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This paper considers how memorial architecture as a form of symbolic restoration could contribute to our understanding of some of the complexities in memorial design. Symbolic restoration, like many other symbolic practices, offers us the possibility to emphasise what we consider significant but suffers from what we here call the 'paradox of meaningfulness'. Within memorial architecture, this paradox transforms into a peculiar problem. While a memorial designer must be wary not to create an overload by design and/or programmatically since this could corrupt the memorial's primary concern to symbolically restore, the design must, at the same time, be interesting to be visited. Only then could the memorial's ability to allow for commemoration be safeguarded, and thus be able to mark that which it represents as relevant over time. But, in order to do so, the memorial needs a kind of worthwhileness, brought about by its design or programme. Hence, this reveals the memorial design paradox. This reflective awareness as unfolded in the paper will support memorial designers in finding designed responses to the need for symbolic restoration. In general, this paper illustrates the importance of critical and ethical reflection within architecture.

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Prelude

While the meaning of memorials and memorial architecture has already been extensively debated, the discussion has not yet considered how a philosophical reflection on symbolic practices could assist in advancing our understanding of memorial architecture. Such an intermission for critical and ethical reflection may *prima facie* appear less useful for some architectural theorists and practitioners, but its insertion into architectural theory, education, and practice may lead to a kind of knowledge or wisdom, though implicit, that will enlighten both design and theory. Therefore, the paper wishes to address a broad audience, including architects, architectural theorists, philosophers, and whomever interested in memory studies or memorial architecture.

This paper explains why memorial architecture can be seen as a form of symbolic restoration and in what sense it is similar to other symbolic practices. With reference to Arnold Burms, 'symbolic restoration'[1] here is defined as

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acknowledging or emphasising the value, worth, or significance of someone, something, or an event by symbolical means, i.e. acts, gestures, or language, such as a minute of silence. Because 'real' restoration is impossible, 'symbolic' restoration operates in the sphere of meaning and value to counter the possibility of a lack of significance, or an appearance of insignificance, that propels the feeling or idea that something has to be done in face of what has been harmed or lost, i.e. the sense that we owe it to those involved. The paper starts with the part, 'Commemoration, memorial, and monument', a common-sense description of memorial architecture and what monuments and memorials are ordinarily understood to be, which leads to a discussion on how these understandings may be sceptically received and theoretically addressed. In the following part, 'Memorial architecture: a symbolic practice', the notion of a symbolic practice will be explained. The immanent meaning of these symbolic practices that we are intuitively familiar with in our ordinary lives as human beings is further reflected. The non-architectural examples make intelligible the meaning-constituent aspect of these symbolic practices and their relevance; this is further connected to memorials as architectural parallels. The basis of how memorial architecture plays a role in symbolic practices further informs the subsequent part that explores the connection and differences between a memorial and many other symbolic practices.

This then leads to the part on 'The memorial design paradox' which sets out the basis of the argument that, despite the aims of a memorial's design to enable or support the symbolic restorative practice, it may also hamper it. This tension is here called the 'memorial design paradox' which can be momentarily described as follows. In order to guarantee the continued remembrance and acknowledgement of the relevance of events and persons, the memorial has to be valuable, interesting, or worthwhile in order to continuously arouse interest and attract and engage visitors. However, the supporting architectural programme or design may corrupt the memorial's *raison d'être*. The inclusion of this supporting concern to the design risks to imply that the event, those involved, or who have suffered appear to be instrumentalised to serve other implicit or explicit ends that the memorial might also entail or support, such as economic, regional or urban development, tourism, architectural-aesthetic value, and/or political ideology. This is the design paradox — in order to design for the primary symbolic function, one has to include a secondary supporting design concern which then may hamper or corrupt the enabling capacity for the first.

By revealing this parallel and the design paradox, the paper shows that our ordinary and intuitive understanding of memorials should not be approached sceptically, but instead holds an important truth or wisdom to memorial designers that can assist us in the deliberative design processes of memorials. This is the paper's concern in the final section, 'The intuitive wisdom in our ordinary understanding'. By way of concluding, the paper suggests some design implications by referring to some exemplary cases.

Methodologically speaking, this paper offers a reflective, explanatory account that searches to describe the immanent meaning of symbolically

restoring by architectural means. The paper is essentially philosophical, and might therefore sometimes read as speculative, and suggests that memorialisation by architectural means in public space is not essentially different from very ordinary commemorative practices. While such practices are intuitively clear to us, their significance does not always seem to be accounted for in our theoretical reflections on memorial architecture. While memorials shifted to become more 'horizontal', or spatial and experientially engaging, which has been observed by, among others, James E. Young, and, more recently, Quentin Stevens and Karen A. Franck, as well as Sabina Tanović,[2] there has not been much attention to the risk this design trend, if overemphasised, may sometimes pose to what memorials mean to us. Additionally, the risk of our theoretical engagement with memorial architecture, its function, and our critical interpretation thereof[3] — i.e. the way it is framed often as a political, ideological, and collective tool in creating identities and memories — is that it sometimes seems to cast a shadow on our intuitive, ordinary understanding. The latter, as the paper argues, remain highly relevant in our evaluative reception of and our engagement with memorials, as well as, importantly, the design task involved in creating commemorative places.

This paper aims to show that this ordinary understanding could be interpreted within the framework of symbolic restoration, implying that memorials and commemorative practices are therapeutic. For instance, Kirk Savage notably argued for this therapeutic interpretation, which has to some extent been empirically accounted for, and this paper extends it to the level of meaning or sense-making, i.e. the symbolic order.[4] By drawing the parallel between everyday symbolic practices and their architectural form, one could say this paper's contribution to the debate is threefold. Firstly, it offers an explanatory account of the immanent meaning of memorial architecture and commemorative practices that is consistent with our everyday, showing how intuitively evident symbolic practices offer a complementary understanding of what commemoration and memorials seem to mean or do from a lived perspective. Therefore, it assists, in the long run,[5] in explaining this contemporary shift from monumentality to counter-monumentality characterised by horizontal, minimal, and experiential designs — as we are aware of how monuments tend to lose their figurative and representational appeal over time and are not able to continuously engage visitors, thus less effective in symbolically restoring than the way contemporary memorials do by means of programmatically or aesthetically interesting architecture or landscape architecture. The paper shows what role our contemporary *lieux de mémoirs* play in enabling symbolic and cultural practices of commemoration. It explains how our ordinary ways of symbolic restoration — or vernacular ways of commemorating — mould our collective, public symbolic practices, clarifying what we expect or not to find in memorials. Secondly, it points to an inherent difficulty or risk in contemporary memorial design because of the tendency to endow the memorial with an additional — broadly speaking — function. While this tendency towards counter-monumentality seems logical from this human need for symbolic restoration, it seems nevertheless important for memorial designers to

become aware of this tension, i.e. the memorial design paradox. While acknowledging the role of aesthetics, programme, and function within a memorial design and within this contemporary, restorative framework, the paper explains why over-scaling those aspects might elicit indignation and criticism. While these symbolic practices are intuitively evident to us, this framework has not often been invoked to explain the often morally tainted debate on memorial design. Relatedly, the paper suggests why agonistically memorialising may morally backfire as such memorials are not always or fully able to offer the intuitively clear and sought-for symbolic acknowledgement. Put differently, it points to why a memorial's legibility (as a memorial) and incorporating explicit references (naming) is constitutive for restoration. Thirdly, the paper suggests that a kind of overindulgence with theoretical interpretations of commemoration, though not necessarily untrue, may cast a shadow on this ordinary understanding of memorials and the immanent meaning of such commemorative practices, as these theoretical interpretations sometimes depict the latter as erroneous or delusional.

In general, the added value of making memorialisation intelligible by referring to symbolic restoration, and explaining its consistency with the broader range of symbolic practices, lies not in theoretical exhaustivity, but is to re-instantiate the relevance of this ordinary understanding to memorial design deliberations. This paper and the explanatory framework that it presents assist in understanding what sometimes seems to go wrong in memorial design and how design choices could be understood to drive that drift. It explains why an insufficient awareness of the symbolic-moral dimension, which this paper points to by referring to the memorial design paradox, can lead to, such as the criticism that a memorial erroneously focusses primarily on aesthetics, entertainment, or urban, tourism, or economic development, or suffers from a lack of memorial legibility or representation (e.g. names).

This suggestion to improve our understanding of some design issues in memorial design relies on this interpretative, reflective suggestion to clarify the immanent meaning of symbolic practices. The latter, however, are culturally embedded. In order to be able to describe and reflect on these practices, one is in need of a firm grasp and deep understanding of them. Therefore, it makes sense to start from examples within one's own cultural context. In that regard, one might say that the examples are perspectival and mirror the author's West-European roots, which is acknowledged by the paper as its scope and limitation. However, the paper aims to offer a framework that can inform investigation based on different cross-cultural examples and elaboration on what may be revealed through this reflective explanatory lens.[6]

Commemoration, memorial and monument

Memorial architecture encompasses a broad range of forms and sites, from buildings, statues, to parks, in our built environment. They have been specifically designed and built for this reason — the memorial entity, object, or place (whether a park, building, site, or museum) intends to make us aware

of a specific event or period, for which someone in some way asks for some kind of awareness or recognition. It is intended to remind us of what happened. Although the meaning of what happened might shift throughout time, be disputed or diversely interpreted, a physical entity or intervention remains important. The alternative would be to have nothing there. Historic monuments, heritage, and meaning-infused buildings or sites, some of which may be difficult heritage, share this characterisation; the site is safeguarded for reasons ranging from historical or architectural worth to the relevance of an event or period to the site, and a site can possibly be adapted to remain or become valuable and functional. Leaving it to decay or demolishing would instead suggest an aura of insignificance.[7] Put differently, the commemoration asks for a materialised form or spatial intervention in order to guarantee the remembrance of that which is thought to be worthy of remembering. A memorial offers a signpost within space and time and, thus, is somehow able to guarantee the relevance of what it refers to. In contrast to a fugacious memorial service that over time seems to leave the event to oblivion, memorial architecture offers a material and seemingly permanent acknowledgement that correspond to the intention to never forget, adding to the acknowledgement a sense of timelessness through its public, spatial, and material character.

This description tries to capture both a monument and a memorial. Since the paper primarily concerns the human practice of commemoration, the description suggests that most memorials carry the connotation of an event that demanded remembrance because of the loss it generated. Memorials carry with them a sentiment of loss and disruption, of that which should not have happened and should not ever happen again. Monuments, on the other hand, reside in a sphere of honouring.[8] They refer to an act of heroism or great achievement, though possibly and often at a certain cost.[9] The difference between the two seems in ordinary human practice relatively straightforward. In a monument, there seems to be a focus on what has been gained or achieved. The narrative is positive. A memorial, instead, is primarily concerned about the loss, mostly of (individual) lives, and has a negative focus, inviting us to pause and reflect on the loss, what generated it, and who suffered from it. The loss of life or the suffering itself is what the spectator is reminded of, not the greatness of the achievement or the heroism. This understanding resonates with Kirk Savage's historical analysis of modern memorials focussing on honouring victims instead of celebrating victory and heroes.[10] The monument is associated with reflections about that which we have done, while the memorial arouses thoughts about that which should not have happened; but both deal with recognition. Note that both categories could be said to be gradually distinct and can evolve. For instance, a monument in honour of a colonial leader can be perceived as offending because of the contrast between the 'positive and honouring' intent and our current reading of the injustices and losses imposed by colonialism, which the monument and narrative fail to acknowledge. Both monuments and memorials are visual markers and political tools[11]; although they may serve to communicate social and political ideas, this paper aims to highlight that such ideas are not explicitly or necessarily present

in ordinary understandings of memorials and monuments or when participating in a commemorative practice.

This ordinary understanding of architectural commemoration is sometimes rather sceptically viewed within the fields of architectural theory and memory studies. For instance, in their text, 'Writing on "the Wall": Memory, Monuments and Memorials', William M. Taylor and Michael P. Levine rightly refer to the value of 'psychological and related views explaining the working of memory, for they provide a rationale for assessing the evocative capacity of memorials'.[12] But they critically question the alleged function of memorials to commemorate, mourn, and 'find closure' or 'catharsis'. For instance, they write that such views are 'useful for understanding what memorials are about in both subjective and social terms', but

> [t]o say simply that they are about remembering, honouring and the like, hides more than it explains. […] What is important is that these and similar accounts explain memorials and the need to memorialise in ways *that suggest ordinary understanding and justifications for these activities (they help us 'move on' etc.) are superficial or even false*. Moreover, they also provide a theoretical background that can be used to explain […] the difficulty, *if not impossibility, of adequately memorialising* even those things that need to be remembered.[13]

Taylor and Levine thus do not question that commemoration is a distinctive and motivating reason for the creation of memorials. They are, however, critical about their function in so far as memorials would assist to 'find closure' or help us 'to move on', which is precisely what our ordinary understanding of memorials and commemoration entails. This understanding in a contemporary sense is framed by Savage as 'memorials being therapeutic':

> By therapeutic I mean a monument whose primary goal is not to celebrate heroic service or sacrifice, as the traditional didactic monument does, but rather to heal a collective psychological injury.[14]

> The monument functions as a communal act of recognition, and indeed, restitution. It restores their dead comrades to a place of honour […]. Judith Herman, in her study of trauma, identifies recognition and restitution as the collective responses 'necessary to rebuild the survivor's sense of order and justice'[.][15]

It is this ordinary understanding Taylor and Levine characterise as 'superficial' or 'false', and they question whether it is even possible to 'adequately memorialise'. Although their critical analysis is very valuable, the point here is to draw attention to the fact that they tend to devalue an important aspect of our common-sense understanding of commemoration and memorials. This is not to say that their reflections are incorrect, but it is another thing to say that our ordinary understandings referring to 'remembering, honouring and the like' are 'superficial or even false'. This distancing from our ordinary understanding is not something specific to their account. With reference to Françoise

Choay's influential book, *The Invention of the Historic Monument*, one might question whether we should connect our concern for the past and our commemorative activity to the idea that we have a certain goal in mind. For instance, Choay writes,

> [I]t is [a past] localised and selected to a critical end, to the degree that it is capable of directly contributing to the maintenance and preservation of the identity of an ethnic, religious, national, tribal or familial community.[16]

Choay's analysis links the explanation for commemoration in 'a psychologically grounded account' to its deliberate 'function', as Taylor and Levine summarised.[17] However, this paper shall suggest that, within our ordinary understanding of memorialising, this deliberate, consciously entertained function, with reference to Maurice Halbwachs, is not necessarily present.[18] Although this paper does not necessarily deny such insights on the constructed nature of collective memory, it does question to what extent the need for commemoration and memorials is adequately captured by this functional understanding that seems to do away with the first-person, internal perspective — which seems to rely on deeply ingrained symbolic, moral attitudes, such as an awareness of value and indignation about what happened. Thus, this paper does not question the value of these sceptical or critical accounts; instead, it addresses the problem of how such analyses cast a shadow on the kind of knowledge or wisdom that is implicitly entailed in these 'ordinary understandings'. In other words, this paper doubts whether we should denote the latter as 'false' or 'superficial'. Why would memorials not be simply about 'remembering, honouring and the like'? Why do they help us 'to move on'?

Through the descriptive analogy in commonplace symbolic practices, where the commemorative acts on both an individual and collective level and memorial architecture, the paper clarifies in what sense these collective, commemorative practices, also within their architectural form, originate from a need for recognition (and symbolisation). The act of collectively commemorating is to be understood as a community's response to a local need; as if we, the community, owe it to those affected. The interpretation here attempts to bridge the gap between ingrained habits of thought and action, which are ubiquitous in both individuals and groups, and public commemoration, such as memorial architecture, which could be considered as another way of collectively responding to an essentially human need. In John Bodnar's view, these are vernacular ways of commemorating.[19] Put differently, this paper aims to show the truth in our ordinary understanding of memorial architecture, contrary to the conception that it is somehow 'erroneous'.[20] Thus, this paper advances a possible explanation to understand the immanent meaning of symbolic practices, in particular those of symbolic restoration and their architectural parallel, i.e. memorial architecture. To unravel the immanent meaning of an action, custom, or practice, this paper develops means to describe and (speculatively) reflect on why it makes sense from an internal perspective. This forms the basis of the paper's claim that this way of understanding memorial architecture helps to

elucidate some issues in memorial design and to inform the deliberative memorial design process.

Memorial architecture: a symbolic practice

In order to clarify the notion of a symbolic practice, let us first consider symbolic restoration, which I consider a paradigmatic example of these practices. Arnold Burms[21] noted repeatedly that, when there is a natural disaster, we not only try to restore the damage and to prevent it from happening again, such as to rebuild houses and improve dams, but also to symbolically restore that which cannot be repaired, for instance, the suffering and the lives lost. This symbolic restoration, embodied by the politician's visit, a memorial service, or candles and flowers, does not aspire to change the cause of events and is not oriented at a kind of alteration or restoration of (a previous) reality, but aimed at a restoration on the level of meaning or value. It tries to emphasise the value and to deny the apparent irrelevance of those who were harmed or lost. In that sense, a symbolic restorative practice gains or offers the participant a relation to and to hold on meaning or value that cannot be easily accomplished in another way.

Symbolic restoration, memorial services, putting down flowers, lighting candles, medal ceremonies, visiting graves, funerals, gifts, putting up photographs, name-giving, initiation or transition rites, anniversaries, birthdays, ceremonies, punishments of offenders,[22] and vows are all examples of symbolic practices. Acting symbolically is thus more than participating in a ritualistic practice.[23] These examples suggest that human beings are symbolical beings; we act in ways that are only intelligible if we reflect on how these practices relate to what we consider valuable and significant. They make up what we in a Lacanian sense could call the 'symbolic order' — the realm of customs, practices, rituals, rules, traditions, and meanings, in which we are in a Heideggerian sense thrown [*Geworfenheit*] and which are, at the same time, natural to the kind of being that we are. These practices are simply part of our mode of existence.

Human beings spontaneously adopt these practices in order to find a way to deal with certain events, thoughts, and feelings; without these acts, gestures, or language, we would not be able to have this kind of response and we would have to find another (and symbolic) way. Importantly, we come to understand and adopt them without a prior or parallel theoretic belief about why we do so, such as their function, or social or emotional role. These practices are not explicitly explained or justified to us at some point, but incrementally we come to understand and adopt them as an appropriate way of dealing with certain events, situations, and emotions. Although they are spontaneous in that we intuitively adopt them or feel the spontaneous need or desire to participate in them,[24] they are of course cultural, the non-spontaneous, in the sense that we do not have to invent them time and time again. Put differently, there is a cultural stock of such acts that we can rely on, which of course does not mean that they cannot change over time, and that we in a sense inherit and sometimes (re)invent. For instance, when someone dies, it is difficult

to find a way to deal with this loss. In such instances, we rely on our culture — our symbolic order — to find a way to show that we cared about this person. The feeling, desire, or need to do something is spontaneous; doing nothing would instil in most of us a disquieting feeling or the idea that we should do something, but the gestures we make are also culturally embedded — implying cultural differences.

These practices are meaning-constitutive because they allow us to acknowledge that something has a particular value or meaning, or that something important happened or something valuable was corrupted or lost. They make it possible to express our indignation, grief, and gratitude. They enable us to find a way to stress the significance of certain deeds or events, or to deal with events that threaten the meaning of our lives. Through these acts, we publicly highlight what happened, what should not have happened, and/or what we never want to see happen again. In that sense, the meaningfulness of these symbolic practices derives from their enactment and our intuitive understanding of their appropriateness[25]; vice versa, their absence may create an aura of irrelevance. Such practices are symbolic in that they either symbolically refer to an event or persons, and in doing so establish them as relevant or meaningful, or they are symbolic as they grant certain objects a particular status. In those cases, the object refers to the event or person. Therefore, disrespecting the object means disrespecting the person. What these practices have in common is their symbolic dimension or, put differently, a dimension relating to what these events, persons, or objects mean to others and what they in some way represent.[26]

This is not to say that only these kinds of symbolic practices can confer meaning to our lives; everything we do may do so. However, this does not make the observation less true that these symbolic practices seem to offer us a way to either reject the apparent irrelevance brought about by the contingency of our existence or to emphasise the significance of something. Choay's reference to entropy holds relevance here, which will be discussed in a later part.

In that regard, it would be mistaken to focus exclusively on our negative practices. Ordinary human life is pervaded by similar positive practices, from name-giving, birthdays, a book launch, initiation rites, vows, to wedding ceremonies. All these practices celebrate value or meaning, and emphasise that which is thought of as relevant, important, or valuable, such as having and attending my children's graduation. But when this celebration or emphasis remains absent, the event or person might appear irrelevant. For instance, when no one attends the funeral, it seems as if the deceased is completely irrelevant; when no one thinks of someone's birthday, then we feel compassion and pity for the one who should have been celebrated. A birthday is celebrated to communicate that we care about a person and appreciate the kind of person they are and what they mean to us. Hence, by attending, I indirectly endow some kind of relevance to the other, and by not doing so, such as forgetting or not attending without good reason, it seems as if this person is not that important (to me).

Thus, while relying on the suggestion in Paul Moyaert's writings,[27] not performing these symbolic acts would be an implicit acknowledgement of the pure contingency of the event or the person, and hence its irrelevance or meaninglessness. If we would not perform these acts, then the contingent events that are significant would disappear in the continuous stream of life and the universe, which by itself does not offer signposts for significant or meaningful events. In contrast, by symbolising, that is, by disrupting the stream of contingencies — which a minute of silence does explicitly — these events are called into being as meaningful events and become relevant.[28] Hence, our symbolic order offers us a possibility to retain meaning in life by rejecting the apparent meaninglessness of events and persons. This symbolic meaning constructed through its enactment is also something Pierre Nora acknowledged:

> Even an apparently purely material site […] becomes a *lieu de mémoire* only if the imagination invests it with a symbolic aura. A […] site, […] belongs to the category only inasmuch as it is also the object of a ritual. And the observance of a commemorative minute of silence, an extreme example of a strictly symbolic action, serves as a concentrated appeal to memory by literally breaking a temporal continuity.[29]

Once again, an interpretative use of Jacques Lacan's reflections may assist us here.[30] While the event, such as a natural disaster, or an action, such as a terroristic attack, causes the physical death of its victims and a lot of suffering, human beings desire also the avoidance of a second and symbolical death. For instance, in Sophocles' Antigone, it is Antigone who revolts against the prohibited burial of her brother as this prohibition would imply his second, symbolical death — the prohibition to bury his body implies his irrelevance and denies him personhood. She cannot accept this devalued status of her brother and decides to bury him. Her act acknowledges the value and respect her brother ought to have, and rejects his symbolical death, i.e. the end of being meaningful or relevant. It also implies her own symbolical death as she suffers being outcast. However, this kind of symbolical gesture, i.e. the symbolical denial, such as the burial, of a symbolical death, not only acknowledges one's relevance, value, or meaning but also implies a kind of symbolical rebirth. This is a kind of transcendence of our physical existence reflected, for instance, in the famous George Elliot quotation, 'Our dead are never dead to us until we have forgotten them.'

The absence of an acknowledgement, such as the forgotten birthday, very often through a symbolic gesture, such as the birthday gift or attending the birthday party, can easily turn into something negative or threatening. In Lacan's terms, even if the act may not have caused someone's symbolic death, it may easily cause symbolic harm, such as apparent devaluation or irrelevance. This is apparent in many other examples, such as a baby who has not received a name, a book launch or graduation no one attends, an initiation rite or baptism that is forgotten or suspended, or the vow that is not spoken.[31] In summation, we engage in such practices to confer meaning on events and

persons, and, indirectly, on our lives. This is done by symbolically suspending the continuous stream of events in ordinary life and by expressing value or relevance in some way.

Moreover, as Moyaert rightly observes,[32] symbolic (physical) objects continue this affirmation of meaning or value when we ourselves no longer do or cannot do so. We then pass on the remembrance and the preservation of value to the community (such as memorial services or punishments) and the objects (such as memorials, statues, photos, or graves). For instance, soon after someone dies, we all recognise the guilt-like feeling we experience when we realise that we are not remembering the deceased, as if we got caught doing something inappropriate. On the other hand, in the instance of parents who lost their child, while the child is too important for the parents, it is also impossible for the parents to continue their lives while constantly remembering their child. The child's picture or the visit to the grave seem to offer the parents some way to respond to what happened and seems to help them not only to relate to this discomforting reality but also to find some implicit assurance that there is something that marks the value of their child and does so every second, which is for them (and anyone else) impossible to do. In this case, the picture does not change something, but symbolically restores the unjust loss of the child, i.e. the picture continuously reaffirms the relevance and value of the child apparently annulled by his or her death. Such objects constitute a permanent remembrance and thus recognition of the importance of the deceased. Quite literally, these objects (or in other examples the community) preserve the value or meaning of events and persons permanently and continuously and, in some sense, relieve certain members of the community (such as the parents or family members of the victims) to take on the responsibility to constantly remember and acknowledge what was lost.

I would like to suggest now that these symbolic practices and objects have an architectural parallel. Like the grave or picture, memorials can be seen to symbolically restore and/or represent the loss and acknowledge the relevance of what happened and those who suffered or died. Their role in this kind of symbolic restorative practice could be considered as layered. Firstly, erecting a memorial is a public acknowledgement that an event, the loss, and those involved ought not to be forgotten. Secondly, the memorial offers a lasting place and invitation to commemorate. It also invites those who were only remotely involved or those who come to learn about that which the memorial represents, or passers-by who are drawn to the memorial by its design or programme. Thirdly, the memorial guarantees that there is a place or object that nourishes the remembrance even at times when those who primarily cared about the commemoration, *in casu* those involved, those who have suffered losses, or the community, are unable to do so or are no longer among the living. The memorial can be considered like the picture or the grave in that it offers some kind of assurance that there is something enabling the remembrance, relieving in a way specific individuals from this responsibility and allowing them to move on.

In sum, the memorial publicly and continuously acknowledges the significance of the event and the value of those involved, and thus denies the previous denial of their worth or significance by the regretful event or misdeed that took place.[33] As explained, erecting and visiting the memorial offers us a way to retain meaning in life by denying the apparent irrelevance of events and persons by symbolising their worth. In addition, visiting the memorial or participating in its creation allows people to find a way to symbolically restore and to relate to the event or to learn about it. Without the memorial, there is a hiatus — there is nothing symbolically restoring and there is nothing offered to relate to the loss.

This explanatory account is congruent with our common-sense understanding and ordinary language in which memorials are considered important, as they allow us to commemorate something that ought not to be forgotten. It is also congruent with historical and theoretical accounts of commemoration and memorial architecture. For instance, Sebastian Brett, Louis Bickford, Liz Ševcˇenko, and Marcela Rios stated that public memorials are 'designed to evoke a specific reaction or set of reactions, including public acknowledgment of the event or people represented; personal reflection or mourning; pride, anger, or sadness about something that has happened; or learning or curiosity about periods in the past'.[34]

Choay also implicitly acknowledged the meaning-constitutive function of commemorating, of intervening in the flow of contingencies as a way to reject the apparent 'entropy' — monuments are 'an antidote to entropy, to the dissolving action of time on all things natural and artificial, it seeks to appease our fear of death and annihilation'.[35] Sabina Tanović refers to Choay when stating that '[f]or those who erect it, as for those who receive its messages, the monument is a defense against the traumas of existence'.[36] In this way, the memorial functions as a recognition which allows those affected 'to move on' as those involved and their losses are acknowledged. Similar to the examples explained above, if we do not erect the memorial, it might seem that we diminish the value or lower the significance of what happened and the loss it generated. The memorial is a signpost to remember and an invitation to commemorate. It is a physical object, like a grave or photo or birthday present, that symbolises and makes this value and relevance endure in time and space, allowing certain members of the community to 'move on' as the memorial has relieved them from the responsibility to actively and constantly remember. It is the memorial that enables the transfer of this responsibility to the community at large, in both space and time.[37] This explanatory account thus shows our common-sense understanding to be adequate after all, countering the view of authors like Taylor and Levine who consider our ordinary understanding erroneous in some respect.

The difference and the paradox of meaningfulness

As shown, symbolic practices concern meaning in life directly, though mostly implicitly, and they seem to serve a protective role when negative and an

emphatic role when positive. This explanatory account reveals that, underneath these spontaneous actions, a certain kind of protection against meaninglessness (or emphasis of value) is at work. However, they do so implicitly because this motive, i.e. to protect against meaninglessness, is not consciously entertained within the practice. Put differently, the action is not undertaken for this explicit reason nor justified on this basis. With regard to the symbolic practices, persons act as such spontaneously out of a sensibility and attachment to meaning and value, i.e. because they are aware of the values present or lost, such as the tragedy and the heroism of the deed. Many of these actions and practices flow from an immediate awareness of and concern about what matters in life, about what is valuable, what human beings are attached to, and what it means to them, but this immediate awareness and the participation in those actions is not originating from a consciously entertained belief about why these actions are undertaken on a reflective level of understanding.

In contrast, and this is what we may call 'the paradox of meaningfulness', consciously or intentionally striving for meaning can undercut the ability to achieve it in the context of symbolic practices. For instance, suppose I am hesitant to attend a wedding or birthday, but decide to go anyhow since I know that my absence may be harmful or offensive. In those cases, I am attending because of this derivative concern not to be reproached for implicitly displaying that I do not care that much about the other person. Additionally, if I would be explicit about my reason to attend, I instantly understand if, for instance, the one celebrated is a little confused or feels insulted, thinking something like 'if that's the reason, you shouldn't be here'. Although less clearly so, there may be something similar happening when I invoke the reflective understanding as a reason to act. Attending the birthday or funeral for the explicit reason that this allows me to acknowledge the other's relevance might come across a little odd. The oddity is due to the fact that, if the other is important to me, I should spontaneously want to attend and would not be in need of another additional, or derivative, reason. In contrast, attending would be self-evident and would not depend on further thoughts. There is an intuitive understanding of the reason for acting symbolically, but this intuitive clarity is not functioning as a reason for so acting.

So, in general, there is this kind of paradox: we have to do these actions or participate in these practices because not doing so would strip away the meaning of events and persons; however, if we would consciously entertain this idea by attending them and justifying these practices on this basis, then by doing so, we all the same seem to strip away the meaning or value of the act and, consequently, object, event, or person. Thus, although this explanation enlightens what these practices are for, it neither precedes our lived experience nor could the explanation take its place. Even if we are familiar with this insight — as we intuitively are — we do not consciously entertain it as if we would foster an instrumental or theoretical belief about these actions. Within the practice, this insight remains dormant, absent or passive — and it needs to be so.

However, the case of memorial design is somewhat different. The design of a memorial necessarily involves the reflective understanding of what the design has to entail so as to support or enable the memorial's functions. The design has to deliberate about the aesthetics, the supporting programme, and the spatial context to evidence its involvement with why we commemorate and what is conducive to a place for enabling remembrance, acknowledgement, and commemoration. These thoughts are very similar to reflective thoughts about why we are participating or even having these symbolic practices. Hence, there is this tension — since the memorial has to be designed, this designed character necessarily inserts these kinds of thoughts about what is designedly conducive to the memorial's function(s) and its worldly context. Consequently, the evaluation of these further thoughts — among which the intelligibility and justifications of the deliberation and design decisions — become part of our perception and evaluative understanding of the memorial. Hence, the risk arises that a reflective or functional understanding of the memorial, i.e. the way it serves its ends by its design, suppresses or corrupts, rather than supports, the memorial's essence — its enabling capacity for acknowledgement, remembrance, commemoration, and meaning-constitution.

Thus, what the paradox of meaningfulness shows is that a reflective, explanatory (and possibly scientific or functional) understanding of symbolic practices may hamper, corrupt, or even destroy these practices. The problem with memorials is similar in that both their design and assessment seem unable to stay away from such reflective understandings that give rise to these risks. In other words, the problem is that a memorial, because of its designed nature, will influence our understanding or reading of the memorial, implying these reflective thoughts will enter (and possibly hamper) the symbolic practice. For instance, a memorial design can play a role in a redevelopment logic. Hence, the redevelopment is necessarily part of the design, but the memorial's role in it may cause the understanding and evaluation of the memorial to become dominated by how the memorial functions within this redevelopment, which poses a threat to its commemorative function. However, this kind of contamination is almost impossible to avoid given that the memorial is necessarily imported into a real world context, with all the complexities that our societies and built environments comprise.

We now have to clarify in what sense a design can corrupt the memorial's actual meaning and how this may influence our understanding of the design and the memorial.

The memorial design paradox

The memorial design paradox denotes the difficult position and sought-for balance designers (and possibly commissioners) face due to the nature of memorial design. On the one hand, the memorial responds to a commemorative need and its main concern is symbolic restoration. The memorial enables a community to symbolically, publicly, and continuously throughout space and

time remember and acknowledge the relevance and value of the event and those involved. But, on the other hand, the designed character of the memorial risks corrupting this commemorative enabling function in the design's attempt to respond to a secondary need. For in order to be able to continue this commemorative function, that is, to safeguard that which ought to be remembered, the memorial relies on its continued existence for which it must be able to engage visitors by creating a permanent value by its architecture, programme, function, and/or activities. If not, the memorial also fails; a memorial that is uninteresting and unvisited seems to lose its function in time (and will disappear, either physically or from our shared memory). The memorial's commemorative meaning and function is therefore designed to survive by grace of the memorial's worthwhileness.

However, these strategies to guarantee its appeal and survival may divert the attention of its participants or visitors away from that which ought to be remembered, corrupting its commemorative *raison d'être*. Therefore, to safeguard the memory of what the memorial represents, the memorial needs to be interesting, which may hamper the commemorative (and primary) function of the memorial. Hence, the memorial design paradox — on the one hand, a memorial designer must be wary not to go overboard in programme and/or design since this could corrupt the memorial's primary concern to symbolically restore; on the other hand, the design must at the same time be interesting to be visited and remain part of the built environment and society. Only then will it be able to safeguard the memorial's ability to allow for commemoration and, thus, to mark that which it represents as relevant over time. However, in order to do so, the memorial needs a kind of worthwhileness, brought about by its design or programme, which consequently gives rise to the possibility that the memorial is or is perceived to be erected to serve other gains, such as economic, urban or regional development, or tourism, in addition to or even instead of its primary commemorative function.

In order to further explain this risk that seems inherent to the secondary design need, consider the following two issues. Firstly, the memorial that inserts a specific programme to its design may suffer from the fact that this programme is experienced or perceived by relevant involved parties, such as victims, survivors, friends and family members, and/or local communities, as dishonouring. The intention to offer symbolic restoration and recognition can be hampered due to such a programme because the latter may evoke the idea that the event and the loss or suffering is instrumentalised for ulterior motives, such as tourism or regional or economic development. These motives could consequently be considered inappropriate by certain concerned members of the community, such as the relatives and victims, because they divert the attention away from the restorative or commemorative (and primary) function. For instance, Karen Wilson Baptist also noted this when discussing the mausoleum of the (site of the) National September 11 Memorial & Museum in New York City,[38] i.e. the site of the World Trace Center Towers that were destroyed in the 11 September 2001 attacks:

> [T]he tomb will include a private seating and viewing area exclusively for family members […] The facilities are forbidden to members of the public, but the presence of the repository is indicated within the museum by a massive concrete wall inscribed with the words of Virgil: 'No day shall erase you from the memory of time'. Visitors to the museum can touch the wall, leave tributes for victims in proximity to the remains, and purchase a keychain engraved with Virgil's homily in the museum shop. For some families, the presence of the dead in the underground repository is a profanity, akin to including the dead […] in 'a freak show' […] For some families, a primary objection to the repository is based on the notion that the dead will become a component of a commercial tourist attraction [… The] mausoleum remains controversial […].[39]

Ken Foote also acknowledges that this difficult balance is one of the frictions of contemporary commemoration; 'There's a fine line between maintaining a memorial site and creating a tourist attraction, and the two are seen by many as incompatible.'[40]

Thus, a programme and design may conflict with the value of those who suffered and died since their death or the event leading to their death and the suffering are instrumentalised to develop an (often commercialised tourist) attraction and to offer visitors an experience. This tension has also been noted by Daniel J. Sherman in his analysis:

> [T]he memorial remains a crucial form of public recognition of their loss. Such recognition matters all the more because the building of any kind of memorial takes place in the context of reconstruction, which many oppose in principle.[41]

> Survivor's groups, notably, fear that the instrumentalisation of memories, which the survivors consider not only an end in themselves but sacred, will inevitably obscure the memories.[42]

The problem at hand is not how visitors behave, but the design intent to attract visitors or tourists, although this may seem desirable as well, which is the paradox. Such a design intention, which is often done through some kind of adventure-driven, sensation-providing activities or programmatic and aesthetic strategies, may then in a sense subordinate the memorial's symbolic restorative and commemorative function. Consequently, the memorial is not primarily concerned anymore about the symbolic restoration and is perceived as failing to acknowledge the relevance and value of what happened and, therefore, elicits controversy and (often emotional) revolt.

Secondly, in those cases where we would speak of a programmatic or by design overload, the fact that the memorial is intended to offer something different from commemoration and symbolic restoration could be problematic because the unmistakably present designed character conflicts with the symbolic practice that does not search for something different from commemoration and recognition. Such additions in a memorial design risk betraying the demand of the spontaneous practice that asks for a non-

programmatic or minimalist programmatic design. Similar to the reflective understanding that can destroy the practice if taken to function as a reason for action and made explicit, the intended design reflecting a programme that intends to do more than remembering could thus corrupt or destroy the commemorative practice since there seems to be another reason involved to have the memorial. The memorial might lose its meaning for whom the memorial really matters. Thus, an overload of design or an additional programme that discloses the intentional design possibly corrupts the symbolic practice — note that an ostensibly political or ideological appropriation of the commemoration or memorial (site) may evoke a similar revolt and incapacity to symbolically restore.

The intuitive wisdom in our ordinary understanding

Let us now return to Taylor and Levine's sceptical questions about our ordinary understanding of memorials and their commemorative function. In their text, they repeatedly refer to the extensively debated Vietnam Veterans Memorial (VVM), which was completed in 1982 and is situated on the National Mall in Washington DC and designed by Maya Lin (after she won the design competition). Taylor and Levine critically discuss the open-ended narrative of the memorial. The absence of some kind of context or position on the legitimacy of the war is, according to them, a kind of moral failure of the design and its commissioners. They wrote:

> There are many people, for instance, seemingly the majority of Vietnam veterans and most commentators on the VVM, who regard Lin's project as an unqualified success, emotionally, intellectually and aesthetically. As we have seen, one of the most frequently cited reasons for this is that the design allows for various interpretations of its architectural and landscape form — as if various and diverse interpretations are always a good thing […][43]

They question 'whether the prospect of a minimalist memorial is anything more than a myth, self-deceiving in its conception and possibly no less political in its effects than heroic, figurative and realist designs'.[44] The VVM allows, so they claim, for a narrative that endorses 'America's long history of 'noble' sacrifice'.[45] The narrative openness of the memorial is therefore problematic:

> If Haskins and DeRose are correct that the VVM serves the 'public function of mourning and remembrance' then it is not clear how its meaning, however widely or narrowly conceived, supports this recuperative function. For what is it being mourned and remembered?[46]

> While its walls may supply the aesthetic requisites for a counter-memorial in abstract terms, these do not make Maya Lin's design an *anti*-Vietnam war memorial — and ultimately, this is grounds for its moral failure.[47]

The plural or open interpretative character of the memorial is problematic because it does not say what is remembered and it does not take a stance on certain narratives that would be wrong. It is certainly true that this 'narrative openness' of the memorial leads to a certain ambiguity, which then again explains why the memorial becomes contaminated with political-ideological and more contemporary debate. Taylor and Levine would rather have preferred a memorial that did not allow for certain (in their view unjust) interpretations, and consider this possibility its (moral) failure.

Additionally, the question is also whether the memorial can avoid being 'political', irrespective of Lin's design intentions. Savage notes that the design of the memorial was adjusted by 'a simple didactic inscription, in two parts,' which was 'precisely the sort of imposed "message" that Lin had avoided'.[48] Savage also remarks, though, that 'one could easily argue […] that her walls so effectively shape the experience of the monument that they render the inscription invisible and irrelevant'.[49] The question remains, however, whether the memorial is still political:

> The 'give and take' of the inscription points to multiple readings of these deaths, which is how Lin had wanted it all along. What the inscription avoids […] is a statement of moral purpose […] What the inscription is attempting to do, in the end unsuccessfully, is to address the key problem inherent in the therapeutic monument. If we can erect monuments to victims rather than agents, then whose trauma deserves to be commemorated, and why? Who deserves the therapy of a public monument?[50]

This political nature of commemoration surfaces when we question why we collectively respond to some needs for symbolic restoration, but not others, and to what extent we can or should guide interpretations and what stories are then to be told (or considered worthy to). Because public commemoration is always intending a specific object, i.e. persons and/or events, it seems implausible that memorials would ever be apolitical. Relatedly, Sherman claims that 'the apparent construction of an apolitical realm of commemoration through naming and commemorative sites is an illusion'.[51] Sherman argues that both memorial sites (places) and the naming of victims (names) 'appropriate the personal on behalf of the political'[52] and that 'names continue to foster the illusion that they form the basis for a commemorative practice turned away from master narratives'.[53] So, it seems that our collective response is also a political act that depends on how we judge something's collective significance — the pertinent truth, which has been noted by Savage, with reference to Judith Herman's analysis, that 'which category of victim deserves a monument is fundamentally political'.[54]

These critical analyses, however, should not sideline our ordinary understanding. The immanent meaning of commemoration — i.e. its symbolic origin and our intuitive understanding of its meaning — seems to be overshadowed by an analysis that, although rightly, questions the political appropriation of commemorating but in so doing forgets about the need for symbolic

restoration and the designer's role. Thus, although I do not question such insightful and critical analyses, the question is also whether we can — and should — ever deny the primary and fundamentally symbolically restorative nature of the memorial? For instance, given the memorial's symbolic nature, the question is to what extent, or if at all, 'alter-commemoration' or 'anti-monumentalisation', which Sherman refers to, are able to really symbolically restore, in part because of their interpretative fluidity or instability and the denial to speak a name?[55] To what extent can and should a memorial become something else? Because of such critical analyses, we seem to forget sometimes that the design is primarily a response to a primary need for symbolic restoration, even though it is inevitably limited and eventually in some way politically recuperated. Thus, although this political dimension of commemorating was not the paper's focus, the account here enlightens why memorials often backfire. This paper suggests that a political — either overt or subversively all too present — appropriation of commemoration might have the same effect as the above-explained design paradox. If memorials would be seen as ways to only or mainly support political ideologies or hidden agendas, submerged in their function, such as a museum or a development site, or even to convey another symbolic message, such as to bring 'an end to hatred, ignorance and intolerance',[56] then their symbolical restorative *raison d'être* might start to deteriorate, eliciting indignation and leaving (at least some of) us in a state of entropy, of manifold symbolic deaths.

All this means that, in light of the account here suggested, there is another way to view the strength of certain memorials, such as Lin's design. Its strength may lie in a kind of awareness of what the memorial had to do; it had to remember those who lost their lives. It does not take a stance on whether the war was just or unjust, but rather symbolically represents people who died and whose lives were severely affected and thereby affirms their relevance. In the critical analyses mentioned, which I consider to be very valuable and largely correct, one seems to forget that the success of a memorial, like the VVM, may lie in its strength as a response to the need for symbolic restoration and to pause the continuous stream of irrelevant events to form a refuge of the dissolving entropy of our existence. The reason that the VVM is described as 'successful' might be that it responded by its design to what we here have called the memorial design paradox. Lin designed in a minimalist way that which was most needed — recognition of the fact that these persons died. It remembers that this has happened, not what has happened, and therefore precisely avoids a kind of programmatic overload. It simply says that these lives (and those affected by their losses) were relevant, despite what had happened or why they died. One might say that, even more than in its aesthetic qualities, the VVM is minimalist in what it wanted to remember and it may be this kind of minimalism that, at least for some, adds to its success.

The VVM case and the reception of its design suggest that certain 'skilful manipulations of aesthetics' and design decisions will be able to respond to the need for symbolic restoration and recognition, while other design decisions

may do this less. In that regard, this suggests there is at least a reason to doubt Taylor and Levine's critical conclusion that

> [i]t is personal, intellectual and professional hubris — a fantasy of omnipotence — for designers to think that the success of a memorial lies in their hands and the skillful manipulation of aesthetics.[57]

Hence, the ethics of commemorative architecture may also lie in designs that understand themselves within this symbolic practice and attempt to respond to a (very common, human) need for symbolic restoration — it is simply about 'remembering and the like' and finding ways 'to move on'.

Conclusion: design implications?

By way of clarifying this move from the above explanatory, reflective account to design consequences, let us, though very briefly, look at two more examples. One notable, much-discussed example is Peter Eisenman's Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe.[58] The memorial has repeatedly faced criticism in popular debate because of the memorial's level of abstraction. Precisely the fact that the concrete blocks are non-referential at all and that the documentation centre is located underground imply that the act of recognition becomes implicit. James E. Young, who was appointed by the Berlin Senate as a member of the *Findungskommission* [search committee] in 1997, wrote about it in 2016:

> [T]he underground Information Center audaciously illustrates both that commemoration is 'rooted' in historical information and that the historical presentation is necessarily 'shaped' formally by the commemorative space above it. Here, we have a 'place of memory' literally undergirded by a 'place of history,' which is in turn inversely shaped by commemoration, and we are asked to navigate the spaces in between memory and history for our knowledge of events.[59]

From a reflective, theoretical point of view, this is true of course. The problem, however, is that in an ordinary encounter with the memorial, the information and the explicit acknowledgement are absent from this encounter and the public space; it is literally hidden underground, which may imply the memorial does not necessarily bring about what it purports to do or be according to our ordinary, intuitive understanding of the affordance of symbolic restoration. Although the final design of the memorial, including the underground documentation centre, could be said to search for this balance — as the search committee was of course aware of this tension when they chose Eisenman's design and advised to complement it with the underground documentation centre — it seems to suffer from a design flaw because the design itself, while being strong in its evocative and experiential aspects, does not publicly or explicitly include the sought-for acknowledgement. The anonymity and level of abstraction have ostensibly removed the restorative function for the

sake of design, leading up to critical interpretations, such as film-critic Richard Brody's, who wrote:

> Without that title, it would be impossible to know what the structure is meant to commemorate; there's nothing about these concrete slabs that signifies any of the words of the title, except, perhaps, 'memorial' — insofar as some of them, depending on their height, may resemble either headstones or sarcophagi. […] In any case, the memorial, as imposing and as memorable as it may be in itself, hardly serves the function for which it was intended. […] The mollifying solemnity of pseudo-universal abstractions puts a great gray sentiment in the place of actual memory.[60]

As a consequence, it should not surprise if the square is sometimes perceived to be a tourist, urban development rather than a memorial site — noting that its corresponding use and the way people behave may then strengthen this interpretation and the disapprobation it sometimes arouses. One conclusion here could be that, while agonistic memorials may invite reflection and debate, they tend to do so at the cost of their ability to offer symbolic restoration. When designs remain silent about *whom* is remembered, they tend to erode the recognition and restoration that can be found, eliciting indignation and possible criticism. Theoretical interpretations and designers that forward the agonistic nature of such memorials tend to forget that the debate these designs spur may also work counter-effectively for those searching for symbolic restoration — in Savage's words, 'the trauma club'.[61] From our ordinary intuitive understanding, we commemorate because we owe it to the victims; we do so in order to deny the apparent irrelevance that the contingent events and the entropy of our existence threatens to cast over them, and indirectly over our lives. From that point of view, the memorial should not be concerned about debate, tourism, or urban development, which in this case appear to have been prioritised because of its apparent anonymity. In contrast, and by way of comparison, the simple inscriptions,[62] which were also stated in the design brief as obligatory, at the Judentplatz Holocaust Memorial (2000) in Vienna, designed by Rachel Whiteread, seem to suffice in guiding the reading of the memorial from abstract to commemorative and restorative. Within a framework of symbolic restoration, the role of naming victims or the inclusion of a reference to what or whom is remembered — which many contemporary memorials still do — becomes evident, irrespective of insightful questions and critical thoughts about the politics of naming. Conversely, not doing so, in cases of agonistically memorialising, holds a risk. This kind of reflection can assist memorial designers in their design deliberations.

The recent cancellation of and opposition against the proposed design, 'Memory Wound',[63] by Jonas Dahlberg for the Utøya memorial could be understood in light of the above suggested explanatory framework. The main purpose of the memorial is to symbolically restore and re-affirm those lost lives as significant, i.e. to deny the previous and continuous denial by the offender and the event or misdeed by which those lives were displayed as negligible

and of only instrumental value to the offender's questionable cause; this is primarily for those involved, which in this case includes the wider regional community. The proposed design to cut a nearby island might hamper the memorial's restorative capacity because the design could be said to rely on a kind of spectator's awe for the design itself and would disproportionally draw tourists to an island that is rather isolated from human involvement. Therefore, there is something to say for the criticism that the design apparently prioritises a kind of tourist and sensational aesthetic to attract visitor's engagement over proper symbolic restoration. From a critical point of view, the design could be considered to rely on an element of spectatorship at a questionable location, which outbalances the inclusion of restorative aspects of the design because of this apparent focus on drawing in tourists. The latter could be seen as an instrumentalisation of the victims and the event, which is highly precarious because the memorial's symbolic message precisely counters a former instrumentalisation of the victims. In brief, the design too easily allowed for a reading in which the memorial problematically mimics the symbolic interpretation of the misdeed, that is, the instrumentalisation of the lives lost, thus eliciting indignation and opposition. Between, on the one hand, spatiality and context of a design and its aesthetic features and the implications hereof and, on the other, its meaning or restorative essence, a sensible balance is required to guide design deliberations.

Translated into a sketchy comparative analysis, this means that Berlin's memorial is too agonistically, i.e. too abstractly and anonymously, designed, although, as Young wrote, the documentation centre supports the aboveground memorial. While the underground documentation centre in an important respect mirrors the Judenplatz's context, i.e. the place name, the nearby museum, the Berlin memorial's anonymity means that the memorial fails to redirect the reading of the abstract memorial as a memorial in its public appearance. This is the concern raised by Brody — something which the invisible documentation centre is insufficiently able to counter — and thus fails to *publicly* acknowledge and offer symbolic restoration. In contrast, the explicit reference to the victims on the Judenplatz memorial does so unambiguously. The case of the Utøya memorial is, in this respect, similar to the abstract design of Eisenman; the abstract cut in the island fails to publicly, visibly, explicitly acknowledge itself as a memorial and whom it represents. The absence of context — if only very remotely by facing the island of Utøya — and the invisibility of the pathway and the mentioning of victims' names within the memorial cut, creates a similar public anonymity.

Additionally, the Utøya memorial would probably have to rely on ticketing (to get to the island or to sail by it to visit it), which would reinforce the impression of wrong priorities for the memorial, that is, creating a tourist attraction. Moreover, given the cut island's and thus memorial's location, any supporting programme would seem to be contaminating. If not for the memorial, there would be few visitors, which also poses the question to what extent such a memorial can claim to *publicly* acknowledge and commemorate; this again strengthens the interpretation that the design errs in its priorities.

Although it is not evident to distil concrete design implications in general, especially given that memorial design cases will always be highly specific and contextual, it seems worthwhile to at least make some suggestions.[64] While agonistic memorials might spur debate, be aesthetically inviting, and be interesting from a touristic, economic, or urban development perspective, they tend to be ambivalent with regard to offering recognition and restoration because it is often not directly or explicitly clear what or whom the memorial represents. In order to symbolically restore, a minimally explicit reference to primarily *whom* the memorial is about might already be sufficient for guiding the reading of the memorial in a way that also offers the sought-for symbolic restoration, as discussed in the cases of Judentplatz memorial and the VVM.

The naming of victims seems a good strategy when it comes to offering restoration, although there is much to say for its political appropriation. Names represent persons and are thus symbolical entities. Naming thus not only symbolically acknowledges but also incorporates 'persons' (often lost in such contexts) and allows them and their commemoration to transcend to the public symbolical realm, as explained above. For the same reason, naming brings in an aura of respect and dignity — like graves and graveyards do — which might be hard to combine with functionality and commerce, suggesting the consideration of at least a separate space that can respect and allow movement around and between those names, such as in the 9/11 Memorial. Symbolic restoration pauses the contingent stream of events; therefore, when naming is involved, it seems wise to allow visitors also to pause and reflect in spatially dignified ways.[65]

Additionally, it seems wise for commissioners and designers to communicate the deliberative reasons for a supportive programme which in itself serves other functions as well: first, this communication explicates how this supportive function is meant to enhance the commemorative act of the architectural intervention and this already goes a long way in steering of indignation, which might be based on alternative ways of interpreting these architectural gestures or decisions; and second, it raises awareness, explicates deliberations, and communicates decisive reasons that leads to (moral) understanding and intelligibility.[66]

One should be wary with regard to commercialisation, both of the memorial as well as its context, and it seems to make sense to make memorial sites at least in part publicly accessible. If there is an aspect of commercialisation, it might also be worthwhile to think of explicating in what sense those resources could be attributed to relevant stakeholders in the broad sense, such as in support of the victims, non-profit organisations, and/or educational programmes, or to limit the exploitation in such a way. With regard to scale or nature of the supporting programme or function of a memorial site, it is hard to formulate general design implications as those decisions will be highly case and context specific. Nonetheless, the kind of awareness this paper points to remains valuable.

In sum, by relying on our ordinary understanding of memorials and symbolic practices, and on an attempt to explicate the immanent meaning of these

practices and memorial architecture, this paper focused on the parallel between memorial architecture and symbolic restoration, clarified the complexity of memorial design, and suggested how to understand possible criticism towards memorials and their designs. In other words, this paper argued that our ordinary, intuitive understanding of both symbolic practices and memorials can, when reflected upon, improve our grasp on memorial architecture and its complexities. In general, the paper argues for the relevance of moral understanding and reflection in the deliberative design processes that guide how we create our built environment and, in a literal sense, our lifeworld.

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Notes and references

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3. Among others, see Sarah Kenyon Lischer, 'Narrating Atrocity: Genocide Memorials, Dark Tourism, and the Politics of Memory', *Review of International Studies,* 45 (2019), 805–27; *Grassroots Memorials: The Politics of Memorializing Traumatic Death*, ed. by Peter Jan Magry and Cristina Sánchez-Carretero (New York, NY: Berghahn, 2011); Erika Doss, *The Emotional Life of Contemporary Public Memorials: Towards a Theory of Temporary Memorials* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008); Françoise Choay, *The Invention of the Historic Monument* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Martha K. Norkunas, *The Politics of Public Memory: Tourism, History, and Ethnicity in Monterey, California* (New York, NY: SUNY Press, 1993); *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. by Eric Hobsbawn and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); and Maurice

Halbwach, *The Collective Memory*, trans. by Francis J. Ditter and Vida Yazdi Ditter (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1980), first published in French, *La memoire collective,* in 1950.

4. Kirk Savage, 'Trauma, Healing, and the Therapeutic Monument', in *Terror, Culture, Politics: Rethinking 9/11,* ed. by Daniel J. Sherman and Terry Nardin (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006), pp. 103–20. For further evidence, see Stevens and Franck, *Memorials as Spaces of Engagement*; Hannah Collins, Kate Allsopp, Kostas Arvanitis, Prathiba Chitsabesan, and Paul French, 'Psychological Impact of Spontaneous Memorials: A Narrative Review', *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, 14 (2022), 1230–6; Nicholas Watkins, Frances Cole, and Sue Weidemann, 'The War Memorial as Healing Environment: The Psychological Effect of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on Vietnam War Combat Veterans' Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Symptoms', *Environment and Behavior*, 42 (2010), 351–75; Thomas Fuchs, 'Presence in Absence: The Ambiguous Phenomenology of Grief', *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences,* 17 (2018), 43–63; Dennis Klass, 'Continuing Bonds in the Cultural, Existential and Phenomenological Study of Grief'; and Brady Wagoner and Ignacio Brescó, 'Collective Grief: Mourning Rituals, Politics and Memorial Sites', in *Cultural, Existential, and Phenomenological Dimensions of Grief,* ed. by Allan Køster and Ester Holte Kofod (London: Routledge, 2021), pp. 197–213.
5. See Chris Bessemans and Koenraad Van Cleempoel, 'Adaptive Reuse: Different Functions, Shifting Meanings and Moral Aftershocks', presented at the 'Current Issues in Interiors 2024 Symposium', Department of Interior Architecture and Environmental Design, Yaçar University. As suggested in this, this attention for the moral-symbolic dimension within architectural theory may also assist us in understanding issues in adaptive reuse and difficult heritage. Because of the history and meaning such heritage sites carry, our dealing with it, inescapably, is a moral and symbolic gesture which puts more weight to the design deliberation and its explication. This ethical dimension of architecture is our general concern in our current research project, 'The Ethical Nature of Architectural Interventions in Built Heritage', at TRACE: Built Heritage and Adaptive Reuse, Faculty of Architecture and Arts, UHasselt, supported by the Research Foundation – Flanders (FWO) under grant G0A2624N (2024–2029).
6. This limitation is not that peculiar. For instance, Stevens and Franck limit their own analysis in their book, *Memorials as Spaces of Engagement* (p. 5) in a similar way. Although some of the reviewers of this journal suggested a more inclusive and culturally sensitive analysis, this paper's scope does not allow for a cross-cultural comparative analysis. Hopefully this paper inspires (possibly others) to investigate this.
7. This suggestion is not always correct though since there may be a specific (also symbolic) reason for this ruinous state, but then again one has to know it to avoid to perceive it as neglected and therefore apparently unvalued.
8. This understanding of monuments and memorials is similar to other theorists' interpretation of the difference; among others, see Arthur Danto, 'The Vietnam Veterans Memorial', *The Nation*, 31 August 1986, pp. 152–6.
9. Etymologically speaking, the difference is less clear in English than it is, for instance, in German. While 'monument' stems, via the French *monument*, from the Latin *monumentum*, literally 'something that reminds', and 'memorial' from the Latin *memorialis*, literally 'of or belonging to memory', their subtle difference in meaning is not directly clear to outsiders. In German, *Denkmal,* which stems from the verb *Denken*, refers to something to think of, to remember, while 'monument' is translated as *Ehrenmal*, in which *Ehr* means honour and thus refers to something that it is to be honoured.
10. Kirk Savage, *Monument Wars* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009).
11. Tanović, *Designing Memory*, p. 9.

12. William M. Taylor and Michael P. Levine, 'Writing on "the Wall": Memory, Monuments and Memorials', in *Prospects for an Ethics of Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 125–54 (p. 141).
13. Taylor and Levine, 'Writing on "the Wall"', pp. 142–3, italics emphasis by the author to highlight their sceptical position.
14. Savage, *Trauma, Healing, and the Therapeutic Monument*, p. 106.
15. Ibid., p. 107, with reference to Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1992), p. 34.
16. Choay, *The Invention of the Historic Monument*, pp. 6–7, italics emphasis by the author.
17. Taylor and Levine, 'Writing on "the Wall"', p. 142.
18. Halbwach, *The Collective Memory*.
19. John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (New York, NY: Princeton University Press, 1992). Note, however, that the account here offered differs from Bodnar's idea that this vernacular level also functions as a way to intentionally pursue social and political concerns in local communities; here it is emphasised that there is no such second order thought or belief about the purpose of such symbolic practices.
20. This paper thus also questions whether we should consider memorials and our intent in erecting them as having a 'permanent' meaning as 'delusional', as, for instance, is claimed by Dacia Viejo-Rose, 'Memorial Functions: Intent, Impact and the Right to Remember', *Memory Studies*, 4.4 (2011), 465–80. The idea that a memorial is a *permanent* acknowledgement, i.e. recognising the significance of the event and relevance of those that suffered from it, is part of the symbolic restorative need and practice, i.e. part of our ordinary understanding of memorialisation. If we would erect a memorial and at the same time acknowledge that it will over time change or lose its meaning, as all memorials will do at some point in time, this would corrupt the memorial's symbolic and therapeutic force (similar to the paradox of meaningfulness to be discussed in later parts). This is not to say that the practice of memorialisation cannot be politically claimed as a tool or that memorials do change meaning, as Viejo-Rose illustrates. However, the latter does not mean that our ordinary understanding is wrong or delusional. Also, perspectival differences in what a memorial means to some members of society do not mean that the need for symbolic restoration is less pressing to those members whom it concerns, even though we might debate about what and whom should be acknowledged. Put differently, this paper aims to warn for a kind of schism between our ordinary (and primordial) understanding and our theoretical interpretations of memorials and their function.
21. See Burms, 'Retributive Punishment and Symbolic Restoration', p. 160; Burms, *Toerekeningsvatbaarheid*, pp. 133–4; and Burms, Cuypers, and De Mesel, 'P. F. Strawson on Punishment', pp. 175–7.
22. See, on punishment, Burms, Cuypers, and De Mesel, 'P. F. Strawson on Punishment', pp. 165–90; Tine Vandendriessche, 'Should We Punish a Remorseful Offender? Punishment Within a Theory of Symbolic Restoration', *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 33.2 (2014), 113–9; and Chris Bessemans and Tine Vandendriessche, 'Ethics, Architecture, and Prison Design – A Primer', *The Journal of Architecture*, 29 (2024), 967–90 <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602365.2025.2490992>.
23. For instance, when my six-year-old daughter is taking tremendous care of a drawing from her so-called boyfriend, then she is acting symbolically; she already seems to have an implicit understanding of the symbolic dimension of the artwork and seems to realise that the way she treats it represents how she values him and their relation.
24. For instance, putting down flowers at my father's grave or attending my son's graduation from kindergarten.

25. I am indebted to one of the reviewers of this journal to phrase it this way.
26. Although my thesis is different, I am indebted to Burms and Breeur who argued similarly for the significance of bodily continuity for personal identity; see Ronald Breeur and Arnold Burms, 'Persons and Relics', *Ratio*, 21.2 (2008), 134–46.
27. See Paul Moyaert, *Iconen en beeldverering. Godsdienst als symbolische praktijk* [*Icons and Image Worship: Religion as Symbolic Practice*] (Amsterdam: SUN, 2007), p. 170; and Paul Moyaert, *Ethiek en sublimatie. Over De ethiek van de psychoanalyse van Jacques Lacan* [*Ethics and Sublimation: On Jacques Lacan's Ethics of the Psychoanalysis*] (Nijmegen: SUN, 1994), p. 35.
28. Moyaert, *Iconen en beeldverering*, p. 170.
29. Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire', *Representations*, 26 (1989), 7–24 (p. 19).
30. I am indebted to one of the reviewers of this journal for this suggestion to refer also to Lacan's symbolical death.
31. This primordially negative, protective function might appear as an unwelcome truth, but it has its parallel in the moral realm; see Aurel Kolnai, 'The Thematic Primacy of Moral Evil', *The Philosophical Quarterly,* 22 (1956), 27–42; Aurel Kolnai, 'Morality & Practice', in *Ethics, Value, and Reality*, ed. by Francis Dunlop and Brian Klug (London: Athlone, 1977); Chris Bessemans, 'A Short Introduction to Aurel Kolnai's Moral Philosophy', *Journal of Philosophical Research*, 38 (2013), 203–32; and Chris Bessemans, 'Moral Conflicts and Moral Awareness', *Philosophy*, 86 (2011), 563–87.
32. Moyaert, *Ethiek en sublimatie*, p. 35.
33. Burms, *Toerekeningsvatbaarheid*, pp. 133–4.
34. See Sebastian Brett, Louis Bickford, Liz Ševc̆enko, and Marcela Rios, *Memorialization and Democracy: State Policy and Civic Action*, conference report (New York, NY: International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, 2007); and Tanović, *Designing Memory*, p. 9.
35. Choay, *The Invention of the Historic Monument*, p. 7.
36. Tanović, *Designing Memory*, p. 5.
37. Note that the strength of the *Monument Against Fascism* by Jochen Gerz and Esther Shalev-Gerz (1986, Hamburg) relied also at least in part on the literal deconstruction (vanishment) of this idea of transferring this responsibility to the object. As the monument slowly vanished into the ground, it expressed the idea that striving for justice will demand a continuous effort and thus requiring current and future generations to take on the responsibility to not only remember but also to act in response to what had happened. The monument's vanishment symbolised the limitation of the monument's role in what it represented and in its attempt to symbolically restore.
38. The memorial design is by Michael Arad (Handel Architects) and landscape architecture firm Peter Walker and Partners who won the World Trade Center Site Memorial Competition. The original masterplan of the site was by Daniel Libeskind. The Memorial opened on 11 September 2011 and the Museum on 15 May 2014.
39. Karen Wilson Baptist, 'Incompatible Identities: Memory and Experience at the National September 9/11 Memorial and Museum', *Emotion, Space and Society*, 16 (2015), 3–8 (p. 6).
40. Quotation from an interview with Foote by Sheila Foran, 'Memories, Memorials, and the 9/11 Museum', *UConn Today*, 10 September 2014 <http://today.uconn.edu/blog/2014/09/memories-memorials-and-the-911-museum/> [accessed 7 August 2025]; also quoted by Baptist, *Incompatible Identities*, p. 7.
41. Daniel J. Sherman, 'Naming and the Violence of Place', in *Terror, Culture, Politics: Rethinking 9/11,* ed. by Daniel J. Sherman and Terry Nardin (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006), pp. 121–45 (p. 132).

42. Ibid.
43. Taylor and Levine, 'Writing on "the Wall"', p. 145.
44. Ibid., p. 141.
45. Ibid., p. 148.
46. Ibid., p. 146.
47. Ibid., p. 147.
48. Savage, *Trauma, Healing, and the Therapeutic Monument*, p. 107.
49. Ibid.
50. Ibid., p. 108.
51. Ibid., p. 123.
52. Ibid.
53. Ibid., p. 137.
54. Ibid., p. 109, with reference again to Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, p. 73.
55. The reference is to Sherman, *Naming and the Violence of Place*, p. 139, with the closing lines: 'In such sites, meaning emerges from the individual images and desires, remaining fluid, unstable, impossible to pin down — a memory, in other words, that need speak no name.'
56. This is mentioned in the mission statement of the 9/11 Memorial, quoted by Sherman, *Naming and the Violence of Place*, p. 129.
57. Taylor and Levine, 'Writing on "the Wall"', p. 153.
58. It is located at Cora-Berliner-Straße 1, Berlin, Germany, and was completed on 15 December 2004. Engineering was by Buro Happold.
59. James E. Young, 'The Memorial's Arc: Between Berlin's Denkmal and New York City's 9/11 Memorial', *Memory Studies*, 9.3 (2016), 325–31 (p. 328).
60. Richard Brody, 'The Inadequacy of Berlin's "Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe"', *The New Yorker*, 12 July 2012 <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/richard-brody/the-inadequacy-of-berlins-memorial-to-the-murdered-jews-of-europe> [accessed 22 September 2025].
61. See Anna Cento Bull and David Clarke, 'Agonistic Interventions into Public Commemorative Art: An Innovative Form of Counter-memorial Practice?', *Constellations*, 28 (2021), 192–206 <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8675.12484>; and Savage, *Trauma, Healing, and the Therapeutic Monument*, p. 111.
62. The inscriptions mention all the concentration camps where Austrian jews died as well as a dedication to these victims in German, English, and Hebrew.
63. Dahlberg won the design competition in 2014 to memorialise the killing of 77 civilians, mostly teenagers, on 22 July 2011, of which 69 were killed by a shooting by Anders Breivik on the island of Utøya and 8 were killed in Oslo where he planted a bomb that detonated on the same day. The memorial would have consisted in creating a gap or cut of 40 meters long and 3.5 meters wide through a small peninsula facing Utøya. In 2019 Dahlberg premiered a documentary, *Notes on a Memorial*, telling about the process and debate on the memorials, and the resulting cancellation.
64. For a long time, I was very reluctant to do so, as I do not want to suggest that this kind of reflection can tell designers and commissioners what to do. In that regard, the following are only suggestions as an attempt to raise awareness (and were added to the paper as a response to the editor's request).
65. For instance, the spontaneous or temporary memorial (or 'shrine') alongside a roadway or public space carries this tension. By being there, it marks and thus offers a stand-still to what happened at that place, but at the same time, because of being next to a road or place in which ordinary life constantly unfolds and continues, it might feel disquiet-

ing or uncomfortable as well to both stakeholder of the memorial and passerby. To the former, because its apparent irrelevance, it might be disturbing and, to the latter, because when aware of the memorial, it feels inappropriate to continue without pausing in some way.

66. See Bessemans, *Moral Conflicts and Moral Awareness*; and Chris Bessemans, 'Universalizability in Moral Judgements: Winch's Ambiguity', *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 52.4 (2012), 397–404.