



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1993 Volume I: The Symbolic Language of Architecture and Public Monuments

Preserving Memory: A Study of Monuments and Memorials

Curriculum Unit 93.01.06
by Bradley McCallum

This unit is designed to bridge academic research and artistic production for upper level High School Students who are enrolled in a two hour Visual Arts Block at the Co-operative Arts and Humanities High School, and assumes that students will both have some art making experience under their belt as well as a motivated interest in the subject matter. The focus of this unit is to examine how artists and architects have through their work participated in the cultural process of preserving memory. Students will study how monuments and memorials function to communicate a given story and how the artist's creativity and innovation critically determine the form in which the communication will take place. This course is structured to combine a brief historical survey of significant monuments, memorials and works of art that function to preserve memory, with an analysis of the public memorials in New Haven including 'temporal markers' such as shrines left on the roadside after a fatal a car accident or street graffiti which name the victim of violence with the tag RIP (rest in peace).

On April 29, 1993 Terrell McFarlin-James known as LI died in a motorcycle accident on Dixwell Avenue. Shortly after his death a graffiti artist painted the walls of a building near the location of LI's death in his remembrance. This course will try to demonstrate how graffiti tag writing is motivated by the same human need to preserve memory that inspired the Roman elite who commissioned sculptors to design and build sarcophagi, and how this human need can be traced through history and exemplified in contemporary works like Maya Lin's Vietnam Memorial in Washington DC. Through a non-linear approach to presenting historical information students will develop a critical vocabulary of the visual elements that are used by artist and architects when they design and build memorials. In turn students will utilize this knowledge in their studio work. In addition to academic work students will be required to complete three studio projects in which they will build objects that function as repositories for memory. To begin the semester the class will participate in assembling panels for The Names Project, National AIDS Quilt. The second project will require students to research and build models for a sight specific public memorial in New Haven concerning a topic of their choice, and for the final project students will fabricate a temporal memorial which will be installed in New Haven. By presenting students with a paralleled study of art history and studio work this course will be based on the premise that one can see further when standing on the shoulders of a giant.

In this course students will learn how to analyze works of art and architecture. A specific form of object analysis will be introduced to students and with its use they will develop a vocabulary used in contemporary art criticism. Through a process of dialogue students will learn how to 'see' and express their opinions regarding their observations. Over time they will discover how critical discourse shapes the way history is

recorded and remembered. Students will learn a five step process of 'object analysis' which begins by describing all the physical details (formal qualities) of an object, this would include its placement, materials, scale, image and text. The second step requires students to make three drawings of the object. These drawings should be to scale including a frontal study, a 3/4 view and a topographical map locating the object in relation to its surroundings. The third step analyzes the type of memory being preserved (content), and the fourth step actively critiques and evaluates the symbolic relationships between the formal design elements and the content of the object. The final step in this process is for students to evaluate how successfully the object communicates its message to others. In their conclusions students should comment on both the placement of the object (context) and the audience.

Most memorials are placed in public spaces with the intention of maintaining an aspect of history. Understanding the dynamics of this form of communication is the goal of 'object analysis'. As students become familiar with this process they will address fundamental questions regarding why we are motivated to build markers to remind ourselves of the tragedies and Epiphanies that effect our lives. By studying memorials students will learn how identity is formed and gain a better understanding of the relationships between conscious and unconscious thought. Memorials are a way in which communities maintain conscious thought. They are public reminders of who we are and where we have come from. Their intentions are both to honor and to warn. Nations, states, cities, towns, neighborhoods, and families all have memorials which maintain a conscious reminder. For instance a white cross left by the roadside where a tragic accident occurred will remind a community of the deaths as well as the need to drive with caution. Holocaust memorials remind us of the horrors of genocide and war memorials remind us of fallen soldiers who have died for their country. History is known to repeat itself, memorials attempt to interrupt that cycle.

A child who has experienced a trauma will often suppress the memory until he or she is much older and is able to process the experience. Is it possible for a nation or a race to suppress a memory in the same way that a child does? If this is the case, do memorials keep traumatic events conscious and thus prevent the atrocities from repeating? However, even with memorials we need to recognize that the genocide of the Jews during the Holocaust is repeating itself only this time the Muslims are being persecuted and the Croats are performing the 'ethnic cleansing.' What will the memorials for this conflict look like? Do we have to experience the trauma of death to experience history and to value life?

To illustrate how an 'object analysis' works three examples will be given each sighted in Washington DC, these will include a day long installation of the AIDS Quilt on Memorial walk, the Washington Monument, and the Vietnam Memorial. While these works are placed in the same location their message is very different. In the three works we see the difference between a temporal and a permanent marker, between worshipping a heroic figure and grieving the loss of thousands of lives, between a distant history, a recent history, and the present, and between a national symbol and a political gesture. For an analysis to succeed it is important that students develop the dialogue beyond the initial one liner," I think the AIDS Quilt is a really good idea because people are dying of AIDS and we need to focus on the issue". To solicit a more in-depth response students should follow each of the five steps, writing their observations and opinions down. Using the 'stream of conscious' writing technique students will put emphasis on the development of their ideas as opposed to writing itself. While it is best to visit memorials in person, slides are a useful tool to be used in presenting work that is impractical or impossible to see. The following analysis would be written during and just after the slide presentations of the memorials.

The Names Project AIDS Quilt

Step One: observation

The scale of the quilt is extremely large.—It seems as though the memorial could continue to grow in scale.—The quilt itself is made up of panels that are all basically the same size and on each panel a name has been placed.—The colors designs and materials of each panel are very different, indicating that they were all made by different people.—While hundreds of different people have collaborated on this project the composition of the quilt holds together as one work because of the use of a specific grid pattern. Each panel is combined with seven others to make a perfect square.—The squares are then combined with three others to make one large square and the large squares form rows and columns that extend several city blocks.—The size of each panel is similar to a single bed, flag, or coffin.—The quilt is not permanent and requires a large effort to care take the work.—The quilt functions as a temporal memorial bringing people together for a specific issue.—After looking at each individual panel it is clear from the inscriptions they were made by loved ones, for instance Gary Arthur Key’s mother made a quilt for her son who died on February 26, 1986. On the panel she has sown rows of birds, along with a text describing her son as “bird watcher, only son, jogger, attorney, gourmet cook, outdoors man”.—The graphic handling of each panel ranges from a illustrative approach like Robert Bowling’s panel for his lover John Mueller in which he creates the image of pine trees surrounding a lake with a rain bow that stretches across the sky, to collage used in the panel made for Ron Wilson in which his team mates stitched his soft ball uniform along with a single word “warrior” onto a panel.—As the students continue to look at different examples they will notice that each panel is a memory or collection of memories. Photographs, news articles, love notes, pieces of clothing, symbolic images and quotations all accompany the names of the victims and the dates in which they have died.

Step Two: drawings

Submit three drawings, in this case also include a diagram of the patchwork used in the Quilt.

Step Three: content

The content of The Names Project is self-explanatory. It is a collection of memories presented by friends, lovers and family members who have experienced the lose of a loved one to AIDS. The work is a formal acknowledgment of the AIDS crisis and is used as a tool for activism in gaining public awareness and support for those who have AIDS.

Step Four: symbolism

The public fear that accompanies AIDS isolates individuals who are HIV positive. This memorial subverts the tendency by creating a healing context for people to gather and morn the victims of AIDS.—By establishing a common context for the memories of the victims a unity and strength is established that demands attention in a public manner.—Because AIDS is in part a sexually transmitted disease the use of the quilt as a symbolic reference is important.—Each panel can be seen as covering the bed of the victim sealing their death with a memory.—Furthermore, placing the quilt on the ground establishes a common burial for the victims the quilt covers the dead.—In addition each panel serves as a burial marker.—Because the scale of The Names Project and the care that goes into presenting the work is so great, a ‘sacred’ space is established that is strongly felt by any one who views the memorial.—A powerful statement is made when a collaboration between many people participate in a common goal. The goal is to represent the rang of survivors who have lost loved ones to AIDS.—Finally this work succeeds in its design to show that the individuals who have died are just one type

of victim, the survivors are also victims and their testimonies represented by their panels reveal their pain.

Step Five: context—audience

The Names Project functions as a temporal memorial it establishing a specific purpose for people to gather and acknowledge the effect of AIDS on our community. For those who see the project have a profound memory that will influence their understanding of the AIDS crises. Secondly unlike other memorials this work is used as a form of activism to corral the media's attention. The audience extends beyond those who have seen the work in person to include the millions who have learned about the AIDS Quilt from television, newspapers, and magazines. A question that should be asked of the students is how the impact of this memorial would change if it were permanently installed? Would it continue to demand the media attention?

Washington Monument

The Washington Monument is an interesting work to analyze because most students already know its image. The most difficult task will be for students to determine what is the true function of the Washington Monument.

Step One: observation

A tall thin obelisk placed on a raised knoll on the mall facing both the nation's Capital and the White House.—The monument itself is built from two different color stones indicating the point where the construction stopped due to lack of funds.—The monument stands as a singular structure providing a focus for the city.—The obelisk is an ancient four sided vertical structure that comes to a point and is often used as a burial marker.—It both reaches to the heavens while indicating a north, south, east and west axis.

Step Two: drawings

Drawings of the monument to scale, and map showing the placement of the monument in relation to the Capital and the other memorials. Compare this with the grounds of Versailles.

Step Three: content

A historical marker for our first president of the United States of America.

Step Four: symbolism

The Washington Monument has successfully appropriated the obelisk as its own symbol.—When Americans see another obelisk, the Washington Monument is referenced.—The placement of the monument supports our romantic memory of President Washington as the sole leader in our country's fight for independence and leading our government through its' first presidency.

Step Five: context-audience

The Washington Monument is not unlike the World Trade Center, or the Statue of Liberty it is a tourist attraction; a structure that people enter to go to the top for a view of the city.—The monument is a visual focal point. A beacon to help individuals navigate throughout the city.—Students should consider the importance of having national symbols. Do these symbols define our cultural identity? Would being an American mean the same thing if the Washington Monuments were never finished? The construction of the Washington Monument resumed after a lack of funds because our forefathers believed that the existence of cultural markers were

essential.

Vietnam Veterans War Memorial

In 1980 a senior female undergraduate Maya Lin, a Yale architecture student designed the memorial and it was entered in the enormous juried competition that was conducted to select a work to be built as the national memorial in Washington to the veterans of the Vietnam War. In a written statement of intention she states:

These names, seemingly infinite in number, carry the sense of overwhelming numbers, while unifying those individuals into a whole. Brought to a sharp awareness of such a loss it is up to each individual to resolve or come to terms with this loss. For death is in the end a private matter, and the area contained within this memorial is meant for private reckoning.

I had an impulse to cut open the earth . . . an initial violence that would heal. The grass would grow back but the cut would remain. It was as if the black-grown earth were polished and made an interface between the sunny world and the quiet dark world beyond, that we can't enter . . . I chose black granite to make the surface reflective and peaceful. The angle was formed solely in relation to the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington Monument to create a unity between the past and the present.

Step One: observation

The memorial is a path that cuts into the earth, beginning as a thin wedge and extending to an overwhelming wall of black granite at which point it changes directions creating an angle which slopes upwards out of the earth.—The entire surface of the black granite is covered with the names of the veterans who died in the war, the names are listed chronologically when you follow the path you witness the beginning of the war, its escalation and its end.—The memorial is strategically located extending to both the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington Monument.—Along the path it is common to find momentos, photographs, and flowers left each day by friends and family who continue to grieve the loss of their loved ones.—Having walked along the wall viewers are presented with a second Vietnam Memorial. It is a group of soldiers cast in bronze. The soldiers are frozen in battle.—One soldier is wounded another is scared while two others have their guns in a ready position.—The figures are realistic and depict appropriate facial expressions, clothes and weapons.

Step Two: drawings

Submit three drawings of the memorials to scale and a map indicating its placement in relation to the other memorials.

Step Three content

The Vietnam war is a dark part of our nation's history. It is the only war we have lost and to this day we are not able to justify our nation's involvement in this conflict. This memorial is a conscious reminder of the scar that exists in our nations psyche

Step Four: symbolism

Maya Lin's statement of intent is a key to understanding the symbolism of this memorial. The most important aspect of this memorial is the way in which Maya Lin takes each viewer through a journey of reflection. It is

experiential.

Step Five; context-audience

When experiencing the memorial each individual is first aware of their own presence among the names of the dead. They become aware of others who are also witnessing the memorial while behind them is the image of the trees and sky. It is similar to looking into a pool of water and one can see the sky above and the rocks below the water, however it is difficult to focus on both simultaneously. In the Vietnam Memorial your attention is divided equally. One's focus is directed to the names of the victims or to those who are witnessing the memorial, and grieving the human life lost in war. Maya Lin states, "Later, when I visited, I searched out the name of a friend's father. I touched it and I cried. I was another visitor and I was reacting to it as I designed it."

For the purpose of making this Curriculum Unit accessible to other teachers it will be structured into sections organized chronologically in a semester long Visual Arts block at the Cooperative Arts and Humanities High School. This course will meet twice a week for a duration of two hours each period (see attached course schedule). While this unit is designed to be used at Co-op High School the sections can be modified for a standard class period. Art history as well as studio projects are combined in different sections placing a greater emphasis on academic studies in the beginning of the semester.

Establishing an open dialogue with students is critical and important for the course to succeed. Classroom discussions, slide lectures, field trips to specific memorials in New Haven, design projects and group critiques of student work all emphasize an interactive approach to teaching in which students are encouraged to express themselves.

Section 1: Building a Common Vocabulary

Days 1- 2

The first classroom project will be to draw a large map (8' x 12') of New Haven and then to use this map to locate the monuments and memorials including the temporal memorials that can be found in New Haven. Because Coop High School is an arts magnate school it draws upon students living in several different neighborhoods. The first assignment is designed to harness each student's knowledge of their own neighborhood in a collective manner. However, before students begin the process of indicating the location of different monuments they will be required to write a short one to two page definition of 'memorial'. In this paper they will be asked to establish categories for the different types of memorials such as war, civic leader, religious saint, or victim and to describe the different styles of memorials. They include memorial parks, architecture, statuary, symbolic objects and tag writing. From their definitions students will develop a color coded key indicating the different types of memorials, with clear distinctions made between the type of memories being preserved and the formal characteristics of the memorials.

Days 3-8

Students will be required to complete a series of short research assignments investigating the memorials found in their own neighborhoods (see attached research forms). This will introduce them to the five step

procedure of analyzing memorials. Having completed the research students will be asked to present their findings in the class and to place this information in code on the map. The goal is to generate a collective map that will indicate how the very fabric of our city is built upon the human need to preserve memory. It is through a careful analysis that students will gain an understanding of the artist's intentions, use of symbolism and finally how our interpretations of these memorials shape our understanding of history.

The teacher's responsibility will be to listen to each of the students presentation, review their research forms and to give critical feed back that will continue to challenge their insights. For instance if a student were to make a presentation of the Vietnam Memorial in New Haven, described its form (black granite in a V shape), stated the purpose of the memorial, equated the symbolic use of the V as representing Vietnam and summarized the audience as anyone living in the greater New Haven area, the teacher should press the student with additional questions such as: What is the significance of placing the memorial along the side of the highway? When you see the letter V what comes to mind? Victory? In what ways have the Vietnam Veterans become victorious? Does this memorial read as a billboard and if so does the audience include all of the people who are driving past the memorial on I-95? Is there a relationship between the way we view the history of Vietnam and the way this memorial can so easily be viewed from I-95? If in fact its placement next to I-95 is inconsequential then what is the symbolic purpose of placing it next to Long Island Sound? This process of questioning will encourage a dialogue within the class room and give students the freedom to question every aspect of a memorial and create an informed perspective.

After the students have completed their research assignments the teacher will present a slide lecture of New Haven memorials. This presentation will combine overview shots with details of the most significant memorials using approximately 80 images (one carousel). A significant portion of this presentation will be a review of the students research. However when a memorial is shown that was not previously covered students should indicate this work on the collective map. (see notes for slide lecture 1)

Section 2: The Temporal Memorial

Days 9-10

In this section Students will be presented with documentation of the installation "Shroud Mother's Voices; a memorial for victims of gun violence in New Haven CT". They will be asked to compare this work to street graffiti memorials for victims of gun violence. The Shroud Memorial includes a group of silk banners which have the image of the victims' mothers printed on them along with a text, giving her name, her child's name, child's age and date of death. These silk shrouds accompany a two hour video document edited into short ten minute vignettes, in which each mother shares memories of her child, describes who they hold responsible for the death of their child, and what it means to them to be a mother. This work is built from the voice and shared experience of twenty-seven mothers who have lost a child to gun violence in New Haven, CT. This work attempts to create a space for remembrance and acknowledgment for both the victims and their families as well as a document that addresses the complex issues associated with urban violence. I created the Shroud Memorial as my graduate sculpture thesis exhibition at the Yale Art and Architecture Gallery. After this initial installation the work has been shown in the Maloney Correctional Institution, the entrance corridor of New Haven's City Hall, and in the Connecticut College Harkins Chapel, New London, CT. Included in this unit is a set of sides documenting each installation and a copy or the video. Students should question how this work

changes when it moves from one location to another. (see slide list # 2)

Day 11

Invite a representative from The Names Project; AIDS Quilt to make a presentation to the class. Their presentation should include photographic documentation of the AIDS Quilt and a short description of The Names Project as well as a detailed description of the guidelines which need to be followed in making panels for the quilt (contact: The Names Project, P.O Box 14114, San Francisco, CA 94114).

Days 12-15

Design and assemble two panels for infants who have died of AIDS as a collaborative class project, and then present the panels to the local chapter of The Names Project

Section 3: Public Space, How Memory Functions

Days 16-17

This section is designed to present students with significant works of art, monuments and memorials which function as a repository for memory. During informal slide talks students will be asked to write a brief 'object analysis' for the works presented in class. Students will study the memorials located in Washington DC, as well as works of art such as Pablo Picasso's 'Guernica' and Auguste Rodin's 'Burghers of Calais' (see slide list # 3).

Days 17-26

Independent Research Assignment

Students will be required to write a seven to ten page, comparative analysis of memorials which address a common theme. Students will be given the opportunity to select a topic of their choice which could include memorials dedicated to Civil War heroes, Presidents, veterans of World War I and World War II, the persecution of the Jews, or the Vietnam War to begin a list. This paper should reflect four weeks of work and will be used to determine 50% of the final grade. If a student chose to write about memorials dedicated to the Holocaust they would be expected to study the relationships between Auchwitz, the New Haven Holocaust Memorial, the Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC and the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies housed in the Yale University Sterling Memorial Library.

Section 4: The Making of a Memorial

Days 17-28

Designing a Public Memorial

Students will be required to design a memorial to represent the civil rights uprising which took place in New Haven during the year 1968. It will be their responsibility to research the history and to find a way of

communicating some aspect of that time period in their work. The memorial they are to design will be located on the New Haven Green opposite Phelps Gate. Students should consider the relationship between Yale and New Haven and use this opportunity to comment on Yale's response to the riots.

After students have focused on a specific concept, they will begin a series of drawings of their proposed work. It will be the teachers responsibility to review these drawings daily, giving each student appropriate criticism and encouragement. After the concept drawings have been refined students should create three drawings to scale of their proposed memorial. After this is completed students will begin to build finished models at 1/4 scale.

Days 28-34

Building a Temporal Memorial

Students will be given the opportunity to design a spray painted memorial using graffiti tag writing techniques in New Haven's downtown sixth street district. The paintings should memorialize a teenager who has recently died as a result of gun violence. It will be a challenge to use this trauma as a catalyst for creating an image that both acknowledges death but also functions as a sign-post warning others to settle conflicts without violence.

Before going to the street site the students are required to brain storm, then draw concept sketches of several plausible ideas and to finalize the sketches before painting the memorial.

Slide List # 1

- #1-4 "The Holocaust Memorial," Whally Ave, New Haven CT.
- #5 Grave Yard opposite "The Holocaust Memorial"
- #6-7 "Westville Soldiers Memorial," Whally Ave, New Haven CT
- #8 "Memorial for Bart Giamatti," Yale University, New Haven CT
- #9-12 "The Vietnam Veterans Memorial," Sargent Dr. New Haven CT. (see analysis in paper)
- #13-18 "Memorial Wall," Dixwell Ave, New Haven CT
- #19 "Temporal Memorial for gun shot victim," Whally Ave, New Haven CT
- #20 Memorial Statue, Yale University, New Haven CT.

Slide List # 2

#1-8 Brad McCallum, "Shroud: Mothers Voices, a memorial for victims who have died of gun violence in New Haven CT.," May 1992 MFA Thesis Exhibition Yale University. This installation included a group of silk banners which had the image of the victim's mother printed on them along with a text, giving her name, her child's name, child's age and date of death. The silk "Shrouds" accompany a two hour video document edited into short ten minute vignettes, where each mother shares memories of her child, describes who they hold responsible for the death of their child, and what it means to them to be a mother. On the far end of the room opposite the video monitor was built a table to display audio speakers, placed on the front of each speaker was a selection of text from a local news paper. This article summarizes the homicides which took place in New Haven, and the circumstances surrounding each victims death.

#9-10 "Shroud", July 1992. Installation in the entrance to the New Haven City Hall. The "Shrouds" were installed in the entrance corridor.

#11-12 "Shroud", November 1992. Installation in the Maloney Correctional Institution.

#13-14 "Shroud", September 1992. Installation in the Harkins Chapel, Connecticut College, New London CT. Slide #14 shows a reflections book that accompanied the installation.

Slide List #3

#1-4 "The Names Project, AIDS Quilt" (see analysis in the body of the paper)

#5-7 "The Vietnam War Memorial, Washington DC" (see analysis in the body of the paper)

#8 Washington DC Memorial Walk, aerial view

#9-10 Versailles, aerial view.

#11 Jenny Holzer, "Under a Rock," 1988, 2' x 4' Jenny Holzer is a contemporary 'word' artist, this work is a bench that she made with a written epitaph cut into the set of the bench.

#12 Pablo Picasso, "Guernica," 1937, 11.5' x 25'

#13 Eugene Delacroix, "Liberty Leading the People ," 1830, 10'8" x 8'6"

#14 Francisco Goya, "The Third of May, 1808," 1814, 9' x 11'

Suggested readings for students and teachers

Vincent Scully, "Architecture, the Natural and the Man-made," St Martins Press Copyright 1991

The first chapter of this book the 'Sacred Mountain' would be a useful introduction to ideas concerning context and placement. Students will learn that the earth itself is a monument, and that our desire to build architectural space is ancient. He also gives an interesting story about Maya Lin in the last chapter.

Suzi Gablik, "The Reenchantment of Art," Thames and Hudson, Copyright 1991

An impressive argument for arts ability to heal. Memorial are often designed with specific social intentions, this book outlines a number of artist who work from a similar point of view.

Louise Gardner, "Art through the Ages," Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, seventh edition Copyright 1980

A useful survey of art history, high-lighting significant works of art.

HW Janson, "History of Art," Abrams NY, second edition, second printing Copyright 1977

A second useful survey of art history.

Cindy Ruskin, "The Quilt, Stories from the Names Project," Pocket Books NY, Copyright 1988

A very good description of the Names Project, and the Aids Quilt. Easy reading, great pictures.

Douglas Crimp, "AIDS, Cultural Analysis Cultural Activism," The MIT Press, Copyright 1987

This is a collection of articles and essays that covers AIDS activism. Martha Gever's "Pictures of Sickness" is particularly good, and provides useful information to be used in the context of this course.

Edward Cassy, "Remembering," Copyright

This book provides excellent theoretical support for why mankind is motivated to build memorials, and how memory functions.

Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, "Survivors Among Us," Film, 40 minutes

Excerpts from testimonies of survivors now living in the Hartford area, organized around the themes of "Early Memories," "The Camps," and the "Resistance."

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