (Harper, 2020)." This is reminiscent of the location of Whiteread's Holocaust memorial; despite its controversy, it is important to its design.

To this day, large bonfires that are lit every July, carry a heavy history in Northern Ireland due to the oppression and sectarianism they represent. Despite the beauty of the temple and all its trimmings, the process of burning may be viewed as insensitive. Marriage continues on how this is "about taking the bonfire tradition and subverting it (Harper, 2020)." in a poignant attempt to change the narrative. Although thoughtful and intentional, this may be a crucial detail as to why the memorial can be seen as a failed endeavour on my part. Despite that, Best's process of burning his sculptures is one of great importance as he mentions "you don't destroy the temple when you burn it. You burn it to protect it (Harper, 2020)." Therefore, what makes them so effective is the participation of communities and the stories carried on; the power is in the process. "The temple lives on in the experience of everyone who contributed to it and witnessed it going up in smoke (Harper, 2020)."

4.6 Conclusion

Hundreds of members of the public, not dissimilar to the Gun Violence Memorial, helped in producing the decorative panelling, in which “grievers being their memories, not to forget but to make peace with the past (Lister, 2022).” The participation of the public is what made this memorial successful otherwise it would just be a mass of carefully designed wood being burned to the ground. The process of grieving is included, in giving a helping hand to the participator in letting go and making peace with the past. “It wasn’t just the building process. Simply visiting the temple – setting foot in a part of town that has long felt off limits because of its political and religious affiliations – was significant for many (Artichoke, no date)” comments Jo Caird, to Spears Magazine.

5.0 Installation Art as Memorialisation

5.1 Introduction

Death and loss from death is a universal experience. What intrigues me about memorials is the deeply individual nature of the experience and how we as designers can communicate something so extensive and intangible to become something condensed and tangible. “That’s how I see the power of art: to take an intangible experience and make it tangible for people to process and be with (2022).”

The Tate describe installation art as “large-scale, mixed-media constructions, often designed for a specific place or for a temporary period of time”. We saw the upheaval of art installations from the 1960s. It became a major strand in modern art from the early 1990s “when the ‘crash’ of the art market in the late 1980s led to a reawakening of interest in conceptual art (Tate). Art installations can be made up of objects or mixed media such as light and sound and often occupy an entire room, series of rooms or gallery space that “the spectator has to walk through in order to engage fully with the work of art. Some installations, however, are designed simply to be walked around and contemplated, or are so fragile that they can only be viewed from a doorway, or one end of a room. What makes installation art different from sculpture or other traditional art forms is that it is a complete unified experience, rather than a display of separate, individual artworks (Tate).” The focus is therefore displaced onto how the observer experiences the art and thus the emotions or thoughts provoked by the installation is often a dominant theme, something I would argue makes them so successful. As mentioned in the first chapter, participation is important in holding a viewers attention. “Even in the dematerialised, social media sodden scene, art still functions as a memorial (Whorrall-Campbell & writer).”

Many artists will come to mind for different individuals, depending on what resonated with them the most, which is almost what makes them so alluring. I will begin to discuss two art installations as a form of memorialisation, both of which I find as successful as the other and despite their disparity in context, have design concepts akin that we as designers should take into consideration.

5.2 Case Study 4: Fallen by Emma Leahy

Fallen (Leahy, 2021), is an art installation “comprised of 3,602 hand sculpted, high fired porcelain feathers that represents and commemorate the 3,602 individuals who lost their lives as result of the Northern Irish conflict from 1969 to current day (Leahy, 2021).” Each and every detail of this installation is considerate, making it successful. The use of the porcelain as her main material highlights the fragility of Northern Irish politics and the how life can be lost in an instant, reflecting how the lives of those lost in the Troubles were immediate.



Figures 5.0 and 5.1: Photographs of Fallen Porcelain Installation. (Leahy, 2021)

5.3 Analysis

It is interesting to look at porcelain as her materiality of choice due to its slight transparency when held up against light. Could this be a comment on the politics that exist in Northern Ireland today, how everyone's judgements are still clouded due to past events? Repetition is a concept of great weight throughout art installations. It places emphasis on the number of lives lost without losing meaning. Each feather is different, again to stress how each life lost was different and isn't just a statistic. The ring shaped curtain of feathers envelopes the viewer as they step inside, not to immerse themselves but to step inside of the story rather than looking at it from a distance, as I previously mentioned in the first chapter. Leahy's thought provoking installation stands to be moving yet refreshing through details, materiality and repetition.

5.4 Case Study 5: War Room by Cornelia Parker

Cornelia Parker was invited to make a piece of work about the First World War. She visited a poppy factory in Richmond, London, in which she drew inspiration from "a machine that had rolls of red paper with perforations where the poppies had been punched out (Tate)."



Figures 5.2 and 5.3: Photographs of the War Room. (Parker, 2015)

5.5 Analysis

The absent poppies are what makes it so poignant, it is symbolic of the lives taken from the first world war and others since. “In this room there’s something like 300,000 holes, and there’s many more lives lost than that (Tate).” She designed the room like a tent, suspending the layers upon layers of material as if it were fabric. Visitors can enter the room and feel enclosed by the tent, the effect is captivating but also sobering in its message.

5.6 Conclusion

Alike Leahy’s ‘Fallen’, Parker places a lot of importance on the material used and adopts the same theme of repetition to echo the lives so tragically lost. The two could be said to make the viewer feel a great deal of weight of the grief left behind, felt by loved ones of victims. Although neither installations include participation of the public or victims families in the creation of the work, they are offering the concept of walking through a memorial, what I essentially feel is existing inside a memory and therefore are participating in their remembrance.

6.0 Conclusion

6.1 Hypothesis and Rationale

The Holocaust as a starting point for the upheaval of memorials, ultimately, called for the materialisation and manifestation of a tangible form of grief and remembrance. Collectively, nations came together in taking a stance to announce their grief and each others understanding of that grief. This has been carried through generations to this present day, nearly 100 years later. To the best of my knowledge, it can be clear to see that in being able to try to understand grief or to participate in remembrance of an individual, group of people or event, an observable tangible entity is where we find the most impact despite the succession of social media and a new digital culture.

6.2 Key Findings

Whiteread's Holocaust Memorial is a brilliant example of how symbolism is important in this process, however, this is not to say that any memorial with a main design concept of symbolism is immediately effective. Whiteread's success is in the brutality of the design and how it is not trying to be something beautiful or something that it is not, as the Holocaust shall not be shone in that light. Given its context, this memorial stands against my argument that a memorial is more impactful when accessible. Whereas, when introduced to memorials such as Berlin's Holocaust, the abstract symbolism has been somewhat lost in time. Neither are fully accessible and both produce concepts of symbolism, brutality and repetition. In spite of that they create completely different effects upon the public eye.

Contemporary memorials such as MASS design group's Gun Violence Memorial has grasped the notion of walking through a memorial as a 'working through' of the grief. The participation of the victims families are what makes this memorial so gripping; without the personal objects, the memorial would lose its essence. In the same way, Best includes the public in participation of the Let it Burn memorial, again another example of how without their contribution and participation would declare the structure powerless. To my best understanding, participation in a memorial makes the process of grieving, to some degree, a collective experience and so adheres to collective remembrance, a phenomena that we have been searching for from the beginning of memorial architecture. Participation can range from walking through a memorial to contributing a meaningful

object, to writing a poem on a corner of the wall. We as designers must move with how new generations process information. This is not to say we should ignore previous or historic memorials, nor is it to say that such memorials are ineffective but that we need to turn towards participation and inviting the viewer into the memory, to welcome a new generation of understanding rather than detached observation.

6.3 Reflections on Research

The individual is inside of that memory rather than looking at that memory and thus are not displaced from the event or person. A large body of statistical research is yet to be analysed as there is not enough data to show for it today so some questions still remain. Will we see an increase of art installation memorialisation? Will memorialisation through installations shape future generations understandings of current tragedies and complex histories whilst providing spaces for collective remembrance in years to come?

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8.0 List of Figures

- Figure 1.0: Hartley-Parkinson, R., 2017. Image of tourists jumping on Holocaust Memorial, Berlin. [image] Available at: <<https://metro.co.uk/2017/01/19/powerful-images-that-show-why-holocaust-selfies-are-so-disrespectful-6391091/>> [Accessed 5 November 2022].
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- Figure 2.0: Manchester City Council, 2017. Photograph of the spontaneous memorial in St Ann's Square after the Manchester Arena Attack. [image] Available at: <<http://www.spontaneoumemorials.org>> [Accessed 15 October 2022].
- Figure 3.0: Khanam, M., 2022. Photograph of The Judenplatz Holocaust Memorial, Vienna. [image] Available at: <<https://www.re-thinkingthefuture.com/designing-for-typologies/a2623-judenplatz-holocaust-memorial-by-rachel-whiteread-a-plethora-of-signs/>> [Accessed 1 Nov. 2022].
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- Figure 4.0: MASS Design Group, 2019. Photograph of The Gun Violence Memorial Project, Chicago. [image] Available at: <<https://massdesigngroup.org/work/design/gun-violence-memorial-project>> [Accessed: 20 October 2022].
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- Figure 4.2: Harper, P., 2020. Interior Photograph of the Let it Burn Temple, Derry. [image]
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- Figure 4.3: Harper, P., 2020. Photograph of burning of the Let it Burn Temple, Derry. [image]
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- Figure 5.0: Leahy, E., 2021. Photograph of Fallen Porcelain Installation. [image] Available at:
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- Figure 5.1: Leahy, E., 2021. Close up photograph of Fallen Porcelain Installation. [image]
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