

NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

Memory – Space – Politics:

Public Memorial and the Problem of Political Judgment

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Field of Political Science

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EVANSTON, ILLINOIS

June 2008

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ABSTRACT

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Late twentieth-century architecture is increasingly charged with the task of constructing sites of meaning that generate awareness and understanding in the wake of catastrophic historical events. My dissertation explores the challenges of memorializing these events, in order to recover the importance of memory for politics. Insisting on the role of public memorial as a site of democratic practice, my work questions the dominant discourse that informs and directs acts of memorialization. That is, a discourse that circumscribes remembrance and forgetting as either a politics of memory, in which the meaning of an event is imposed on a particular community, or as its attendant ethics, in which one or more communities is obliged to remember, most often for the purpose of collective instruction.

Theorizing the meaning of community in the representational strategies of public memorial, I ask: What kinds of memorials enable plurality and political speech? What kinds disable and silence? Which practices of remembrance are best suited to the events they want to memorialize, as well as to the imperatives of our own political present? Do these practices consolidate meaning, or do they provoke the kind of critical questioning that is essential to democracy?

To recover the importance of memory for politics, I develop a distinctively political idiom for talking about public memorial. I draw from the texts of Walter Benjamin, Hannah Arendt,

Friedrich Nietzsche, and Theodor Adorno to show how memory energizes our ability to think, judge, and act in the face of a past that can be neither forgotten nor changed. While these thinkers provide me with theoretical resources, I ground my readings in contemporary memorial architecture. Each site casts an individual perspective on the events it sets out to represent, and thus offers a singular notion of what it means to remember. It is not my intention to establish a paradigm out of a particular field of memory, but to bring each act of memorial into conversation with the theoretical texts in order to ask how space enables and disables practices of reflective judgment constitutive of human plurality and democratic community.

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Introduction: Memory – Space – Politics

Memories are motionless, and the more securely they are fixed in space, the sounder they are.¹

-- Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*

The remarkable thing about monuments is that one does not notice them. There is nothing so invisible in the world as a monument.²

-- Robert Musil, "Denkmale"

Midway through his review of two recently published surveys of modern architecture, philosopher Mark Kingwell asks a seemingly straightforward question: *whom should architecture serve?* Foregrounding the mutual implication of architecture and politics, while stressing the significance of place for the invisible space of human relations, Kingwell responds:

Hannah Arendt, rare among political theorists for her interest in the built environment, called architecture 'the space of appearances' and argued plausibly that, because it provided the canvas for all social life, it was essentially political. Certainly no other fact of everyday life is as inescapable. You can turn off a television or a computer, avoid cash transactions, even stifle advertising's constant blare; but you cannot avoid being in the fabric of your place.³

Arendt recognized something important for political theory: issues of place, space, form, and order, are as important to politics as those of authority, legitimacy, and right. Following Arendt, Kingwell rightly emphasizes the material and symbolic significance of architecture to politics. "Architecture is political, as all public things are, but architecture itself is not politics. We citizens must conduct the business of sifting among our built forms and public spaces for the ideas and interactions that may make for a thriving society. Nobody can do the work of

1 Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 9.

2 The original German: *Das Auffallendste an Denkmälern ist nämlich, dass man sie nicht bemerkt. Es gibt nichts auf der Welt, was so unsichtbar wäre wie die Denkmäler.* Robert Musil, "Denkmale," *Nachlaß zu Lebzeiten* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1957), 59-63.

3 Mark Kingwell, "Modernism A La Mode," *Harper's Magazine* (November 2007): 83-88.

democracy for us.” When read in view of Arendt’s insight that the grammar of politics is an invisible space that both relates and separates individuals as they appear before others, Kingwell’s claim that democracy is lived, not given, is the starting point of the following study of memorial architecture and democratic politics. This study not only defends a dynamic view of history, arguing for an ethically aware and politically engaged historical sensibility, it asserts the importance of space as that which lies between memory and politics.

The chapters below attend to material forms of public memorial by questioning their ability to facilitate a distinctively political practice of remembrance and forgetting. While drawing from debates within the emerging field of memory studies,⁴ they focus on the reflective act of political judgment as a critical practice of meaning formation. Thinking outside the frame of collective memory and the imaginary identifications that it supports, that is, outside the traditional view of memorialization which subsumes our understanding of the past to a self-referential object of knowledge (whether it be a fixed identity or a universal narrative), the readings contained within each chapter invite us to think about issues of memory, space, and politics without the ontological telos of progress and its secular, theological, and metaphysical undercurrent of redemption. A politically mindful act of remembrance, I argue, is not about identifying with the hollow that is collective memory, but about altering our relationship to the past such that we reclaim it as something we can judge but also be questioned by.

⁴ Memory studies is a multidisciplinary field seeking interdisciplinary status. The 2008 inauguration of the journal *Memory Studies* is indicative of the upsurge of interest in memory as an object of inquiry across the humanities and the social sciences. One finds a range of disciplinary traditions – including (though not limited to) anthropology, history, sociology, psychology, literature, and philosophy – concerned with the forms, functions, and typologies (e.g. cognitive, bodily, traumatic, narrative, habitual, sensory) of memory. The growth of memory studies forces increased terminological specification on the concepts of memory and forgetting. That is not to say that the wholesale proliferation of their use demand conceptual refinement to the point of establishing a unitary theory of memory and forgetting, but that any study invoking the terms ought to specify their intended meaning.

Collective Memory

“Political struggle,” writes literary theorist Petar Ramadanovic, “is not primarily a battle for the territory of memory or its content, but for the meaning of memory, for what memory *is*, and for that which is memory beyond meaning. It is a resistance to the politics of imposition and representation, to their powers and manipulations.”⁵ This view on memory and its political stakes corresponds to the well traveled passage of novelist and essayist Milan Kundera, from *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*: “the struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.”⁶ As Ramadanovic explains: “For Kundera, the struggle for memory is a political struggle. It is waged against the winners, that is, the conquerors who control history, and, by manipulating the collective memory, dictate the collective’s identity.”⁷ Abuses of memory are a commonplace of history. Yet, as is often the case in the reflections that call these abuses into question, both Ramadanovic and Kundera mistakenly presuppose the fact of collective memory as an ontological given lying between myth and history.

I raise the question of collective memory here not to introduce the subject as one of the dissertation’s themes, but to address its limits as a heuristic device and emphasize the dangers of drawing the political import of memory from this specious notion.⁸

5 Petar Ramadanovic, *Forgetting Futures: On Memory, Trauma, and Identity* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2001), 27.

6 Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, trans., Aaron Asher, (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 1999), 4.

7 Ramadanovic, *Forgetting Futures: On Memory, Trauma, and Identity*, 24.

8 Sociologist Jeffrey Olick notes the continued lack of historical appreciation in Anglo-American scholarship for the intellectual-historical context of Maurice Halbwachs’s ‘collective memory.’ In the initial stages of its study, “many were talking about collective memory issues in other terms, whereas now we often talk about other issues in terms of collective memory, thus risking a loss of conceptual specificity.” The use of collective memory (and other concepts traveling across disciplines and between the academy and popular culture, like trauma) often obscures more than it reveals. See Jeffrey Olick, “‘Collective Memory’: A Memoir and Prospect,” *Memory Studies* 1, no. 1 (January 2008): 23-29.

At its most basic level, collective memory signifies shared readings of the past – sanctified, canonized, and authorized – that are founded on a common tradition. Where history weaves multiple narrative threads out of facts for the purpose of knowing and understanding the past, collective memory crystallizes a multiplicity of beliefs invested with symbolic meaning. It implies that individuals within a group are able to recognize a common story or set of symbols, not that each individual knows the same facts.⁹ Put differently, history encompasses a totalizing field of precision and accuracy, while collective memory forms a semi-permeable zone of contestation. Within this zone of contestation, a wide range of groups compete for authority over the past, negotiating their own strategies of remembrance with and against those sanctioned by official scripts, canonized by public institutions, and authorized through legal channels.¹⁰ Unequal parties, these groups advance and defend particular interpretations of the past for their own material and symbolic interests. Whether global, diffuse, local, or acute, collective memory unfolds a terrain in which groups of all sizes compete for recognition, respect, and survival.¹¹

One of the ways a community like the nation-state sustains itself over time is by using collective memory to shape the collective consciousness and identity of its members.¹² Passed

9 Collective memory, “a shared memory of a historical event that goes beyond the experience of anyone alive is a memory of memory, and not necessarily a memory that ... ends up at an actual event. This kind of memory reaches alleged memories of the past but not necessarily past events.” Avishai Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 59.

10 For historians Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, civil society (the domain between the family and the state), describes this zone of contestation, which is composed of “voluntary social groups, led by secondary elites. These elites help shape the process of remembrance, though their freedom of action is limited by the contribution of individual members of this group.” See Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 29.

11 As historian Idith Zertal explains, collective memories are “cultural constructs, products of socio-political realities which reflect power struggles and political motivations existing within that society.” Idith Zertal, *Israel's Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 118.

12 Identity signifies a sense of self and understanding comprised of inherited and contested narratives circulating within a public realm. Following Dominick LaCapra, I take identity to be “a problematic constellation or more or less changing configuration of subject positions.” See Dominick LaCapra, *History in Transit: Experience, Identity, Critical Theory* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 5-6.

down through generations in official histories and informal narratives, collective memories inform and often define what it means to be a member of a community. Moreover, they provide groups with one of the strongest means of preserving order. Coursing through the ideological arteries of a given society, collective memories instill a sense of civic pride, morality, and common purpose (discussed in Chapter 1).

Ideology does not supplement memory by imposing symbolic order and coherence on a shared history. Rather, it calls memory into service; ideology works through memory. Following Kundera and Ramadanovic, memory has the potential to be exploited by those who, claiming authority over the past, attempt to legitimize their claim either by concealing social division and representing unity through the projection of an imagined community or by playing on the fears of social disorder and insecurity. As a form of ideological discourse, collective memory strategically diversifies and displaces its references to past and future, so to efface the historical as a contingent result of human action. “To an ideology, history does not appear in the light of an idea but as something which can be calculated by it.”¹³ Ideology assumes a position above history.¹⁴ When read in terms of its ideological effects, collective memory coalesces impenetrable interpretations of the past. The claim made by ideologies “to total explanation promises to explain all historical happenings, the total explanation of the past, the total knowledge of the present, and the reliable prediction of the future.”¹⁵ From the perspective of

13 Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1966) (New York: Harcourt, 1979), 469 – 470. “Ideologies pretend to know the mysteries of the whole historical process – the secrets of the past, the intricacies of the present, the uncertainties of the future – because of the logic inherent in their respective ideas.”

14 Borrowing Freud’s formulation, “unconscious is eternal,” Louis Althusser claims that ideology is eternal, “omni-present, trans-historical and therefore immutable in form throughout the extent of history.” Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), 109.

15 Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 469-470.

ideology, collective memory is a powerful organizing principle, for it assigns an explanatory logic to historical events.

For the modern nation-state, the memory of punctuated events serves as a reservoir of psychic energy from which to shape the collective imaginary. Thought in terms of an imaginary community, the nation-state develops out of a transformation in how time is collectively conceived. This shift, from a medieval conception of simultaneity along time, vertically linking human events to a Judeo-Christian eschatological narrative of redemption, to a conception of homogenous empty time, in which simultaneity is marked by temporal coincidence, lends ideological justification to the immortality and symbolic coherence of a collectivity like the nation-state. Supporting this view, political scientist Benedict Anderson argues, “the idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogenous, empty time is a precise analogue of the idea of the nation, which is also conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history. An American will never meet, or even know the names of more than a handful of his 240,000-odd fellow-Americans,” but “he has complete confidence in their steady, anonymous, simultaneous activity.”¹⁶ Insofar as civic ideals are able to form affective bonds, identification does not require face-to-face relations. With the help of collective memories, the state is able to determine the form and content of such ideals.

Putting memory to work not only detemporalizes past, present, and future, it also secularizes “fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning.”¹⁷ Though it is rare to find an

16 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 24-26.

17 *Ibid.*, 11. Through rituals of testimony and identification, the modern nation-state constructs a sense of civic glory or collective martyrdom. The more a community recollects itself through the unifying memory of victories and defeats, the more its members envision themselves bound together by a common mission and destiny. “In this community, the living appropriate the dead, immortalize them, assign meaning to their deaths as they, the living, see fit, and thereby create the ‘common city’ ... constituted out of the dead and the living, in which the dead serve as the

established consensus on the past, collective memory plays a significant role in the constitution and consolidation of community. It is nearly impossible to imagine a state “that does not try to structure some set of privileged, constitutive, understandings of the society it purports to represent.”¹⁸ As is shown in Chapter 1, similar modes of identification can be found in the Athenian funeral oration, whereby a diverse and culturally heterogeneous community – opaque and yet utterly real – constitutes itself by displacing generational difference, geographic distance, and social division.¹⁹ In both the nation-state and imperial Athens, the imaginary becomes the figure through which community ideologically apprehends itself.

How, then, are we to distinguish between memorial abuse, the concerted manipulation of the past, and honorific and cathartic acts of memorialization?

It is safe to say that every historical community has an original relation to violence.

These violent episodes, what are often referred to as founding moments, legitimize themselves

highest authority for the deeds of the living.” As we shall see in Chapter 1, the funeral orations of Thucydides’s *History...* and Plato’s *Menexenus* construct a civic ideology akin to that of the modern nation-state. See Zertal, *Israel’s Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood*, 9.

18 Sanford Levinson, *Written in Stone* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 86-87.

19 One of the primary functions of the Athenian funeral oration and the traditional memorial model is to construct an internally stable identity founded on a univocal understanding of the past. The modern variant, writes philosopher Edward Casey, “affirms the past’s selfsameness in the present by means of a consolidated re-enactment, thus assuring a continuation of remembering into the future” (256). Through commemoration “I overcome the effects of anonymity and spatio-temporal distance and pay homage to people and events I have never known and will never know face-to-face” (218). An Athenian analog to Casey’s understanding of public commemoration in modernity is given by classicist Edward Cohen: “In this sublime rousing of national consciousness, Perikles tellingly addresses his audience not as *politai* but as *astoi* (and *xenoi*) [2.36.4] – appropriately, because at Athenian funeral ceremonies the orators speak directly to an audience that encompasses a spectrum of persons present in Attika: local men and women of varied status, visiting foreigners, perhaps family members of foreigners who had fought for Athens.” Pericles, as such, draws his audience “into the combination of persons, physical environment, and shared experience that constituted the imagined community of Athens.” Reflecting on the bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, historian Edward Linenthal writes, “perhaps one of the greatest attractions of a nationwide bereaved community, is that it is one of the only ways Americans can imagine themselves as one; being ‘together’ with millions of others through expressions of mourning bypasses or transcends the many ways in which people are divided.” See Edward Casey, *Remembering* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2000); Edward Cohen, *The Athenian Nation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 97-98; Edward Linenthal, *The Unfinished Bombing: Oklahoma City in American Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 111.

only after the fact by what philosopher Paul Ricoeur describes as a “precarious state of right.”²⁰

It is this precarious state of right that justifies systems of rule and authority to determine what constitutes a community like the modern nation-state. Partitioning part from whole (e.g., citizen and foreigner) and ordering a relation of hierarchy between the governing and the governed, a precarious state of right cultivates legitimacy for arbitrary systems of rule and authority. With the help of various narrative resources, these systems of order position themselves with and against traditional forms of rule, appealing to punctuated historical moments to legitimize their claim to material and symbolic resources.²¹

Remembering involves either the passive reception (involuntary affection) of a past image or idea, or its active (intentional) search. The image or idea recalled is a selective and interpretive representation on the past. Because the object, experience, or event being remembered is absent, and imagination is the means of its representation, memory is mutable and open to manipulation. Legitimizing former abuses of power, exclusions, and other forms of political violence through the use of memory exploits this constitutive openness.

Instrumentalization occurs when memory is put to the service of ends that self-consciously privilege certain aspects of the past while intentionally omitting others.²² Resisting such

20 “The same events are thus found to signify glory for some, humiliation for others. To their celebration, on the one hand, corresponds their execration on the other.” Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 82.

21 “It is the selective function of the narrative that opens to manipulation the opportunity and the means of a clever strategy, consisting from the outset in a strategy of forgetting as much as in a strategy of remembering.” Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 84-85.

22 In the language of cognitive psychology, memory is susceptible to manipulation after an initial *encoding*. Such instances of *interpolated learning*, as Winter and Sivan explain, occur when external influences persuade individuals of the truth of certain notions or the reality of certain events. “Interference operates either by manipulating major so-called ‘facts’ and/or by introducing key interpretive terms which have clear-cut resonances for the *semantic memory* of the individual.” This results in the formation of a new script or narrative, neither of which is determined exclusively by elites. “Agency in the constitution of social learning about the past” operates from below as well as above.” Winter and Sivan emphasize throughout their analysis of collective memory that state agency does not have a monopoly over individual and/or group memory. “Much ‘memory work’ goes on spontaneously within civil

functionalization, I argue, requires self-reflective acts of judgment capable of altering one's relationship to the past and opening it up to critical thinking.

Memory is inescapably social and political; there will always be conflicting accounts and interpretations of the past, even within individual memory, which will undoubtedly change over time. And yet, "we have nothing better than memory to signify that something has taken place, has occurred, has happened *before* we declare we remember it."²³ When speaking about the past and its multiple histories, memory is an unavoidable uncertainty.

Sociologist Maurice Halbwachs's foundational study on collective memory develops a social conception of memory. Memory, Halbwachs claims, cannot emerge in isolation, that is, from within a strictly subjective understanding of the past. "A person remembers only by situating himself within the viewpoint of one or several groups and one or several currents of collective thought."²⁴ For Halbwachs, memory is a social phenomenon, something shared collectively, and not the exclusive or private possession of an individual subject. "Memory does not exist outside of individuals, but it is never individual in character."²⁵ Personal memory is only a viewpoint on the collective memory, which unavoidably involves a mnemonic division of labor.²⁶

society, especially after salient or dramatic events. This work goes on through exchanges among members of social networks, either those pre-existing the events or created as a result of them." Winter and Sivan, *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*.

23 Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 21. Memory "is our one and only resource for signifying the past-character of what we declare we remember."

24 Halbwachs develops this notion of collective memory by distinguishing it from what he calls common memory, that is, an aggregation of individual memories. Collective memory is general and universal, accounting for a plurality of perspectives where each perspective contributes to the collective memory as an incomplete fragment. Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory [La mémoire collective]* (New York: Harper Colophon, 1980), 33.

25 Winter and Sivan, *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, 24.

26 I borrow the term "mnemonic division of labor" and the distinction between common and collective memory from Avishai Margalit's *The Ethics of Memory*; see chapter two, "Past Continuous," where Margalit argues, "the responsibility over a shared memory is on each and every one in a community of memory to see to it that the memory will be kept. But it is not an obligation of each one to remember all." A complementary understanding of

Halbwachs's sociological conception of memory is appealing insofar as it attenuates the dangers of subjectivism, a tendency within contemporary practices of memorialization to privatize memory and think history as a matter of personal reflection on the past (see Chapter 4). While appealing to the language of personal memory, his notion of collective memory holds the two in a position of rivalry. Resisting this artificial binary, Ricoeur argues that personal and collective memory "do not oppose one another on the same plane, but occupy universes of discourses that have become estranged from each other."²⁷ For Ricoeur, neither personal nor collective memory can sustain a claim to truth or legitimacy over the other. Rather, there is "an interminable level of reference between the poles of individual memory and collective memory, where concrete exchanges operate between the living memory of individual persons and the public memories of the communities to which they belong."²⁸ Ricoeur's more nuanced understanding of collective memory captures the dialogical interplay of individual and collective memory: collective memories unavoidably pass through individuals, and individual memories are formed with the help of others. Organizing a plurality of perspectives is not about building consensus over the past, or converging on the right or true historical account and interpretation; it is about cultivating an open field of memory. To speak of collective memory, so argues Ricoeur, is to speak of such a field: if individuals are able to identify their personal memories within the context of the larger field, there exists a community of memory.

A community of memory does not have to be a national, a religious, or an ethnic group, though traditionally it assumes these forms. A minimal level of communication over an object

memory is advanced by Winter and Sivan, who argue that memory is a process of *social learning* which entails the assimilation by "an individual of narratives or *scripts* about himself and his exchanges with other people," i.e. memory is socially framed across time. See Winter and Sivan, *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, 11.

²⁷ Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 95.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 131.

of memory is all that is needed to provide a group with an informal coherence.²⁹

Communication over a common object of memory can be direct and institutionally organized, in places like museums, memorials, and monuments, or indirect and implicit, as with the naming of a street or a school. What is significant for a community of memory is that mnemonic clues are shared and recognized (if only in name) in public space. In other words, a community of memory exists to the extent that symbolic representations extend beyond relations of intimacy or self, and that these representations manifest a minimal convergence with individual memories.

The Traditional Memorial Model

According to the traditional memorial model, the primary function of public memorial is to shape the social significations of memory for a particular community. A memorial, monument, or museum stands for that which can no longer stand for itself. To the extent that these institutions are the ambassadors, guardians, and repositories of collective memory, they do more than just mark the memory of an event, an individual, or a group. The commemorative function of a war memorial, for example, is both a means of identifying the dead (as victims, heroes, martyrs, victors, protectors, defeated) and acknowledging the survival of a community.³⁰

29 Unlike collective memory, personal memory does not demand communicability and representation in public space. For the most part, individuals expect to be remembered by those close to them through stories, anecdotes, and photos, but without institutional support. We hope that people still talk about us, certainly after our death, but also in instances that are not as emotionally or mnemonically charged, for example, when we meet someone for the first time. For both relations of intimacy and those less immediate, being remembered is a confirmation of the value of a social bond. “The horror of falling into utter oblivion is not necessarily the fear of what will happen to us after death but of what it says about our relationships now. It is the fear of not amounting to much in our present relations with others.” Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory*, 94

30 War memorials commemorate deaths caused by human action, so that “in addition to remembrance, the question of the justification” is also evoked. Violent death screams for legitimation: there must be a meaning for the ‘senseless’ loss of human life. Many view the search for a right cause or just death as an ethical obligation. Yet “the meaning of ‘dying for...’ as it is recorded on memorials is established by the survivors and not by the dead,” reminding us that remembrance is an act for and by the living, guided by the interests of the present. We, the living, cannot know whether the meanings we attach to the dead would agree with those of the deceased. The meanings

By commemorating the past, the living position themselves with reference to an undying identity, which thereby confirms their survivability in the face of death. As historian and theorist Reinhart Koselleck explains, “the war memorial does not only commemorate the dead; it also compensates for lost lives so as to render survival meaningful.”³¹ Whether conveying a message or encouraging reflection, public memorial helps generate meaning for the fact of human mortality.

Yet memorials suffer from an instability of signification. They are products of their time, but their time ultimately betrays their inability to represent an eternal meaning. They have a “surplus potential to take on a life of their own. For this reason, the original meaning of countless memorials is no longer recognizable without recourse to inscriptions.”³² A memorial’s meaning and the identifications it engenders changes according to the needs and interests of its constituency. The only identity that endures in a memorial is the identity of the dead with themselves. “All political and social identifications that try to visually capture and permanently fix the ‘dying for...’ vanish in the course of time.”³³

It goes without saying that memorials play an active role in the formation and preservation of groups and identities. Through the use of heroic symbols and tragic figures, they serve a didactic function, communicating in both victory and defeat the imperative to protect the community and/or defend the homeland. As we shall see in Chapter 1, patriotic sentiments are

assigned to the dead often represent idealized versions of our best selves. “The dead are supposed to have stood for the same cause as the surviving sponsors of memorials want to stand for. But the dead have no say in whether it is the same cause or not. Yet over the course of time, and this is what history teaches, the intended identity similarly eludes the control of those who established the memorial.” Reinhart Koselleck, “War Memorials: Identity Formations of the Survivors,” *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 287-288.

31 Ibid., 287.

32 Ibid., 324.

33 Ibid., 289.

often aroused in survivors in order to secure a motivation for individual sacrifice on behalf of the collective good. Representing exemplary models, which the living are asked to emulate, memorials put the dead on display. Through sculptures, plaques, and inscriptions, they ritualize the memory of victories achieved in common, thereby stabilizing the identity and cohesiveness of a polity. Practiced communally, remembrance secures these traditions and the identifications they engender.

Identifying with the dead, survivors “continue the history of the victors in such a way that they become the protectors of the defeated.” Yet a victory set in stone does not mean that all dead are treated equally. As is often the case when it comes to identity and group formation, there is a “conscious exclusion of others by obfuscation or silence.”³⁴ The notion that all practices of inclusion are based on acts of exclusion bears squarely on Walter Benjamin’s critique of empathetic identification, which is developed in Chapters 3 and 4. For now, it is enough to say that demarcating the dead along categorical lines – victors and victims, good and evil, right and wrong – helps preserve an always artificial homogeneity according to the desires and imperatives of particular group interest.

“No monument is completely absorbed by its political function.”³⁵ Memory must be made meaningful. “The memorial, the supposed guarantor of sensory transmission beyond death, does not appear to be capable of achieving this task by itself. A conscious adoption of the message is always necessary.”³⁶ Reinscription is a fact of life in the politics of memorialization. Not only does mourning exceed the political function of memorial, survival in relation to death, that is, confronting one’s own mortality, exceeds all acts of mourning. Thus, communities of

34 Ibid., 307-308.

35 Ibid., 309.

36 Ibid., 324-325.

memory are incapable of holding a monopoly of use over the memory and meaning of a past for which they claim ownership.³⁷

Modernity not only functionalizes but democratizes public memorial. Privatizing mourning helps the modern nation-state secure the means from which to legitimize public (official) uses of memory.³⁸ Memorialization, as such, commemorates the fate of collectives by making individual death politically meaningful for the collective. “The names of all the dead become individually inscribed, or at least the number of the dead noted ... so that in the future no one sinks into the past.”³⁹ In effect, the survival of the collective redeems the death of individual citizens. Giving political traction to death, the modern nation-state secularizes the theological concept of redemption through the universal identity of the citizen.⁴⁰ Hegel’s claim that it is the duty of the citizen to sacrifice his or her life, property, opinions, and all that naturally falls within the province of life for the independence and sovereignty of the state captures the relation of the nation-state to the memory of the dead.⁴¹ “Under the name of sovereignty,” writes Jürgen Habermas, “conceived in modern terms, the nation state inherited the classical duty to die for one’s father land, thereby confirming the primacy of the nation over all other earthly goods.”⁴²

37 “Different social and political groups make use of memorials to safely preserve their own particular tradition by laying claim for themselves to the meaning of the death which has taken place.” Ibid., 305.

38 As I argue throughout the dissertation, a politically mindful act of remembrance questions, in the words of political theorist Judith Butler, “how the norm governing who will be a grievable human is circumscribed and produced in these acts of permissible and celebrated public grieving, how they sometimes operate in tandem with a prohibition on the public grieving of others’ lives, and how this differential allocation of grief serves the derealizing aims of military violence.” Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence* (New York: Verso, 2004), 37.

39 Ibid., 291.

40 “The tombs of the ‘unknown soldier’ – one for all – are the last step in” what Koselleck describes as a “democratization of death.” Ibid., 317.

41 G.W.F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), §324, 363.

42 Jürgen Habermas, “Historical Consciousness and Post-Traditional Identity,” *The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historians’ Debate* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 257.

This sacrifice is the core content of national-consciousness, one of the more overtly political manifestations of collective memory.⁴³

With the emergence of the modern nation-state comes a transformation in the historical consciousness of political collectivities. Following from “the experience of ‘dislocation and disorientation’ caused by industrialization, free-market capitalism, and political upheaval,” i.e. the “splintering of traditional social and cultural bonds,” nostalgia becomes increasingly prevalent in the myth making of the modern nation-state.⁴⁴ The increasing concern and search for univocal meanings in the past leads to a historical awareness of the break between past and present, and the dislocation of tradition from social and political life (Chapter 3). The myth making of the nation-state develops alongside the rise of the public sphere, enabling an increasingly fragmented society to feel a sense of belonging to a larger community. Though the modern separation of religion and politics denies individuals the promise of earthly immortality, the nation-state recovers the redemption of mankind as the salvation of individual citizens. Through the concerted manipulation of collective memory, the modern nation-state secularizes the Judeo-Christian conception of time.⁴⁵

As I argue in the following chapters, this model of memorialization – what I designate as the traditional memorial model – has been upended by critical responses to its objectifying tendencies. Two responses, in particular, inform today’s practices of commemoration: those stressing the subjective dimension of memory, and those pursuing a particular group interest

43 Following Habermas, national consciousness is a modern form of consciousness, “though it assumes a pseudo-natural appearance.” A group identity embodied by a collective subjectivity, national consciousness is “disseminated through mass communication, and anchored in the outlook of generations primed for war through the mobilization of conscripts.” See Jürgen Habermas, *The Divided West* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), 76-77.

44 Matthew Levinger, “The Birth of Modern Memory” *Modern Intellectual History* 3, no. 1 (2006): 167-178, 173.

45 Following historian Peter Fritzsche, Levinger suggests that “the basic plot line of the modern historical imagination, emphasizing catastrophic loss and the possibility of redemption, is borrowed from Christian theology.” Levinger, “The Birth of Modern Memory,” 176.

through a privileged claim on the past. The former rightly rejects nostalgia and sentimentality in the name of a living history animated by an affective relation with experience. However, by emphasizing private mnemonic encounters, this subjectivist notion of historical understanding misses the intersubjective mode of meaning formation constitutive of human plurality.⁴⁶ To the extent that it ignores alternative opinions and perspectives, a historical sensibility informed by affect rather than fact may just as well empty the past of its social significance.

Once embodying the singular expression of an official and authorized history, the traditional memorial model fails to account for the fragmentary experiences and plurality of identities that make-up today's diffuse culture of commemoration. "Gone is the time," writes historian Pierre Nora, "when major events were celebrated simultaneously throughout the country at identical sites with identical rituals and processions, without regard to specific individual and group identities but with respect for the succession of generations."⁴⁷ Today's pluralized historiographies compete for narrative resources from which to legitimate authoritative claims on memory.⁴⁸ In the words of transitional justice scholar Rudi Teitel, "the attempt to entrench an identity based on a particular historical view for all time is itself an

46 The subjectivist approach to memorial architecture is symptomatic of an increasing privatization of experience in contemporary museums. In *Death's Showcase*, cultural theorist Ariella Azoulay argues that: "the process of privatization of the public space has been accelerated, and a network has been formed of interactive sites that apparently participate in museum discourse and practices without representing anything, except their own reflection as it appears in a kind of mirror provided for them by the museum. These sites reflect the attainment of a place of representation, although no common representation has plain visibility in the public space." Ariella Azoulay, *Death's Showcase: The Power of Image in Contemporary Democracy* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 151.

47 Pierre Nora, "The Era of Commemoration" from *Realms of Memory*, Vol. III Symbols (New York: Columbia University Press), 615.

48 Eric Santner denies "the availability of the narratives of European Enlightenment culture as resources of legitimation and orientation, as the projection of a progressive synthesis of this heterogeneity under some teleological master term." Eric Santner, *Stranded Objects: Mourning, Memory, and Film in Post-war Germany* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press: 1990), 51.

illiberal vision – no choice remains but plurality of narratives, instability and political dialectic.”⁴⁹

The traditional memorial model’s exclusionary and assimilatory practices force political claims to be framed in the idiom of group interest. In effect, there is an incentive built into the logic of recognition affirmed by the traditional memorial model to articulate claims of justice, inclusion, fairness, and reparation, in universal terms, all the while advancing particular interest. As critics of recognition politics rightly point out, the affirmation of local narratives advanced by multicultural discourses do more to legitimate the official scripts of the nation-state than to realize the political claims of their constituents.⁵⁰

What, then, is the future of the traditional memorial model? The decline of the nation-state as the end of a collective project (of social, political, religious, and ethnic unification) leaves one to doubt the efficacy of monumental histories to inform what have increasingly become post-conventional identities: non-moralistic self-understandings that are open, inclusive, and universally oriented to human plurality.⁵¹ With the diffusion of collective memories and the proliferation of memorial styles comes an increased emphasis on local narratives and individual perspectives on the past. As theorist Dominick LaCapra rightly recognizes, “when memory is mentioned, identity and identity politics are never far behind.” “A group’s subject position or constellation of subject positions becomes a crucial if not the paramount consideration in political and, more generally, social activity.”⁵² With identity politics comes a fragmentation of

49 Rudi Teitel, *Transitional Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 117.

50 “To appeal to the state *for* the recognition of one’s own identity – to present oneself as knowable – is already to offer the state the reciprocal recognition of its sovereignty that it demands” (31). Patchen Markell, *Bound By Recognition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

51 For a discussion of conventional and postconventional identities, see Jürgen Habermas, “Apologetic Tendencies,” *The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historians’ Debate* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991).

52 LaCapra, *History in Transit: Experience, Identity, Critical Theory*, 5-6.

memory, which ostensibly weakens the ability of the traditional memorial model to shape collective subjectivities. After the multicultural turn, so it seems, the traditional memorial model can no longer fit within the broken frame of collective memory.

However, the collapse of the traditional memorial model should not be overstated. In its apparent wake, one finds a “loosely organized system of disparate commemorative languages, which assume a different kind of relationship with the past: one that is more elective than imperative and that is plastic, alive, and always subject to perpetual elaboration.”⁵³ Having always been selective, memory becomes a matter of personal choice, fitting the imperatives of the day rather than determining its needs. Traditional sites of social initiation – the school, the family, the monument – begin to lose their mnemonic hold on society. “What was once the responsibility of these institutions has flowed over into the public domain and been taken over by the media and the tourist industry.”⁵⁴ Consequently, individuals exercise greater control over which practices of remembrance they subscribe to, which traditions, habits, and customs they choose to assume. “The democratization of memorials and memorial processes, the compression of time between event and memorial planning, and the rise of activist memorial environments,” characterizes our contemporary culture of commemoration, where a therapeutic work of mourning calls on memory to draw “cautionary lessons from the past as a guide to proper civic behavior.” As with the traditional memorial model, contemporary sites of memory exist “to offer comfort, assuage grief, and inspire future generations to emulate the virtues ostensibly

53 Nora, “The Era of Commemoration,” 614.

54 Ibid., 636.

enshrined in memorials.”⁵⁵ The list of imperatives remains unchanged: remember the dead, mourn the event, serve as a warning, and secure local and national communities.

Having broken with teleological conceptions of historical development (philosophies of history advanced by reason under the stewardship of the state, or by the working-class against the automated processes of capital), it would seem as though contemporary memorial practices would be able to challenge the state’s hegemonic claim for the right to memory and control over group identity. However, the more memorial practices are self-policed, the more they risk sliding into the realm of identity politics, which increases the potential for groups to conflict over the past. The state, in turn, becomes an arbiter of meaning for communities of memory competing over the past, settling private disputes that have spilled into the public realm through the rule of law.⁵⁶ Thus, the primary agent of adjudicating competing accounts of memory remains the nation-state.

For example, truth commissions – officially sanctioned investigations and accounts of mass violence – have become popular modes of reconciling societies to contentious historical legacies. As we shall see in the concluding chapter, truth commissions are entrusted by both the governing and the governed to establish the facts through a democratization of truth (though no less objectifying than the traditional memorial model) intended to cultivate societal consensus and trust between hostile groups. The truth produced by these authoritative counter-accounts “is publicly arrived at and legitimated in nonadversarial processes that link up historical judgment with potential consensus.” The mnemonic fabric of transitional societies is thus weaved of

⁵⁵ Linenthal, *The Unfinished Bombing: Oklahoma City in American Memory*, 4, 229.

⁵⁶ “The socially constructed understanding of evil needs the rule of law to reconsider links between collective memory and accountability.” María Pía Lara, *Narrating Evil: A Postmetaphysical Theory of Reflective Judgment* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 27.

narrative threads from everyday citizens to representative elites. “Every detail is recounted in bare fashion without literary license. In plain, matter-of-fact language, the unbelievable is made believable.”⁵⁷ Authorized by law for the purpose of transitioning from a legacy of violence to a liberal-democratic order, commissions generate politically balanced and neutral documentary accounts. Yet establishing such records goes beyond amassing facts, “for what is at stake is a contested national history.”⁵⁸

The diffusion of particular narratives and their multiple claims to recognition make the social uses of memory “as diverse and varied as the rationales of identity. But the mechanisms involved as well as the reasons for the sacralization of memory are always the same: confrontations between groups subject to constant change and consolidated through constant revival of the memories on which their identities are based.”⁵⁹ Expanding Nora’s thesis, I argue that the politicization of memory secularizes and democratizes commemorative practices at the expense of transforming memory into a kind of fetishized commodity. Exchanged on the free market of political grievances, the memory of past wrongs risks feeding the psychic economy of wounded subjectivities.

In the words of historian Charles Maier: “the surfeit of memory is a sign not of historical confidence but of a retreat from transformative politics,” reflecting “a new focus on narrow ethnicity as a replacement for encompassing communities based on constitutions, legislation and widening attributes of citizenship, it aspires preeminently to the recognition by other groups of its own suffering and victimhood.” To paraphrase Maier, historical wrongs become a form of

57 “The victims of prior oppression are the historical inquiry’s primary source of evidence, the stewards of the nation’s newfound history.” Teitel, *Transitional Justice*, 78-83.

58 *Ibid.*, 84.

59 Nora, “The Era of Commemoration,” 616, 634.

political currency: “getting others to pay respect is a version of national recognition.”⁶⁰ The appeal to national notice made by local and particular histories is founded on a self-understanding that views one’s claim on the past as equal among others yet decisive, as having the final say. Today’s commemorative practices betray both an egalitarian and exceptional impulse: groups want their stories heard in the public sphere provided that competing narratives are silenced.

With memorial excess comes a preoccupation of place, that is, the contestation over spaces of memory, such as monuments, landscapes, and other historically charged sites of meaning.⁶¹ “For ethnic groups wishing to publicize grievances past or present, memorialization offer[s] a physical and ideological presence” once previously denied by the traditional memorial model.⁶² Signifying a bounded space defining law, authority, and allegiance, territory once provided material attachment to immaterial forms of social cohesion (i.e. collective memory). Today, territory is a site of social division. Memorial excess “cathects to landscape and territory because territoriality has been abandoned as a physical arena for civic action and is nurtured instead as an enclave of historicism,” comprised of partisan struggles for recognition advanced

60 Charles Maier, “A Surfeit of Memory? Reflections on History, Melancholy and Denial,” *History and Memory* 5, no. 2, (Winter 1993): 136-151.

61 Following geographer Karen Till and art critic Jeff Kelley, I define place as the material context of embodied experience, whose semi-permeable relation to other places, times and peoples is perpetually negotiated across the intersecting planes of public and private memory. In the words of Kelley: “while a site represents the constituent physical properties of a place – its mass, space, light, duration, location, and material processes – a place represents the practical, vernacular, psychological, social, cultural, ceremonial, ethnic, economic, political, and historical dimensions of a site. Sites are like frameworks. Places are what fill them out and make them work. ... A place is useful and a site is used. ... Places are held in sites by personal and common values, and by the maintenance of those values over time, as memory.” See Karen Till, “Artistic and Activist Memory-Work: Approaching Place-Based Practice,” *Memory Studies* 1, no. 1 (January 2008): 99-113; Jeff Kelley, “Common Work,” in *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art*, ed., Suzzane Lacy (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995), 142.

62 Linenthal, *The Unfinished Bombing: Oklahoma City in American Memory*, 134.

by multiple strategies of commemoration.⁶³ Out of the dissolution of the traditional memorial model emerges an increased tendency for memorial contestation over discursive and material sites of recognition. Unlike the politics of mourning defined by the Athenian funeral oration (Chapter 1) and the traditional memorial model of the nation-state (Chapter 2), today's culture of commemoration creates its own memorial vernacular (Chapters 3, 4, and 5). Private individuals and public interest groups seek out dates and figures from which to legitimize their claims to memory, ignoring some, inventing others, all while playing with and against received meanings and inherited cultural legacies.

Citing Nora, Ricoeur declares: "If we still dwelled among our memories, there would be no need to consecrate sites employing them."⁶⁴ For Ricoeur, places of memory are at one and the same time *material* (already given realities), *symbolic* (works of the imagination), and *functional* (ritual, founding events or spectacles). Materially, symbolically, and functionally, space gives place to memory, awakening multiple senses of the past to produce alternate understandings of history.

As I argue throughout this study, lived experience inscribes the built environment – which is always more than an abstract place, site, or location – with traces of meaning. To make these inscriptions socially, ethically, and politically legible, public memorial ought to encourage individuals to think and judge the spaces in which they are unavoidably situated with a critical

63 Maier, "A Surfeit of Memory? Reflections on History, Melancholy and Denial," 149. As Edward Cohen argues, "the creation and perpetuation of a sense of national identity [has] been generally accompanied by the creation and perpetuation of origin tales set in historical fabrications that establish or reinforce a group's claim to its land." Identity formation, which may or may not precipitate nation building, often deploys origin myths of a bounded territory. See Cohen, *The Athenian Nation*, 80.

64 Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 405. Similarly, architecture and American historian Howard Mansfield claims: "We have everywhere an absence of memory. Architects sometimes talk of building with context and continuity in mind, religious leaders call it tradition, social workers say it is a sense of community, but it is memory we have banished from our cities. We have speed and power, but no place." See Howard Mansfield, *In the Memory House* (Golden: Fulcrum Publishing, 1993), 164.

awareness of the local and increasingly global implications of public memory and official forgetting. Reflective practices of political judgment cultivate intersubjective spaces of meaning by resisting the objectifying logic of the traditional memorial model and the subjectivist trappings of contemporary memorial architecture.

Philosopher Henri Lefebvre's critique of the reproduction of social relations of production relates space to its ideological and objectifying effects, conceiving it as a tool of thought and action. *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre's foundational text on the spatial disarticulation of experience, argues that "in addition to being a means of production [space] is also a means of control, and hence of domination, of power; yet that, as such, it escapes, in part from those who would make use of it."⁶⁵ A surplus energy remains, a reserve in excess of that which can be appropriated under the neo-liberal guise of free-market capitalism. Like every other mode of production, late-modern capital creates its own representations of space, a fabricated space awaiting to be read. For Lefebvre, as well as Walter Benjamin, "space implies a process of signification."⁶⁶ Yet there is no general code from which to unfold its meaning or our relationship to it. Every society produces a space unique to its mode of production. Upon this space, "the past leaves its traces. ... Space is always, now and formerly, a *present* space, given as an immediate whole, complete with its associations and connections in their actuality."⁶⁷ Oscillating between thought and judgment, political action is as much about practices of freedom as it is attuning oneself to alternate experiences of space.

65 "What is an ideology without a space to which it refers, a space which it describes, whose vocabulary and links it makes use of, and whose code it embodies?" Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans., Donald Nicholson-Smith (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishing, 1991), 26, 44.

66 *Ibid.*, 31.

67 *Ibid.*, 37.

Thinking through the shortcomings and dangers of objectivist and subjectivist practices of memorialization and their effects on our understanding of the past, I inquire into the democratic potential of public memorial to nurture intersubjective spaces of meaning. Chapters 2 and 3 develop Benjamin's figural notion of history and his topographical understanding of memory in which a not-yet-conscious knowledge of the past is exhumed in an interruptive moment of thought and action. Following Benjamin, I argue that memory should be related to the built environment not in terms of a fixed and monolithic past, but as a plastic medium that is both marked by and generative of ephemeral experiences with place and history. To enable worldly transformative encounters with the past, space ought to be conceived as a topography of "memory in which mnemonic symbols and traces reveal themselves to reading."⁶⁸ In the words of architectural historian and theorist Mark Jarzombek, "public space is the primary medium through which memory and its associated historiographical energy seeks its representation, and thus it is in the public space that the retrieval process works."⁶⁹ Thinking, judging, and acting – the primary modes of orienting one's finite self to the infinite world of human plurality – enable processes of retrieval that are productive of meaning without the metaphysical or theological promise of redemption.

The Space of Memory

Several pages into the introduction of *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Michel Foucault situates his methods of historical inquiry, archaeology and genealogy, against those of traditional

68 Sigrid Weigel, *Body and Image Space: Re-Reading Walter Benjamin* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 108.

69 Mark Jarzombek, "Disguised Visibilities: Dresden/'Dresden,'" in *Memory and Architecture*, ed., Eleni Bastéa (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2004), 72.

and modern historiography.⁷⁰ For Foucault, history's traditional function is expository and interpretive: history makes documents speak.⁷¹ Modern historiography shifts the relation between the methods and objectives of history and its evidentiary sources. "History has altered its position in relation to the document," writes Foucault. "It has taken as its primary task, not the interpretation of the document, nor the attempt to decide whether it is telling the truth or what is its expressive value, but to work on it from within and to develop it."⁷² Modern historiography approaches its material with active intention. Ordering, sequencing, categorizing, and classifying, it determines the laws of relation between archival sources for the purpose of fashioning a generalizable and universal view of the past. Thus, the task of the modern historian is to arrange discontinuities and breaks, distinguishing major and minor events, in order to develop totalities, unities, and series.

Rather than trace continuities, define beginnings and ends, or determine relations between facts, Foucault's project attempts to describe and localize the conditions of possibility of historical inquiry. As conceived by Foucault, neither archaeology nor genealogy searches for hidden truths or recessed origins.⁷³ Each seeks positivities,⁷⁴ the enunciative functions and

70 "History, in its traditional form, undertook to 'memorize' the *monuments* of the past, transform them into *documents*, and lend speech to those traces which, in themselves, are often not verbal, or which say in silence something other than what they actually say; in our time, history is that which transforms *documents* into *monuments*. In that area where, in the past, history deciphered the traces left by men, it now deploys a mass of elements that have to be grouped, made relevant, placed in relation to one another to form totalities." Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans., A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972), 7.

71 "In its traditional form, history proper was concerned to define relations (of simple causality, of circular determination, of antagonism, of expression) between facts or dated events: the series being known, it was simply a question of defining the position of each element in relation to the other elements in the series. The problem now is to constitute series." *Ibid.*, 7.

72 "The document, then, is no longer for history an inert material through which it tries to reconstitute what men have done or said, the events of which only the trace remains; history is now trying to define within the documentary material itself unities, totalities, series, relations." *Ibid.*, 6-7.

73 Genealogy records the singularity of events without imposing artificial origins or conclusive finalities on their emergence and their development. The pursuit of origin betrays the desire for an unchanging essence, a protected identity. The task of history, as a form of genealogical inquiry, is not to find this eternal essence, nor "to

performances within discourse that constitute the methods and objectives of particular discursive practices.⁷⁵ “Archaeology,” writes Foucault, “is the method specific to the analysis of local discursivities, and genealogy is the tactic which, once it has described these local discursivities, brings into play the desubjugated knowledges that have been released from them.”⁷⁶

With Foucault, genealogy and archaeology designate minor insurrections of knowledge that upset the ontological presuppositions founding the modern subject as an autonomous, self-legislating, willful, and sovereign agent.⁷⁷ Thus understood, Foucault’s historical methodologies do not so much reject knowledge, as they disrupt the norms and conventions regarding its production. His claim that genealogy is best understood as an anti-science implies a relation of antagonism vis-à-vis “the power-effects characteristic of any discourse that is regarded as scientific.” Neither empirical nor positivistic, genealogical inquiry dispels myths unifying theory and fact. Genealogy, in short, is an “attempt to desubjugate historical knowledges, to set them

demonstrate that the past actively exists in the present, that it continues secretly to animate the present, having imposed a predetermined form on all its vicissitudes,” but to make us aware of the contingent nature of our historical constructions. See Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” *The Foucault Reader*, ed., Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 81.

74 In Foucault’s work, positivities designate historically situated rules that characterize particular discursive practices. Positivities do not signify transcendental conditions of validity for judgments, but local conditions of reality for statements. See Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, 127.

75 Archaeology, writes Foucault, “takes as the object of its description what is usually regarded as an obstacle: its aim is not to overcome differences but to analyze them, to say what exactly they consist of, to *differentiate* them” It attempts “to untie all those knots that historians have patiently tied; it increases differences.” Michel Foucault, *Society Must be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976*, trans., David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), 10-11.

76 Ibid., 10-11.

77 Foucault argues that “continuous history is the indispensable correlative of the founding function of the subject.” Constructing a “locus of uninterrupted continuities,” philosophies of history provide “a privileged shelter for the sovereignty of consciousness.” Genealogy and archaeology trouble the transcendental foundations of modern subjectivity. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 12.

free, or in other words to enable them to oppose and struggle against the coercion of a unitary, formal, and scientific theoretical discourse.”⁷⁸

Guided by the lines of inquiry traced by Foucault, contemporary practices of memorialization are able to resist the scientific impulse of producing a totalizing explanation of history, and the archival impulse of achieving a complete knowledge or mastery of the past. The insights of Foucault’s historical project, whose aim is to “free the history of thought from its subjection to transcendence,” enable memorial architecture to impart an experience with history “in the discontinuity that no teleology would reduce in advance; to map it in a dispersion that no pre-established horizon would embrace; to allow it to be deployed in an anonymity on which no transcendental constitution would impose the form of the subject; to open it up to the temporality that would not promise the return of any dawn.” If memory is to redeem itself from a notion of redemption conceived as end, cleanse itself of “all transcendental narcissism,” and release itself “from that circle of the lost origin,”⁷⁹ it must provoke a plurality of readings on the past. A work of memorial redeems itself of the wish for redemption (where work is understood as both noun and verb), by offering a

critical staging of the relation of a community to its past in terms of shared traumatic memory and the inevitable acting-out of collective and individual trauma, with the possibility that art, in its specific (often highly mediated, indirect, darkly playful, powerful but other than narrowly documentary or informational) forms of bearing witness or testifying to that past, might assist in partially working the past over and through, thereby making more available other possibilities in the present and future.⁸⁰

78 “We can give the name ‘genealogy’ to this coupling together of scholarly erudition and local memories, which allows us to constitute a historical knowledge of struggles and to make use of that knowledge in contemporary tactics.” Foucault, *Society Must be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976*, 8-10.

79 Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 203.

80 On this reading, memorials ought to generate a view on the past that “lives on experientially and haunts or possesses the self of the community,” and, as such, “must be worked through in order for it to be remembered with some degree of conscious control and critical perspective that enables survival and, in the best of circumstances,

To work the past over and through is not to master and control history, but to negotiate one's relationship to it, such that a past reclaimed returns possibility to the present.

To be sure, working through the past entails a work of mourning. On a functional level, a “work of mourning is essential, not as ‘penance’ but as an indisputable prelude to the formation of autonomous and mature identities for both nations and the individuals who comprise them.”⁸¹ Failure to mourn is indicative of a failure to judge and understand, to come to terms with the past, to reconcile oneself with reality (discussed in Chapter 5). To reconcile oneself with the immutable affairs of the world, one must avoid melancholic attachment to loss and the site of victimization, which, from the perspective of remembrance developed throughout this study, means reclaiming lived experience (the stranded objects of a fragmented cultural inheritance) without reducing it to a fixed identity.⁸² The labor of remembrance involved in mourning ought to refrain from identifying with the past, whether identification is with the victims or with the victors of history.⁸³ As Hannah Arendt rightly argues, “to look at the events only from the side of the victim results in apologetics – which of course is no history at all.”⁸⁴

How, then, should communities mourn pasts they would rather forget? Put differently, what are the enabling conditions for history to be communicated across an ever-receding

ethical and political agency in the present.” LaCapra, *History in Transit: Experience, Identity, Critical Theory*, 43, 56.

81 Richard Wolin, “Introduction” to Habermas’s *The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historians’ Debate*, xi.

82 Successful mourning realizes that “‘I’ and ‘you’ have edges, that ‘you’ have a life and a will that are irreducibly separate from my own,” such that one releases him or herself from an object of desire. See Santner, *Stranded Objects: Mourning, Memory, and Film in Post-war Germany*, 2, 19.

83 “Identification with the innocent victim is very frequently substituted for mourning; this is above all a logical defense against guilt.” Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich, *The Inability to Mourn: Principles of Collective Behavior*, (New York: Grove Press, 1975), 45.

84 Hannah Arendt, “A Reply to Eric Voegelin,” in *The Portable Hannah Arendt* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 158.

intergenerational horizon? To be sure, history helps a community recognize itself in time, yet it can also be a source of protracted conflict, resentment, and disagreement. For example, following periods of repressive rule and collective violence, communities find themselves struggling to articulate a political identity that properly acknowledges the past without having it incapacitate the present. In these transitional moments, the state responds to the demand for an accurate retelling of its recent historical experience.⁸⁵ The narratives constructed and the records exhumed help legitimize the authority of a new or re-founded political order. Within these (ideally) self-critical moments of historical production and political accountability, communities work alongside the state to develop a publicly recognizable truth, an official historical account.

Making truth official, however, is not an objective process of discovering knowledge (documenting, archiving, recording testimony), but a creation of meaning whose very production ought to resist the narrative closure that often accompanies political consensus. Habermas, by no means a critic of consensual politics, argues convincingly that

anyone whose aim is to revive an identity anchored in quasi-natural fashion in a national consciousness, anyone who is guided by the functional imperatives of predictability, of securing consensus, of social integration through the creation of meaning, must of necessity shy away from historiography's power to enlighten and reject a pluralism of interpretations of history that would influence a broad public."⁸⁶

With Habermas, I argue that the formation of a collective identity based on a shared national history is no longer a viable political project in our post-secular world.⁸⁷ To sharpen our self-

85 As Teitel explains, "The role of historical inquiry is not foundational but transitional." "Transitional truth-tellings ... always stand in contingent relation to the state's existing historical legacies." Teitel, *Transitional Justice*, 115.

86 Habermas, "Apologetic Tendencies," *The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historians' Debate*, 225.

87 The term post-secular designates what Hent de Vries describes as a different governmental or public perception of religion, as opposed to an alternate function or social role. Citing Hans Joas's *Braucht der Mensch Religion? Über Erfahrungen der Selbsttranszendenz*, de Vries posits post-secular as "a changed attitude by the secular state or

understandings of the past and clarify our relation to the cacophony of fragmented traditions, our memorial aids must nurture a plurality of readings committed to the cultivation of self-critical thinking. Historical account cannot fall back on preexisting historical categories and judgments, but must organize itself reflectively around the nature and causes of violence. “Societal self-knowledge is not an end in itself but, rather, the predicate for the potential of prospective change in human behavior.”⁸⁸

Reflecting on the work of mourning and memory in Post-war Germany, German and Judaic studies scholar Eric Santner prescribes a critical reception of history that navigates between the dangers of disavowal, identification, and sanitizing revisionism. Informed by Benjamin’s materialist historiography, Santner envisions a critical reception of history that alters one’s relationship to the past. To rescue and redeem the past is to reclaim “one that never in fact took place but that nevertheless might become available to future generations.”⁸⁹ In the words of Benjamin, to construct a present from the lost fragments of tradition is to mine the past for lived experience, to search “for the tiny spark of contingency, of the here and now, with which reality has (so to speak) seared the subject, to find the inconspicuous spot where in the immediacy of that long-forgotten moment the future nests so eloquently that we, looking back, may rediscover it.”⁹⁰ As Chapters 2 and 3 argue, to look upon experience as “an index of historical opportunity that was left unrealized but that still remains available as a sort of energy potential that continues to dwell in history,” is to begin remembering and mourning “lost opportunities without

in the public domain with respect to the continued existence of religious communities and the impulses that emerge from them.” See Hent de Vries and Lawrence Sullivan, *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-Secular World* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 3.

88 Teitel, *Transitional Justice*, 115.

89 Santner, *Stranded Objects: Mourning, Memory, and Film in Post-war Germany*, 151-153.

90 Walter Benjamin, “Little History of Photography,” in *Selected Writings: Volume 2: 1927-1934*, ed. Howard Eiland, Michael W. Jennings, Gary Smith (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), 510.

disavowing their ancestry.”⁹¹ To recognize the contingent nature of human action is not just to say that things could have happened differently, but to tap the past as a reserve of political energy.

Echoing Benjamin and Adorno, Habermas defends such a critical appropriation of history, one that is able to develop self-understandings of “traditions that stand up to the scrutiny of a gaze educated by the moral catastrophe, a gaze that is, in a word, suspicious.”⁹² For public memorial to develop a suspicious gaze, it must maintain within our shared narratives a degree of the hypothetical, that tiny spark of contingency illuminating alternate pasts and indeterminate futures. Under such a gaze, progress opens itself to the contingent, breaking with the conjoined development of humanity and history, the becoming of a collective singular mankind. History is not one story, and no one voice speaks its truth. Because “no telling can fully escape the preoccupations of the moment or the political concerns of the authors,” history must be made meaningful by concerted acts of reflective judgment. “The past has no sense or value by itself. We, the social subjects, give meaning and value to our reconstructions.”⁹³ However, drawing meaning and value from history does not mean mastering the past, which is not only a false hope, but a dangerous fantasy. Reaching for a totalizing account carries the danger “of telling the story too well, in rationalizing too far – in rendering the past catastrophe somehow necessary

91 Santner, *Stranded Objects: Mourning, Memory, and Film in Post-war Germany*, 151-153.

92 “There is the obligation incumbent upon us in Germany . . . to keep alive, without distortion and not only in an intellectual form, the memory of the sufferings of those who were murdered by German hands. It is especially these dead who have a claim to the weak anamnestic power of solidarity that later generations can continue to practice only in the medium of a remembrance that is repeatedly renewed, often desperate, and continually on one’s mind. If we were to brush aside this Benjaminian legacy, our fellow Jewish citizens and the sons, daughters, and grandchildren of all those who were murdered would feel themselves unable to breathe in our country.” Habermas, “On the Public Use of History,” *The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historians’ Debate*, 233-234.

93 Lara, *Narrating Evil: A Postmetaphysical Theory of Reflective Judgment*, 170.

as a consequential matter for its ultimately liberalizing effects for future prospects.”⁹⁴ Symbolic closure, whether by way of a monument or a narrative (or a monumental narrative), cannot relieve the present of the responsibility history throws upon it. At bottom, there is an “incompleteness and inescapable inadequacy of each possible response” to the achievements and failures of humanity.⁹⁵

This incompleteness and inadequacy should not be disparaged, but embraced. As Arendt claims (in an idiom not far removed from that of Benjamin), “what the illuminating event reveals is a beginning in the past which has hitherto been hidden; to the eye of the historian, the illuminating event cannot but appear as an end of this newly discovered beginning.” “Newness,” she continues, “is the realm of the historian who ... deals with events which always occur only once. This newness can be manipulated if the historian insists on causality and pretends to be able to explain events by a chain of causes which eventually lead up to them.” All events are capable of being integrated into a causal explanation. Yet just because a sequential order can be drawn, does not mean that events unfolded as such. Causality “is an altogether alien and falsifying category in the historical sciences. Not only does the actual meaning of every event always transcend any number of past ‘causes’ which can be assigned to it, ... but this past itself comes into being only with the event itself. The event illuminates its own past; it can never be deduced from it.”⁹⁶ One way of reading this study of memory, space, and politics is as an attempt to develop Arendt’s notion of illumination (as adapted from that of Benjamin) through the medium of memorial architecture, which I argue has the potential to stimulate the production

94 One example of this retrospective reading of the past would be to endow the Shoah with the telos of the founding of the State of Israel. Teitel, *Transitional Justice*, 116-117.

95 Martha Minow, *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), 5.

96 Hannah Arendt, “Understanding and Politics,” in *Essays in Understanding, 1930-1954*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1994), 318-319.

of multiple and intersecting points of meaning over the past. Put in the form of a question: how do certain practices of memorialization open spaces for political judgment, while others close them down?

Storytelling as a Practice of Political Judgment

Drawing on Hannah Arendt, political theorist María Pía Lara claims that “the effort to provide a public place in which to build a collective site of memory crystallizes only when the historian engages with witnesses in the most political of all activities – judgment.”⁹⁷ By judgment, Lara means reflective judgment, that is, judging without a concept or a rule. It is a practice that requires strong notions of plurality and imagination,⁹⁸ which together enable “us to see things in their proper perspective, to be strong enough to put that which is too close at a certain distance so that we can see and understand it without bias and prejudice.”⁹⁹

As argued in Chapter 5, reflective judgment is a meaning-creating practice that involves taking up other points of view and bringing these views to bear on how we think and act.

Attending to the unique qualities of the particular, the *who* of meaning as opposed to the *what* of knowledge,¹⁰⁰ reflective judgment achieves understanding when it is freed of ethical imperatives

97 Lara, *Narrating Evil: A Postmetaphysical Theory of Reflective Judgment*, 97.

98 Arendt looks to the faculty of the imagination as a way of gaining critical perspective from one's own opinions and beliefs. “The more people's standpoints I have present in my mind while I am pondering a given issue, and the better I can imagine how I would feel and think if I were in their place, the stronger will be my capacity for representative thinking, and the more valid my conclusions, my opinion.” Arendt wants to remove the subjective private conditions of thought from judgment, so as to gain critical distance from one's self-interest. Hannah Arendt, “Truth and Politics,” in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin, 1993), 241.

99 Arendt, “Understanding and Politics,” 323.

100 Early in Chapter 5 of *The Human Condition*, Arendt defines the *who* (against the *what*) as a form of meaning irreducible to objective knowledge. I develop this distinction in the first section of Chapter 4, “Distinguishing the *What* of Knowledge from the *Who* of Meaning,” to address what I characterize as a subjectivist turn in contemporary memorial architecture.

that might otherwise inhibit a critical exchange of perspective.¹⁰¹ Moralizing politics not only risks depoliticization but also the entrenchment of determinative judgments. Reflective judgment, insofar as it requires an ability and willingness to see from standpoints not one's own, helps liberate one's thinking from instrumental pursuits and private interests. It is a form of judgment that refuses to reduce the meaning of political claims to the demands of objective and moral categories.

The notion of reflective judgment used throughout this study is that of an imaginative and critical practice that creates alternative relationships between objects of knowledge and experience. Opening the possibility of relating to knowledge and experience in ways that are sensible and figural rather than representational and temporal, it provokes our understanding in its search for meaning. Put differently, reflective judgment describes a mode of counting and acknowledging (as opposed to cognizing and knowing). Returning to Lara's claim, judgment becomes the most political of all activities when spectators become actors, inaugurating new forms of thought and life in a critical exchange of perspective on human experience.¹⁰²

As we shall see, for both Benjamin and Arendt, thinking, judging, and acting converge in a mode of historical transmission that insists on history's original role as remembrance: storytelling.¹⁰³ Storytelling dispenses with the historicist need for explanatory knowledge by

101 The threat of moralizing political judgment is no less true of memory. In the words of media and cultural studies scholar Susannah Radstone, "memory research is often informed by a broader ethical turn that understands itself to be transforming politics." However, "the conjoining of the ethical turn that is currently informing humanities research more generally with the establishment of memory studies as a transdisciplinary subject risks screening as much as it reveals of the politics of memory." See Susannah Radstone, "Memory Studies: For and Against," *Memory Studies* 1, no. 1 (January 2008): 31-39.

102 "The difference between the historiography of the historians and that of the actors/agents falls away when reading and action, interpretation and agency coincide." Weigel, *Body and Image Space: Re-Reading Walter Benjamin*, 43.

103 As discussed in Chapter 1, Arendt praises Homer for his historical sensibility – Homeric objectivity – which is illustrated by his explicit attempt to tell the story of the Trojan War from the perspective other than the victors.

stimulating reflective judgment. Through judgment, a storyteller relays what is necessary and meaningful for a particular time; through judgment, his or her audience retraces lived experience and participates in an event of tradition. Recovering the inaugurative power of lived experience through narration, storytelling mediates action through judgment, thereby preserving within history a degree of the hypothetical and contingent. Neither empirical nor epistemological, the truth of a story names the affective truth of experience. “Truthfulness has never been counted among the political virtues,” writes Arendt, “because it has little indeed to contribute to that change of the world.”¹⁰⁴ Yet, “where everybody lies about everything of importance, the truth-teller, whether he knows it or not, has begun to act; he, too, has engaged himself in political business, for, in the unlikely event that he survives, he has made a start toward changing the world.”¹⁰⁵ Storytelling, and the judgment it inspires, transforms spectators into actors.

That said, how does one go about establishing the truth of events through a medium as transitory, selective, and fallible as memory? For historian and Judaic studies scholar James Young, the proper mode of communicating experience is through an uncanny history, “an anti-redemptory narrative that works through, yet never actually bridges, the gap between a survivor’s ‘deep memory’ [which is unrepresentable] and historical [fact-based] narrative.” Memory alone, Young insists, is an unreliable medium when conveying veritable pasts. In place of testimonial account, Young suggests a *received history*, that is, “a double-stranded narrative

104 At first sight, truth appears to be of little or no use to democratic politics. Factual truths, in particular, “contain no principles upon which men might act.” “The mere telling of facts, leads to no action whatever; it even tends, under normal circumstances, toward the acceptance of things as they are.” The immutability of factual truth can lead to political inaction, a detached resignation and acceptance of the status quo. From the perspective of politics, the facts, unchangeable as they are, appear politically dead. See Arendt, “Truth and Politics,” 249, 251.

105 Ibid., 251.

that tells a survivor-historian's story and my own relationship to it."¹⁰⁶ Young's notion of received history enables historical inquiry to be both a study of what happened and how it is passed down, that is, an account of the telling. Rephrased in an idiom more fitting of Benjamin, historical account becomes uncanny by relaying experience and the mode of its transmission: language, that is, the how of its representation and reception. "In this way," writes Young, "historical inquiry might remain a search for certainties about substantive realities, even as it is broadened to encompass the realities of history's eventual transmission."¹⁰⁷ Young's received history, in other words, accounts for both verifiable fact and for its verifiable representation, while also recognizing that no historical fact is ever communicated without mediation.

A received history challenges the historically situated position of the historian as a neutral and detached documentor and communicator of objective knowledge. It questions the historian's authorial stance and its means of representing the past, thereby forcing it to account for the historical context of history's production. Comprised of both historical representation (narrative account), and its historical reception (how that account is received and understood at a particular place and time), received history infuses acts of retrospection with introspection. "Such work aims to reinvest the narrated past with the animacy of its telling, the consequences of its reception for teller and listener. In this way, we might make the listeners' and readers' responses to history a part of that history's record," interweaving "a history of events with a reflection on how this history comes to be told." As Young makes clear, a received history "is not a contest between kinds of knowledge, between what we know and how we know it."¹⁰⁸

106 James Young, "Toward a Received History of the Holocaust," *History and Theory* 36, no. 4 (December 1997): 21-43, (23).

107 Ibid., 41.

108 Ibid., 42-43.

Rather, it confronts historians with their sources, pressing them to reflect on how their production and organization affect their subsequent transmission and reception.

As we shall see in Chapters 3 and 4, Young's received history recalls Benjamin's materialist historiography and his notion of storytelling. Both recognize the interpretive aspects of narrative representation, that which imparts intelligibility and coherence on the past. Historians, Young argues, need to be more tolerant of their own voices. However, Young is motivated by the pursuit of increasing transparency within our histories, in revealing a hidden dimension of a work's production, whereas Benjamin is concerned with the production of history as a form of memorial action, that is, as politics.

If, following Benjamin, history pushes on the boundary of what is possible, memory extends its horizon. In a brief reflection on Proust, Paul de Man captures what for Benjamin is the worldly transformative power of memory: "the power of memory does not reside in its capacity to resurrect a situation or a feeling that actually existed, but it is a constitutive act of the mind bound to its own present and oriented to the future of its elaboration."¹⁰⁹ Caught between past and future, memory and forgetting, the present both effaces and preserves the past as it brings the future into being. Because the past is always multiple, split, and fractured, the present is forced to decide on what to take from, and what to leave in, the past. To work within "the dissonant conjunction between new swerves of time and the ethical uncertainty they engender," is to actively affirm "that paradoxical politics by which new and unforeseen things surge into

109 For de Man, remembrance is "a deliberate act establishing a relation between two distinct points in time between which no relationship of continuity exists. Remembrance is not a temporal act but an act that enables a consciousness 'to find access to the intemporal' and to transcend time altogether." However, the transcendence of time in memory does not signal a retreat from the affairs of men, rather, remembrance becomes "a positive force if it is capable of re-entering, in turn, into the temporal process." Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 92-93.

being.”¹¹⁰ As political theorist William Connolly explains, a “politics of becoming,” informed by the political virtues of agonistic respect and civic responsiveness, taps into those experiences “in which time is out of joint, in which past and present resonate back and forth in the contingency of an unexpected encounter.”¹¹¹

While memorial architecture would do well provoking such unexpected encounters, it is up to a critical public to wield the mnemonic power of the past. Politics does not begin in the wake of knowledge, but in the syncopated rhythm of lived experience. This means, following Jarzombek, rejecting “at all costs Maurice Halbwachs’s old-fashioned notion of a ‘collective memory’ as some sort of generic, ontological marker bestowing meaning and significance to a culture.” To recover memory is to acknowledge “the traumatized, and traumatizing, temporal dislocations of the urban narrative. It is a narrative in which even nonaccidental omissions are regulated by history-producing visions that can be brought to light and challenged only by scholarship that looks behind the dynamics of the representational strategies out of which the urban consciousness is constructed.”¹¹² Between memory and politics lies space, and it is within this space that politics uncouples itself from timeless, eternal, and fixed images of the past and the contrived historical memories they support.

Memory is the sedimentation of lived experience that settles upon our built environment. It only becomes politically meaningful when we alter our relationship to the past, when we begin

110 “Perception, judgment, and action can be intense because affect clings to the memories that help constitute them and the anticipations that flow from them. Politics does not begin after those issues are settled. It sinks into memory, perception, judgment, and action. It dips into the affectively imbued experience of duration.” See William Connolly, *Pluralism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 102.

111 Ibid., 120-129.

112 Jarzombek, “Disguised Visibilities: Dresden/‘Dresden,’” 71-72.

to unsettle hardened truths through a critical practice of judgment, a thinking through memory redeemed from the metaphysical and theological ends of redemption.

Breaking with redemptive models of memory that enact closure and confer finality on how we relate to the past means releasing ourselves of the imperative to *never forget*: remembering unavoidably involves forgetting. As argued throughout this study, forgetting names the reality of a political struggle fought within the overlapping fields of memory, space, and time. Acknowledging the material effects of forgetting on our political practices, memorial institutions ought to balance the objective demands of knowledge and the subjective claims of experience by cultivating an intersubjective ethos of critical reflection and informed disagreement.

Ultimately, the political significance of memory does not lay in the archive, or any other repository of factual information founded on the false hope of total recall, but in the reflective judgment of experience. At best, the archive serves as a point of access to the past, providing a “supplement to or prosthetic device for experience and memory.” However one figures its relationship to experience, it is clear that the archive is a construction whose composition is based on processes of inclusion and exclusion. Like all forms of historical account, “the material it contains is preselected and configured in certain ways, for example, in terms of state interests or the interests of other institutions (such as religious institutions) that create and manage archives, often suppressing or getting rid of embarrassing material,” and whatever else does not fit the agenda governing its collection.¹¹³

Feigning interest in totality, the archival impulse is driven by a desire for mastery over the past. Reflecting on the televisual traumatism induced by the images of lower Manhattan

113 LaCapra, *History in Transit: Experience, Identity, Critical Theory*, 23-25.

following the events of September 11, Jacques Derrida problematizes our understanding of the archive and its underlying motives:

“By establishing a complete and continuously accessible archive, reproducible at every moment, in a loop, we give ourselves the comforting feeling that ‘it’s over.’ It’s over because it’s archived, and anyone can visit the archive! The archive, the archive effect, reassures (the matter is closed! it’s all on record! it’s all been recorded!), and we then do everything to monumentalize the recordings, thereby reassuring ourselves that the dead are dead; it won’t happen again because it already took place. ... The missing of the archive, the ghost, the phantom – that’s the future –”¹¹⁴

As Derrida suggests, archives related to traumatic events exclude the possibility that the worst is yet to come. Excluding that which cannot be interred within its collection (that which resists the work of mourning, namely, the missing and the future), the archive takes charge of the past so to assure the present of its own survival. But in so doing, the present forgoes the critical work of reflection, of affirming life in the face of one’s own mortality. Insofar as the primary function of the archive is to collect materials related to a particular body of knowledge, the distilled documents that make up the archive manifest a kind of experiential withdrawal. In other words, the archival attempt to limit the past from affecting the present falls short in its effort to contain and control the reserves of lived experience that inhabit history.

One alternative to what Derrida describes as the archive effect can be found in a collection of images taken from the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and the crash site of United Airlines Flight 93. “Here is New York: Remembering 9/11” is an exhibition of 1,500 inkjet-printed photographs, captured by 790 amateur and professional photographers, arranged at random, and hung anonymously and unframed. The press release for the exhibit (as it was shown at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in the fall of 2002) begins with a 1949 epigraph by author

¹¹⁴ Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida*, 188-189, n. 9.

and essayist E.B. White: “The intimation of mortality is part of New York now: in the sound of jets overhead, in the black headlines of the latest edition.” Placing the fact of mortality at its moral and spiritual core, the exhibition offers a truly human response (“as broad and democratic as possible, open to anyone and everybody”) to violence. As the exhibition’s curator Philip Brookman makes clear, “the significance of the exhibition lies in its content, in its breadth and multiplicity, not in the source or relative value of any one image or group of images.”¹¹⁵

Critic Edward Rothstein’s review of the New York Historical Society’s 2007 exhibition of “Here is New York: Remembering 9/11” asks that we consider the ethical and political stakes of public commemoration as a form of remembrance distinct from personal memory. Memory, he argues, is limited insofar as it is tied to an affective experience, a passing sensation that comes and goes. Commemoration, on the other hand, transcends memory’s condensed life span by providing a community with a narrative and an interpretation of what is being commemorated. Ascribing a social significance to an event, commemoration ensures that its meaning will survive its wake. “Commemoration is not a matter of healing or feeling;” writes Rothstein, “it is a matter of meaning.” To the extent that historical artifacts represent authentic traces of the past, the testimony of these material witnesses “have to be identified and interpreted to take on significance.”¹¹⁶ In other words, the photos on display offer a way of altering our relationship to the past provided we actively engage the world in which such realities are produced. Mirroring the impact of immediate experience, they provide an “accumulation of sensation, quantity as

115 “The guiding principle of *here is new york* is simple: if one photograph tells a story, thousands of photographs not only tell thousands of stories but perhaps begin to tell the story, if they are allowed to speak for themselves, to each other, and to the audience.” Philip Brookman, “here is new york: a democracy of photographs,” Corcoran Gallery of Art, http://www.corcoran.org/exhibitions/previous_results.asp?Exhib_ID=52

116 Edward Rothstein, “Remembering Lower Manhattan’s Day of Horror, Without Pomp or Circumstance,” *The New York Times*, September 11, 2007.

much as intensity,” forcing the viewer to confront not only what it cannot look away from, but to reflect on that which it may not understand. This visceral engagement with the past triggers forgotten memories and those yet to be acknowledged. As crystallizations of lived experience, the images direct our attention away from knowledge as fact, making us aware of the “hidden pressure points and buried sensations” that lie just beneath the surface of our daily lives.

By emphasizing the importance of meaning, as something to be created by a thinking, judging, and acting public, the exhibit rightly identifies remembrance as a source of vitality for democratic life. Rather than subsume the world transforming promise of politics to prescribed ethical imperatives, the exhibit reclaims the past as a resource from which to confront the challenges of the present. “Therapy is beside the point” – a sentiment echoed throughout the following study. Forgoing the aesthetic of absence guiding the designs for the new World Trade Center (discussed in Chapter 4), a plurality of images – from the wreckage and debris of buildings and planes, to rescue workers, funeral services, and makeshift memorials – reanimate our orientation to pasts that cannot be changed and to futures in the making. As a model for other forms of memorial and public commemoration, “Here is New York: Remembering 9/11” maintains tension between the interpenetrating temporalities of past and future, not only as we remember, but as we live our lives in each of its irretrievable moments.

Raising the question of memory – which includes the issues of forgetting, forgiveness, and reconciliation – as a fundamental question for political theory, the chapters below force our understanding of democratic practices outside of the traditional boundaries of political science, and into an interdisciplinary space, and thus speak to a larger public, both within and beyond academia. The readings developed within each chapter have significant implications for the way

we think about architecture, how we act politically, how we come to understandings about historical events, and how we draw meaning from lived experience. They oppose the idealism of what is politically possible in an age of inflated expectations, but do not withdraw to a position of disinterested individualism. Instead, the essays engage the pragmatic and theoretical challenges brought about by the withering away of national borders, and with them, the narratives that constitute political community. The diffusion of local narratives demands from us a critical awareness of the past, which, while fractured and multiple, is the wellspring of thoughtful and meaningful action in the present.

Chapter 1: “And so died these men as became Athenians...”
Public Commemoration as Citizen Formation

So died these men as became Athenians. You, their survivors, must determine to have as unaltering a resolution in the field. ... [Y]ou must yourselves realize the power of Athens, and feed your eyes upon her from day to day, till love of her fills your hearts; and then when all her greatness shall break upon you, you must reflect that it was by courage, sense of duty, and a keen feeling of honor in action that men were enabled to win all this. ... These take as your model, and judging happiness to be the fruit of freedom and freedom of valor, never decline the dangers of war.¹¹⁷

-- Pericles, Thucydides's *History of the Peloponnesian War*

Upholding the Sundry Civil Appropriation Act of 1893, which provided for the construction of monuments commemorating the American Civil War battle of Gettysburg of 1863, Associate Justice Peckham of the United States Supreme Court wrote, “Any act of congress which plainly and directly tends to enhance the respect and love of the citizen for the institutions of his country, and to quicken and strengthen his motives to defend them ... must be valid.”¹¹⁸ Preserving the lines of battle at Gettysburg, and marking with tablets the positions of various commands of the opposing armies of the Potomac and of the Northern Virginia, “without praise and without censure,” was thus viewed by the Court as an act intended to strengthen the affective bond and moral resolve of citizens to their state. To erect monuments for the public benefit, “for the present and for the future,” was to manifest “the value put upon the services and exertions of the citizen soldiers of that period.” Exalting “sacrifices then freely made was an act

117 Thucydides, “History of the Peloponnesian War,” in *The Landmark Thucydides: A Comprehensive Guide to the Peloponnesian War*, ed., Robert B. Strassler (New York: Touchstone, 1996), [2.43.1-4]. All further references to Thucydides’s text follow the traditional paragraph and number and are cited from Strassler’s edition, using Richard Crawley’s 1874 translation.

118 *U.S. v. Gettysburg Electric R. Co.*, 160 U.S. 668 (1896).

of recognition that at once “touches the heart, and comes home to the imagination of every citizen.” According to Justice Peckham,

The greater the love of the citizen for the institutions of his country, the greater is the dependence properly placed upon him for their defense in time of necessity, and it is to such men that the country must look for its safety. The institutions of our country, which were saved at this enormous expenditure of life and property, ought to and will be regarded with the proper affection. Here upon this battlefield is one of the proofs of that expenditure, and the sacrifices are rendered more obvious and more easily appreciated when such a battlefield is preserved by the government at the public expense.

If, as Justice Peckham suggests, devotion is followed by duty, memorialization should deepen feelings of reciprocity owed by citizens to the state. When regarded with proportionate affection, the institutions of one’s country and the expenditure given for their preservation ought to inspire worthy action. To paraphrase Pericles, love procures the kind of loyalty befitting of self-sacrifice. Whether or not this sacrifice is freely made or is coerced bears on the relation between citizen and state and the expectations and responsibilities contained therein.

In this chapter, I explore the nature of reciprocity and duty, and the unity and solidarity that both engender, through a reading of the Athenian funeral oration as represented in Thucydides’s *History of the Peloponnesian War* and Plato’s *Menexenus*. Thucydides’s text gives an historical account of a funeral oration delivered in the first year of the Peloponnesian War.¹¹⁹ Idealizing Athenian democratic life through a model of civic relations, this speech binds its audience to the material wellbeing of the city for the sake of legitimizing the established order

¹¹⁹ As we shall see, Plato condemns Pericles (through Socrates’s oration) for his disingenuous rhetoric and faulty leadership. “The dialogue’s historical setting in the first year of the Peloponnesian War amplifies Socrates’ indictment of the genre by showing the dire historical consequences of a foreign policy underwritten by self-congratulatory rhetoric.” Ekaterina Haskins, “Philosophy, Rhetoric, and Cultural Memory: Rereading Plato’s *Menexenus* and Isocrates’ *Panegyricus*,” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 35, No. 1 (Winter 2005): 25-45.

both within and outside of the imperial *polis*.¹²⁰ The second text, which depicts a virtual oration, parodies this end and presents an alternate conception of civic morality founded on familial relations. As a critical commentary on politics and mourning, Plato's dialogue portrays the funeral oration as a stale and inanimate practice incapable of orienting thought toward truth, knowledge, and meaning. Yet in both instances, the funeral oration manifests a passive acceptance, rather than an active affirmation of death. On my reading, the practice forsakes the political potential of memory to provoke self-reflective practices of judgment and understanding.

As classicist Nicole Loraux makes clear in her foundational study of the Athenian funeral oration, *The Invention of Athens*, "it is significant that the Athenians chose the setting of the public funeral to reaffirm the omnipotence of the *polis*: to replace man with the citizen, even in death, is certainly the ultimate achievement of the civic imaginary."¹²¹ A similar reading of the practice is offered by Jacques Derrida, who describes the discursive institution of the *polis* as an

imaginary process of identification: If an orator is all the more eloquent in praising his listeners, as Socrates suggests in *Menexenus* [235d], in listening to him the 'exemplary' image or the 'ideal self' of the people applauding can be determined. This image can either pre-exist the orator or form itself, reform itself, in the mirror thus held out. In both cases, it is a matter of a people in so far as it can *identify itself*, in so far as it is what it is or would wish to be.¹²²

120 The Greek *polis* is used throughout the chapter to describe Athens as a political community. However, as ancient scholar Edward Cohen's *The Athenian Nation* does well to show, Athens is not the paradigmatic ancient Greek *polis*. Athens differs in size (larger), social temperament (impersonal), and productive capacity (lacking self-sufficiency, requiring significant amounts of grain imports) from other *poleis*. For these reasons, it should also be thought of as an *ethnos* [nation]. The Athenian nation, as with the modern nation-state, is marked by what Cohen describes as a mutually conceptualized identity experienced on a "scale of organization and existence that precludes personal contact among the majority of the members" of a culturally homogenous social group, which results in "the creation of an 'imagined community.'" To understand Athens as a nation is to recognize the ordering function of myths productive and preserving of a "group's claims to cohesiveness, uniqueness, and self-determination," which, I argue, helps consolidate a collective identity that can be deployed for various political use. Edward Cohen, *The Athenian Nation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 4.

121 The invention of a civic imaginary is the "process by which, in the oration, an ideal *polis*, both opaque and dominant, is constituted." Nicole Loraux, *The Invention of Athens*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 336.

122 Jacques Derrida, *Politics of Friendship* (London: Verso, 1997), 102-103.

With Loraux and Derrida, I read the Athenian identity constituted by the funeral oration in terms of a social imaginary. Following theorist Cornelius Castoriadis, the social imaginary represents the shared significations that influence and structure a society's creative ability, imparting intelligibility to social relations. Dynamic, flexible, and internally differentiated, imaginaries signify a web of relations that bring together the actions, practices, and understandings of a given community.

The term social imaginary is not meant pejoratively; rather than represent a means of distortion and displacement, it provides channels upon which individuals orient themselves publicly. As such, it is a productive feature of social formation.¹²³ Individuals within a given community relate themselves – whether consciously or not – to such an imaginary, which is comprised of symbols, myths, legends, norms, conventions, and other shared social significations. In the words of philosopher Charles Taylor, “the social imaginary is that common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy.”¹²⁴ The funeral oration, as I read it, imparts Athenian citizens with such a common understanding. In particular, the orations of Pericles and Socrates depoliticize civic association, whereby the symbolic constitution of an identity displaces social division with an idealized whole through the projection of an imaginary founded on collective immortality.

As I argue below, Pericles captures the militaristic and collectivist ethos of Athenian citizenship, offering Athens an idealized self-understanding by accounting for the means of civic, cultural, and economic enrichment. That is to say, he asserts “the city's absolute claim on an

123 “One need not think of the social imaginary as a demiurge that sets itself to work behind the backs of the people. It can be reflexively interrogated and hermeneutically reappropriated.” Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, “Toward New Imaginaries: An Introduction,” *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 1-19, 8.

124 Charles Taylor, “Modern Social Imaginaries,” *Public Culture* 14, no. 1, (Winter 2002): 91-124, 106.

individual's services and the ability of state service to compensate for personal failings."¹²⁵

Imploring his audience to dedicate their lives to the city, he commends a civic virtue that rejects private interest out of common devotion to the public good.

Like Thucydides, Plato provides Athens with a self-understanding by staging a funeral oration through the voice of Socrates. Both historian and philosopher appropriate the genre's conventions in order to construct competing models of civic identity. Plato's imitation of the funeral oration found in Thucydides's *History* questions the moral effects of Athenian democracy under the rule of Pericles. As such, the *Menexenus* "serves as both a condemnation of Athenian democracy in its current state and an indictment of the very language that perpetuates the vanity and insolence of Athenian citizens and the Athenian foreign policy."¹²⁶

As a means of organizing memory and regulating the dissimulating effects of mourning, both funeral orations aim at the consolidation of community. However, neither form of public memorial cultivates an ethic of democratic responsibility and political judgment. That is to say, neither Pericles nor Socrates enables a critical relation to community, a relation constitutive of the kind of plurality that defines democratic politics. This chapter examines the shortcomings of their respective models of civic identity so to better understand the politically disabling effects of memorialization. When read through the lens of the Athenian funeral oration, the imperial *polis* personifies the civic ideal of earthly immortality. By harnessing memory and mourning as the binding agents of community, Athens is able to praise the universal identity it figures through the

125 Loren Samons, "Conclusion: Pericles and Athens," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Pericles*, ed., Loren Samons (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 292.

126 Haskins, "Philosophy, Rhetoric, and Cultural Memory: Rereading Plato's *Menexenus* and Isocrates' *Panegyricus*," 26.

oration, while leaving its hegemonic position unchallenged.¹²⁷ Thus, the model of civic relations advanced by the funeral oration not only turns the hearts and minds of survivors away from the fact of human mortality, focusing them instead on the undying splendor of Athens,¹²⁸ it forecloses a critical relation to the past that might otherwise be productive of political community.

1. Pericles's Funeral Oration

The Athenian funeral oration is a speech covering the glorious deeds of the past, the timeless nobility of Athens, and the heroism of combatants fighting in its name. It is not self-originating, but rather a custom authorized by the present and demanded by tradition.¹²⁹ The genre is bound to a set structure: each oration is composed of a eulogy, an exhortation, and a consolation for the grieving. This formalism (notwithstanding Pericles's critical departures) prohibits the commemoration from developing a critical exchange over the political institutions of Athenian democracy and precludes the reflective practices that often characterize it.

127 "Since Plato's *Menexenus*, or since the funeral oration of Pericles that Plato parodies in this dialogue, politics is related to, or founded on, mourning. In the Athenian context ... it is related to a rhetoric of mourning that tries to complete or even foreclose mourning by lifting death up, sublating it in the fulfillment and glory of the 'beautiful death.'" Michael Naas and Pascale-Anne Brault, "To Reckon with the Dead: Jacques Derrida's Politics of Mourning," editors' introduction to Jacques Derrida's, *The Work of Mourning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 19.

128 Listeners of the oration are encouraged to frequently gaze at the city's beauty, realizing its power and the means through which it was achieved. Monuments were in plain view just outside of the city, where citizens assembled for the rites of burial. Some of these included "the most extraordinary accomplishments of the Athenian's under Pericles' leadership and were among the most dramatic physical expressions of the military and financial (imperial) power of the city present in Athens." The presence of these material reminders at the funeral oration more than likely helped justify their cost in human life. Sara Monoson, *Plato's Democratic Entanglements* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 73-74.

129 "The practical setting for the delivery of the oration was a ritual, public burial of war dead. The occasion placed well-defined expectations on the speaker." Sara Monoson, "Citizen as *Erastes*," *Political Theory* 22, no. 2, (May 1994): 253-276, 272. Though the frequency of the oration is unclear, it is likely that the dead received annual commemoration. For Thucydides, public burial occurred "whenever the occasion arose" (2.34.7), while Plato's *Menexenus* declares that Athens never failed "to honor the dead who have fallen: every year she performs for all in common the customary rites which each family privately performs for its own" (249b). I place my reading of the funeral oration within the larger context of Athenian public burial, understood here as a ritualized practice regulating mourning through the construction of a civic identity.

Responding to the political exigencies of the moment, Pericles's funeral oration breaks with the rules governing its composition, thereby transforming its structural elements. Part of this subversion can be explained by the historical context of his speech. The social and political atmosphere confronting Pericles at the time of his oration was one of frustration and disapproval. The Spartan invasion of Attica compromised Athenian enthusiasm for the war, which, in its first year, had demanded unequal sacrifices among Athens and the rest of Attica. While Athens was spared from devastation, the greater part of Attica sustained significant material losses. As a result, Pericles became "the object of general indignation, [such that] his previous counsels were totally forgotten; he was abused for not leading out the army which he commanded, and was made responsible for the whole of the public suffering" [2.21.3]. Athenian dissatisfaction with Pericles's leadership manifested a decrease of civic attachment and solidarity among its citizens. Pericles's oration departs from tradition against this background of public dissatisfaction, praising the recent war dead by celebrating the immortality of the city.

The first lines of Pericles's oration concern the relationship of the living to the dead. Is it a relation structured on reciprocity, propriety, or both? What do the living owe the dead? What demands do the dead place on the living? Pericles's response to these questions are as brief as they are direct: noble deeds should be met in kind, hence public burial at the public's expense, the occasion for which he now speaks:

Most of my predecessors in this place have commended him who made this speech part of the law, telling us that it is well that it should be delivered at the burial of those who fall in battle. For myself, I should have thought that the worth which had displayed itself in deeds, would be sufficiently rewarded by honors also shown by deeds; such as you now see in this funeral prepared at the people's cost. And I could have wished that the reputations of many brave men were not to be imperiled in the mouth of a single individual, to stand or fall according as he

spoke well or ill. For it is hard to speak properly upon a subject where it is even difficult to convince your hearers that you are speaking the truth [2.35.1].

Reluctantly, Pericles attempts to make good on his obligation to the dead, to custom, and to the law that authorizes it. This is not easy, he explains, for “on the one hand, the friend who is familiar with every fact of the story may think that some point has not been set forth with the fullness which he wishes and knows it to deserve,” while on the other hand, “he who is a stranger to the matter may be led by envy to suspect exaggerations if he hears anything above his own nature” [2.35.2]. Any exclusion will be open to scrutiny; any privileging will be left to doubt. To gain the confidence of his audience, Pericles recognizes that he will need to provide an account that is both broad in scope and great in depth. To secure public approval and be faithful to the past, his account will have to present multiple perspectives while weaving a universally agreeable narrative. If he tells too much, if his speech is overstated or excessively dramatic, its veracity will be questioned. To avoid being pulled in either direction, Pericles departs from the traditional expectations governing the genre.

Rather than discuss the exploits of the dead, Pericles passes over them. He chooses not to recount the military achievements responsible for the material wealth of Athens, as they would be common knowledge among his audience.¹³⁰ Instead, he praises the social and political institutions of Athens, stressing the collective values of democracy. In this way, Pericles projects an idealized version of Athenian democratic life. He reminds his listeners of the form of government under which Athenian greatness grew and the national habits out of which it sprang. Through its political structure and its material wealth, Athens affords each of its citizens the

¹³⁰ “That part of our history which tells of the military achievements which gave us our several possessions, or of the ready valor with which either we or our fathers stemmed the tide of Hellenic or foreign aggression, is a theme too familiar to my hearers for me to dilate on, and I shall therefore pass it by” [2.36.4].

opportunity for self-fulfillment, i.e. it provides its inhabitants with the best possible conditions to realize an ethically fulfilled life. It is for this reason that the city alone deserves the material and symbolic attachment of each individual. Glorifying Athens makes the city a worthy object of desire and thus of sacrifice.

Pericles begins his praise of Athens by singling out its democratic constitution (*politeia*). Favoring the many over the few, the laws of Athens afford equal justice to all in private matters. Citizens are equal before the law which the judiciary follows when adjudicating private disputes. Furthermore, decision making over the law is a collective endeavor. The constitution organizes political life such that all citizens have a say in government; every citizen has a right to speak and to be heard.

The constitution divides the institutions of government into three realms: a deliberative (*ecclesia*), a legislative (*boule*), and an executive composed of strategists and military magistrates. The *ecclesia*, an assembly of all Athenian citizens, is responsible for foreign policy, lawmaking, and sentences involving death and exile. It debates the questions submitted to it by the *boule*, a five hundred person assembly. Thus, the right of Athenian citizenship is first and foremost a right of participation in the political affairs of the *polis*.¹³¹

131 Attica was composed of *astoi* (locals), *politai* (citizens), and *xenoi* (foreigners). *Astoi* and *politai* were distinguished on the basis of political power, the latter enjoying “the right of sharing in deliberative or judicial office” (Aristotle’s *Politics*, 1275b18-20, 49). *Politai* participate in the decision-making and office-holding functions of the *polis* and are not bound to representing specific territories or regions. They are politically defined, enjoying both political and civil rights, while *astoi* are territorially defined and solely accorded civil rights (*astoi* were defined against *xenoi*, outsiders, or metics, i.e. foreigners residing in Attica for an extended period). These classifications notwithstanding, Athenian citizenship was a relatively fluid category, allowing for the continuous inclusion and exclusion of *politai* (open to newcomers and willing to accept offspring of culturally assimilated locals, including metics). For a detailed analysis of Athenian citizenship in the fourth and the fifth century BCE see Cohen, *The Athenian Nation*, Chapter 2.

According to Pericles, the freedom and equality experienced politically in the *boule* extends to Athenian social life. Whether following law or custom, Athenians treat one another justly, so much so that they experience comfort and autonomy in their private relations.

After describing the all-inclusive political system of Athens, Pericles defends the openness and liberality of its citizens. “Never by alien acts,” do they “exclude foreigners from any opportunity of learning or observing” [2.39.1]. An Athenian is generous and tolerant of others, and acquires friends by conferring, not by receiving favors. An Athenian acts freely, but with moderation. “Instead of looking on discussion as a stumbling-block in the way of action,” an Athenian “thinks it an indispensable preliminary to any wise action at all” [2.40.2]. An Athenian has a penchant for reasoned deliberation, but is “never tempted to shrink from danger” [2.40.3]. An Athenian has a taste for the beautiful, but is not a slave to luxury.

In effect, an Athenian is an ideal citizen whose habits, customs, traditions, and temperament are both a source of cultural achievement and military advantage. “Our ordinary citizens, though occupied with the pursuits of industry, are still fair judges of public matters; for, unlike any other nation, regarding him who takes no part in these duties not as unambitious but as useless” [2.40.2]. Pericles’s exemplary citizen is prepared to do what is necessary when it comes to the material wellbeing of the collective. By extolling the virtues of Athenian democracy (democracy views discussion as an indispensable preliminary to any wise action; democracy carries both daring and deliberation to their highest point) through an idealized depiction of Athenian democratic life (defined by civility, culture, moderation, and enjoyment of fine things), Pericles’s speech figures for his audience an imaginary version of its best self.¹³²

132 In this regard, I follow the earlier studies of W. Robert Connor, Nicole Loraux, Sara Monoson, and Edward Cohen, each of whom reads the Athenian funeral oration as participating in the material and symbolic constitution of

1.1

Foregrounding Athenian exceptionalism, Pericles portrays the city as a model for all to follow: “as a city we are the school of Hellas,” which “is no mere boast thrown out for the occasion, but plain matter of fact, the power of the state acquired by these habits proves it” [2.41.1-2]. Recognized by those with whom it has come into contact, Athenian greatness does not leave its “power without witness,” but reveals itself “by mighty proofs”:

Far from needing a Homer for our eulogist, or other of his craft whose verses might charm for the moment only for the impression which they gave to melt at the touch of fact, we have forced every sea and land to be the highway of our daring, and everywhere, whether for evil or for good, have left imperishable monuments behind us [2.41.4].¹³³

What is the nature of these mighty proofs? What does Pericles have in mind when he speaks of imperishable monuments? Thucydides frequently refers to battle trophies, but seldom does he mention monuments or memorials.

The lack of significance given to physical reminders suggests that rather than being attached to a site or material object, the proof of Athenian greatness manifests itself in word and

an imagined community. For Monoson, Pericles’s “speech aims to provide the citizens/readers with a powerful expression of a popular idealization of democracy with which the Athenians wished to be identified (and not necessarily an accurate description of day-to-day practice). Praising and displaying a recognizable image of Athens’ ‘best self’ was the key aim of funeral oratory.” Monoson, “Citizen as *Erastes*,” 271. Loraux’s study of the funeral oration convincingly argues that for Athens to become the model *polis*, it had to produce for its own use “something like an ideality, well beyond the sum of concrete experiences that made up their political life.” See Loraux, *The Invention of Athens*, 124. The funeral oration, Connor’s argues, “projects before us an image of a society shaped by law, reason, mutual respect, self-restraint, and self-sacrifice. We know it is not a description of the historical Athens.” See W. Robert Connor, *Thucydides* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 249-250. For Cohen, “Perikles appeals repeatedly to the collective imagination of his audience – vividly creating with consummate artistry that connection between people, land, and history that modern ethnologists have identified as integral to nation building.” See Cohen, *The Athenian Nation*, 96-97.

133 Clearly, Pericles wants to challenge figure, exaggeration, and hyperbole, rhetorical techniques that would obfuscate meaning. He favors the transparent and objective over the dissimulating charms of the moment, that which melts away at the touch of fact. But does he not adopt the rhetorical strategy he dismisses? Recall Pericles’s devaluation of speech: “For myself, I should have thought that the worth which had displayed itself in deeds ... were not to be imperiled in the mouth of a single individual, to stand or fall according as he spoke well or ill” [2.35.1]. Does this not heighten the rhetorical effect of his oration?

deed, that is, in action. Pericles declares that the dead receive “that renown which never grows old, and for a tomb, not so much that in which their bones have been deposited, but that noblest of shrines wherein their glory is laid up to be eternally remembered upon every occasion on which deed or story shall be commemorated” [2.43.2]. In addition to receiving a public burial, the dead are set to memory in the hearts of men. In other words, their after-life is preserved in speech and action, not in material form. Story and deed commemorate the dead.¹³⁴

Against his claim to the contrary, Pericles’s oration suggests that the performance of public burial at the expense of the state is not enough. The death of citizen-soldiers must be marked symbolically and materially by both speech and sepulcher. As literary theorist Robert Harrison explains, a eulogy “makes of that ground a place or *the* place where the nation finds itself, on which it must found, or re-found, its republic.” “The remembered dead enable the nation to make its own the continent on which it first came forth.”¹³⁵ Together, the speech and the sepulcher mark the nation’s place in time. They materialize a monument lacking physical form: a community in mourning. “A grave marks the mortality of its creators even more distinctly than it marks the resting place of the dead. It is not for nothing that the Greek word for ‘sign,’ *sema*, is also the word for ‘grave.’” The *sema* is a sign that signifies the source of signification itself, “since it ‘stood for’ what it ‘stood in’ – the ground of burial as such.”¹³⁶

134 The subsequent chapters focus on the democratically enabling power of storytelling, and the responsibility it demands, in relation to contemporary memorial architecture. It is significant to note that Pericles presents Athens with a non-material (i.e. discursive) practice of memorialization. While the politically enabling and disabling effects of discursive and material forms of memorialization are issues that run throughout the dissertation, they are directly thematized in the concluding chapter, which explores the increasingly popular mode of commemoration and memorialization through institutional mechanisms of truth and reconciliation.

135 Robert Pogue Harrison, *The Dominion of the Dead* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 28. It is through remembrance “that human societies develop consciousness as to their identity, as located in time.” Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 27.

136 Harrison, *The Dominion of the Dead*, 20.

If, as Harrison argues, the *sema* marks the mortality of its creators more distinctly than it marks the resting place of the dead, then it is the signifying power of the *sema* (or site specific power of memory) that Pericles's oration attempts to dissociate from the dead. Their memory, like the Athenian *polis*, is spatially and politically mobilized by the oration.¹³⁷

What does memory's dislocation from place tell us about its time? To be sure, Pericles's speech takes place in a punctuated temporality, responding to the political imperatives of the moment: a militarily unproductive and politically divisive first year of war. Yet it fails to elaborate, or even account for, specific details regarding the circumstances of death. The speech attempts to transcend the instance of its performance, exalting the immortal city over the mortal citizen, to create a sense of continuity between past, present, and future. By establishing a temporal continuum, the oration situates Athenian immortality not in a geographic location, but in memory. "Athens' 'always remembered reputation' is thus constituted in – or the basis of – an idealized future. And what is 'left behind' is an idealized past, constructed from the point of view of a volatile present."¹³⁸ Following ancient scholar Karen Bassi, Pericles's mobilization of the dead works "to replace the physical city of Athens with a transcendent and eternal 'everywhere.' ... [T]he image of a transcendent city without walls or tombs memorializes the dead warrior's heroic departure."¹³⁹ The memory of the Athenian war dead is not temporally or spatially fixed, but made strategically mobile in speech. Though the commemorative act of the

137 In a previous speech, Pericles asks Athens to envision itself as an island: "Suppose that we were islanders: can you conceive a more impregnable position? Well, this in future should, as far as possible, be our conception of our position. ... We must cry not over the loss of houses and land but of men's lives; since houses and land do not gain men, but men them" [1.143.5]. The idea of a spatially and temporally mobile Athens is confirmed by ancient scholar Karen Bassi, who argues that the Athenian *polis* "refers to a unique conflation of space and time or, more specifically, to an essential and original Athens." Karen Bassi, "Spatial Contingencies in Thucydides's History," *Classical Antiquity* 26, no. 2 (October 2007): 171-217.

138 Ibid., 200.

139 Ibid., 194-195.

oration concludes with the burial and eulogy, its effects are intended to last throughout the life of the city. Immortalizing Athens, Pericles's funeral oration both validates its current military campaign and binds its citizens to the material wellbeing of the city.

1.2

Pericles puts the memory of the dead to use to shore-up consensus over the war and to legitimize the imperial pursuits of Athens.¹⁴⁰ His speech inflates the pride of all those who listen. Citizen and foreigner alike not only feel the power of the city, but are compelled to recognize the means by which it became great. As with the U.S. Supreme Court ruling over the memorialization of Gettysburg, present and future generations are expected to honor the past with like deeds, not out of empathy with the dead, but through identification with greatness.¹⁴¹

“Realize the power of Athens, and feed your eyes upon her from day to day, till love of her fills your hearts; and then when all her greatness shall break upon you, you must reflect that it was by courage, sense of duty, and a keen feeling of honor in action that men were enabled to win all this” [2.43.1].¹⁴² Calling upon *eros* to draw out the demands of Athenian citizenship, Pericles

140 While much of the secondary literature on Pericles's funeral oration does well to show that it should not “be explained as mere Periclean propaganda or Thucydides's manipulation of his readers,” the strategic intentions of his speech should not be underestimated. Citizens are told to ‘never decline the dangers of war,’ to be ‘ready to suffer,’ with ‘as unaltering a resolution in the field’ as those who had already given their lives in defense of Athens. The funeral oration, as such, is implicated in the imperial aspirations and pursuits of Athens: “the institution of these speeches seems thus to have paralleled the fifth-century advent of Athenian imperial hegemony.” Cohen, *The Athenian Nation*, 95. Also see Connor, *Thucydides*, 250.

141 To anticipate the critique of empathetic identification developed in later chapters, it is worth noting Walter Benjamin's counterintuitive notion of empathy, where identification lays with the victor rather than the defeated. Benjamin characterizes empathy with the victor as the strongest and most difficult bastion of historicism to overrun. “The rulers at any time are the heirs of all those who have been victorious throughout history. Empathizing with the victor invariably benefits those currently ruling.” Walter Benjamin, “Paralipomena to ‘On the Concept of History,’” in *Selected Writings*, Vol. 4: 1938-1940, trans., Edmund Jephcott (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 406-407.

142 Pericles's insistence on the affective power of the visual resonates with Justice Peckham's opinion regarding the monumentalization of Gettysburg: “By this use the government manifests for the benefit of all its citizens the value put upon the services and exertions of the citizen soldiers of that period. Their successful effort to preserve the integrity and solidarity of the great republic of modern times is forcibly impressed upon every one who looks over the field.” *U.S. v. Gettysburg Electric R. Co.*, 160 U.S. 668, 682 (1896).

puts forward an ideal of civic relations structured on a model of reciprocity, in which city and citizen are partners in a mutual exchange.¹⁴³

The citizen who attends to the wellbeing of his city receives in return the fruits of his labor – civility, culture, and material prosperity, which can only be enjoyed when individuals recognize what is needed (militarily or otherwise) and act accordingly. “These take as your model and judging happiness to be the fruit of freedom and freedom of valor, never decline the dangers of war” [2.43.4]. Pericles demands that the living act with the same military virtue as those before them.¹⁴⁴ “Such is the Athens for which these men, in the assertion of their resolve not to lose her, nobly fought and died; and well may every one of their survivors be ready to suffer in her cause” [2.41.5]. The model of civic relations advanced by Pericles requires citizens to sacrifice their individual lives should the life of Athens be in danger. “So died these men as

143 Pericles’s speech urges citizens and foreigners to become lovers of Athens in all its power. The nature of this power was imperial. Athenian wealth in the fifth-century BCE was furnished in large part by contributions from other Greek city-states. The Delian League refers to the maritime cities, most of which were from the islands of the Aegean Sea, that turned to Athens for alliance and protection in exchange for tax payments meant to sustain the Athenian fleet. The League’s payments were also used to fund building projects, drama, art, and other cultural activities. To nourish the democratic patterns of life enjoyed by its citizens, i.e. to finance their participation in the *ecclesia*, resources had to be extracted from suppliant cities. “The *good life* of the Athenian *demos*, and the works belonging thereto,” argues ancient scholar Pierre Vidal-Naquet, “depend to a noncalculable, but in no way negligible, degree on the resources contributed by the domination Athens exercised over the islands and the cities of its maritime dominion.” Pierre Lévêque and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, “On the Invention of Democracy” (1992) in *Cleisthenes the Athenian* (1964) (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1997), 110.

144 As Bassi argues, “the city of Pericles’ Funeral Oration, [is] a city defined by the collective willingness of its citizens to die on its behalf.” Bassi, “Spatial Contingencies in Thucydides’s History,” 211. This view is supported by Cohen, who argues against the myth of Athenian autochthony: “courage in defense of your own homeland and that of your ancestors ... makes sense. An *arête* arising from literally ‘having been born from the soil’ does not.” Cohen, *The Athenian Nation*, 96-99. The patriotic zeal aroused by Pericles’s oration appeals to the recent past of its audience, “the personally known and still-verifiable accomplishments of our ‘own fathers’ (2.36.2),” as opposed to the mythological tradition of a noble birth. Similarly, Thucydides relies on the factual rather than the mythological, so that any claim to autochthony suggests continuous residence in one’s country and not a literal generation from the earth (which stands in contrast to Socrates’s appeal to an autochthonous Athenian birth). Mythological claims of autochthony remain absent Pericles’s oration and Thucydides’s history. To this effect, both accounts articulate a political vision of community analogous to that of the modern nation-state. “The questioning that surrounds the legitimacy of the modern state explicitly founded in opposition to nature through a social contract or through conquest is not an issue [with autochthony myths]; the city born from the earth appears to be the natural unit demanding men’s devotion and allegiance.” Arlene Saxonhouse, *Fear of Diversity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 112.

became Athenians. You, their survivors, must determine to have as unaltering a resolution in the field” [2.43.1]. Pericles makes firm demands on his audience to provide for the material security of Athens, such that citizens are not passive subjects of the city but willing, energetic, and active participants in the construction of its greatness and immortality.¹⁴⁵

The deliverance of a formal eulogy, as described by Thucydides’s representation of Pericles’s funeral oration, effectively binds its audience to a collective identity. Reclaiming the bodies of the dead through the body of the state not only constructs the universal identity of the Athenian citizen, but also enforces this identity across time as the city’s proper subject. In effect, the public act of collective burial performs a kind of collective survival, redeeming “the perishing of particulars in a selfsameness that conspires in the present to persist into the future.”¹⁴⁶

Reframed in terms of the juridical order, public burial interrupts nature’s appropriation of a member of the community while rescuing the corpse from the nothingness of individuation. Spiritualizing the dead reaffirms the political significance of the individual citizen to the community. The individual laid to rest realizes itself insofar as it, like those responsible for its burial, remains an ethico-juridical subject of the community. Recall Pericles’s exhortation to the living: “so died these men *as became Athenians*. You, their survivors, must determine to have as unaltering a resolution in the field” [2.43.1, emphasis added]. As political theorist Arlene Saxonhouse explains, “unity comes from the incorporation of the individual into the

145 Sara Monoson argues that death in battle is not a sacrifice born of manipulation, but a voluntary contribution to the *polis*. The collective burial given at the public’s expense portrays a relation of reciprocity. “In giving their bodies, even in death citizens perform a role associated with the ideal of *erastes*. They are providing Athens with instruction in virtue. We can also note that the egalitarian treatment of all the dead confirms the ideal that every citizen is capable of bestowing significant benefits on the city and thus meriting high honors and praise.” Monoson, *Plato’s Democratic Entanglements*, 85.

146 Edward Casey, *Remembering* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2000), 257.

community,” such that “there is no such thing as an uninvolved citizen.”¹⁴⁷ Members of the community are “subsumed primarily with reference to the political and ethical significance of their former lives as subjects of the law, and not simply as isolated individuals.” This view is supported by Hegel scholar Theodore George, who captures the civic ethic of Pericles’s oration: members of the community must “be subsumed primarily with reference to the political and ethical significance of their former lives as subjects of the law, and not simply as isolated individuals.”¹⁴⁸ George’s reading builds on that of Hegel, who claims in *The Philosophy of Right* that “sacrifice for the individuality of the state is the substantial relation of everyone and therefore a *universal duty*.”¹⁴⁹ Read through Hegel’s understanding of the ethical duty of citizenship, the burial rights performed by the funeral oration reinforce the political order such that the ends of community are affirmed with reverence for the law and the primacy of the state.

2. Socrates’s Funeral Oration

Plato writes the *Menexenus* following the Peace of Antalcidas (386-387 BCE), negotiated at the end of the Corinthian War by Sparta and Persia.¹⁵⁰ The text is composed of a funeral oration book-ended by brief exchanges between Menexenus and Socrates. It begins with their unexpected encounter just as the young and affluent Athenian returns from the Council Chamber, where he has learned that the Council has yet to decide who will deliver an oration for the war

147 Saxonhouse, *Fear of Diversity*, 114

148 Theodore George, “Community in the Idiom of Crisis: Hegel on Political Life, Tragedy, and the Dead,” *Research in Phenomenology* 32, no. 1 (September 2002): 126-128.

149 G.W.F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), §324, 363.

150 Insofar as the treaty allowed the Persian King Artaxerxes to become the arbiter of disputes among Greek city-states, the Peace of Antalcidas marked one of the lowest points in the history of Athenian democracy. “The eventual agreement to the terms of the treaty, forced by a naval blockade that cut off Athens’ food supply, receives approbation as a peace more favorable than the one at the end of the Peloponnesian War, because the city was able to retain its walls, its ships and its colonies.” Thus, “the ritualistic exhortation to the children and parents of the fallen Athenians at the end of the speech (246B-249C) appears all the more incongruous precisely because it follows the improbably laudatory depiction of the Peace of Antalkidas.” Haskins, “Philosophy, Rhetoric, and Cultural Memory: Rereading Plato’s *Menexenus* and Isocrates’ *Panegyricus*,” 30.

dead. After Socrates quips and shares his misgivings about the practice, Menexenus asks him to perform a funeral speech, seeing that Socrates thinks it a menial feat to praise those whose company one keeps (i.e. praising Athenians while among Athenians). Unlike that of Pericles, Socrates's oration stays true to the formal conventions of the practice, emphasizing the theme of Athenian *autochthony*, praising the city's political organization (*politeia*), and recounting "its exploits 'in the cause of freedom' from the mythical times of Amazons to the most recent events of the Corinthian War."¹⁵¹

Abstaining from dialectics, Socrates engages in the rhetorical practice of funereal oratory. Like Pericles, Socrates makes use of the funeral oration format to advance an ideal ordering of civic relations. Both present a model of civic patriotism through the staging of an imaginary that maintains the permanence of the imperial *polis* and the preeminence of its power by consolidating the identity of its citizens. Unlike Thucydides's account, however, Plato's dialogue presents its history of Athens within a fictionalized space, a staged funeral oration whose ideal of citizenship is structured on Athenian norms of familial obligations. Socrates's speech – offering praise and honor to the dead in eulogy, consolation and exhortation to the living – follows tradition and abides by the structural elements of the funeral oration, yet it also theorizes the practice (*epitaphios logos*) within its very discursive space. In other words, Plato's text adopts the genre in order to provide a critical commentary on the politics of mourning.

An earnest engagement with the political and rhetorical conventions of Athenian democracy, the *Menexenus* portrays the funeral oration as a stale and inanimate practice whose excessive and generalized glorification of Athens is morally vacuous and politically

151 Ibid., 28.

enervating.¹⁵² With satirical bite, Plato depicts the *epitaphios logos* as a fragmentary form whose unthought composition is made to fit the occasion. Socrates acknowledges that parts of his speech “came on the spur of the moment but the rest had been prepared before, ... pieced together leftovers” from a previous oration [236b]. He admits that his speech was first delivered by Aspasia of Miletus, a resident alien courtesan (*hetaira*) renown for her intellect and skill in both writing and speech. “I learned it from her,” Socrates claims, “and nearly got a whipping for whatever I forgot” [236c]. We know from Socrates that Aspasia made many people good orators, most notably he who “surpasses all other Greeks, Pericles son of Xanthippus” [235e]. By attributing Socrates’s speech to Aspasia, Plato indirectly relates his dialogue with Thucydides’s text and Pericles’s oration.¹⁵³ As ancient scholar Lucinda Coventry explains: “It was necessary that Socrates should be able to distance himself from the speech by referring it to another source. ... Aspasia becomes a link figure, the famous speech ascribed to her indicating what most interested Plato about the genre whose techniques as a whole she represents.”¹⁵⁴

Through Aspasia, Socrates is able to deny responsibility for the speech (he is even hesitant to

152 On classifying the *Menexenus* as either satire or critical commentary, I agree with political theorist Stephen Salkever that “in order to make sense of the *Menexenus*, we must first reject the idea that the dialogue has to fall into one of two mutually exclusive genre categories: the comic or the serious.” “It is misleading to ask whether the dialogue is on the side of the polis or of philosophy, serious or playful, expressive of Plato’s serious political views or an attempt to subvert Athenian politics. Part of Plato’s literary practice is to show us how the philosopher can also be a true *politikos*, how a mythos can be a logos, and how the complex ironies of an artfully written dialogue illustrate serious play.” Stephen Salkever, “Socrates’ Aspasian Oration: The Play of Philosophy and Politics in Plato’s *Menexenus*,” *The American Political Science Review* 87, no. 1, (March 1993): 133-143.

153 As classicist R.E. Allen notes, “the choice of Aspasia as its author, the frequent verbal and structural resemblances, the direct mention of Pericles and his speech, leave no doubt that it is aimed at Thucydides’ report of Pericles’ Funeral Oration.” Plato follows Thucydides’s irregular naming of Greek city-states, including several repetitions of his phrases. For example, Socrates refers to Spartans and Lacadaimonians as Peloponnesians, language representative of Thucydides’s text. Furthermore, he concludes his oration by quoting the last line of Pericles’s oration, and names he and Aspasia directly. R.E. Allen, *The Dialogues of Plato*, v.1, ed. and trans., R.E. Allen (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 323. All further references to Plato’s text will use the traditional paragraph and letter and are cited from Allen’s translation.

154 Lucinda Coventry, “Philosophy and Rhetoric in the *Menexenus*,” *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 109, (1989): 1-15, 3.

repeat it, even if only in private), while also using it to critique its very practice.

This transfer of authorship continues with Plato. In the voice of Socrates, he indicts the funeral oration for its use of sophistic or base rhetoric, a charge that directly implicates Thucydides's praise of Pericles's speech.¹⁵⁵ Both Thucydides and Pericles oppose rhetoric to truth, yet each is beholden to the rhetorical power of language. The *Menexenus* not only reveals Pericles's contradiction with his stated intent, it leaves its readers with the impression that the rhetorical practice is little more than false persuasion (belief without knowledge). Sweeping away the particulars of the past (leaving unsaid the actions of the dead), the oration appeals to the material interests of the many, offering them empty consolation without inspiring a quest for truth or offering a moral orientation toward justice.

Both Plato and Thucydides work with a discursive form intended to present death in battle as a testimonial act of redemption to the eternal city of Athens. On the face of it, the funeral oration is both a lesson in civic morality and a public initiation.¹⁵⁶ Socrates cheekily explains: "in many ways it's a fine thing to die in battle. A man gets a magnificent funeral even if he dies poor, and people praise him even if he was worthless" [234c].¹⁵⁷ This ironic remark

155 In Plato's view, base rhetoric is a form of oratory that panders to the emotions of its audience under the guise of truth and wisdom, passing appearance off as truth. Oppositely, philosophic rhetoric is indifferent to gratification and pleasure. It is devoid of emotion and charm, and presents its arguments in a rational and unified structure. We can infer from Plato's commentary that he views Pericles's oration as a form of base rhetoric. Thucydides's praise paints a different picture: Pericles "never sought power by improper means, he was never compelled to flatter them [the multitude], but, on the contrary, enjoyed so high an estimation that he could afford to anger them by contradiction" [2.65.8].

156 A fearful initiation, as Nicole Loraux explains, "in which one is born into a new status only by renouncing forever the condition of the living creature." For Pericles, this act of initiation – an unfelt death that "strikes in the midst of strength and patriotism" – is an affirmation of valor and a lesson in civic morality [2.43.6]. A fine death becomes the highest order of communal services, "the most glorious contribution" that citizens can offer their city [2.43.1]. See Loraux, *The Invention of Athens*, 100-101.

157 Similarly, Pericles reasons that "there is justice in the claim that steadfastness in his country's battles should be as a cloak to cover a man's other imperfections; since the good action has blotted out the bad, and his merit as a citizen more than outweighed his demerits as an individual" [2.42.3]. Death which strikes the soldier in the midst of his patriotism exalts a beautiful death: "fortunate indeed are they who draw for their lot a death so glorious"

suggests that without giving necessary pause to reflect on either action or intention, the oration – in both its practice and as a convention – glorifies a universal identity, the Athenian citizen, who already formed, stands ready and waiting for its integration into the timeless singularity of Athens.¹⁵⁸

Thus, Socrates's oration demonstrates the failure of funereal oratory to engage its audience critically. Providing momentary pleasure, papering over difference, and quieting dissent, the practice seduces Athens with a beautiful image of itself.¹⁵⁹ Socrates exclaims:

[Their] praise is so beautiful that although they speak things both true and untrue of each man, the extreme beauty and diversity of their words bewitches our souls. For in every way, they eulogize the city and those who died in battle and all our forebears, and even us who are still alive, until finally, Menexenus, I feel myself ennobled by them. I every time stand and listen, charmed, believing I have become bigger, better-born, and better looking on the spot [235a].

No matter how accurate or true, the speech empowers all who hear it. In Socrates's view, this leveling of distinction problematically generates a universal identity through the institution of an

[2.44.1]. Commenting on William Wordsworth's "Essays upon Epitaphs" (1810-1812), David Simpson notes that "the epitaph tends to record the good in everyone, as if they lived in a world without cruelty or evil or mere human failings: 'the affections are their own justification.'" David Simpson, *9/11: The Culture of Commemoration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 36.

¹⁵⁸ "The death of citizens in battle exalts the city so that the death of individuals is immersed in the beauty of the city. No special praise of actions that might separate one actor from another is offered. All are enclosed in the city. The praise is unified and unifying." Saxonhouse, *Fear of Diversity*, 116. David Simpson's comments on *The New York Times*'s series "Portraits of Grief" – 'formulaic,' 'regimented,' and 'militarized' daily snapshots of the nearly three thousand people who died on September 11, 2001 – critiques the homogenizing effects of an imposed unity on a collective dead made to figure in grand "narratives of national futures and civic virtues." Absent distinctions of class, income, and ethnicity, each snapshot pertained to an archetype whose only particularity belonged to a "nationalized and nationalist one, so that the cumulative effect of reading one after another seemed to come from an editorial interest ... in the projection of an all-American wholeness of spirit and a national state of health and happiness." Simpson, *9/11: The Culture of Commemoration*, 29, 46.

¹⁵⁹ In book eight of Plato's *Republic*, Socrates suggests that democratic regimes are seductive, appearing to be "the most beautiful of polities: as a garment of many colors, embroidered with all kinds of hues, so this, decked and diversified with every type of character, would appear the most beautiful." Plato's critique and theorization of the funeral oration should be read in light of his views on democracy: beauty and appearance are corruptive of reason and dissimulating of truth. Plato, *Republic*, from *The Collected Dialogues*, eds., Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), Book 8, [557c].

imagined community.¹⁶⁰ Consolidating community in the here and now of the present, the eulogy preserves the continuity of Athens, which stands as a timeless referent for all to identify.¹⁶¹ Beholden to a monumental past, spectators are initiated into an eternal community of the living through an obligatory logic of the self-same.¹⁶²

2.1

With Pericles, Athens becomes the model Greek *polis* by dissimulating internal division and negating external animosity. Addressed to citizens and non-citizens alike, his oration simulates a dialogue among unequal parties. Demanding submission and respect not only anaesthetizes the body politic from mourning, it subverts the democratic ethos of agonistic exchange, while also preventing its audience from critically engaging one another over its recent past.

A speech without reply, the funeral oration not only flatters the *polis* – idealizing its customs, characteristics, and achievements – it arouses empathy in its audience, which is made to fear, revere, and identify with the city’s unapologetic pursuit of power. Socrates explains: “since there are almost always foreigners with me, and they listen too, I feel more distinguished on the

160 “It is as if the past had been awaiting the present from the very beginning,” writes Loraux, “as if the model of Pericles’ city has from the outset determined the progress of the *polis* toward its culmination.” Loraux, *The Invention of Athens*, 122. See also A.B. Bosworth, “The Historical Context of Thucydides’ Funeral Oration” *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 120, (2000): 1-16, 15. “The motif of the immortality of the fallen makes its appearance, but it is not confined to the dead of a single glorious encounter. All citizens who give their lives for the city, whatever the circumstances, join the company of the glorious dead.” For an account of the leveling effects of commemoration in modernity see Simpson, *9/11: The Culture of Commemoration*, Chapter 2.

161 Pericles projects “an immortal present where past and future are one.” His speech “virtually denies the death of the dead by making them one with a vital and vibrant city that lives.” Saxonhouse, *Fear of Diversity*, 120.

162 The funeral oration imposes a universal identity upon the dead, the living, and the unborn. “Through death the destiny of the city is fulfilled: history is abolished, the past justifies the present, and the present returns to the distant past.” Loraux, *The Invention of Athens*, 127.

spot. In fact I think they are affected the same toward me and the rest of the city, believing it more marvelous than before because they are seduced by the speaker” [2.35b].¹⁶³

Though “the coexistence of justification and threat within the same speech comes close to being a contradiction,” together they uphold an ideal of civic association and foreign relations.¹⁶⁴ To achieve this effect, the oration figures external onlookers – citizens and foreigners alike – as silent witnesses to Athenian greatness. Symbolically invested in the material economy of the ceremony, the onlookers participate through their passivity as subjects, never as equals.¹⁶⁵

Insofar as Athens prefers obedient suppliants over effective allies, the act of public burial helps consolidate support for its imperial interests through the discursive construction of an ideal spectator. Projecting a foreign policy that is “never overly imperialistic, incapable of being truly panhellenic, but always eloquent when exalting the primacy of Athens,” the speech engages both friend and enemy as a mute point of address.¹⁶⁶

The series of displacements enacted by the funeral oration – friend/enemy, past/present, citizen/foreigner, life/death – work to suspend mourning and silence discussion. “It is not expected of the Assembly that it should take the floor, that it should debate, nor even that it should judge.”¹⁶⁷ Provoking neither reflection nor deliberation, the one-way discourse of the oration induces silent feelings rather than critical thought. Reaffirming “social ties, community values, and an established political identity,” Pericles’s funeral oration does not occasion

163 Socrates’s comments are confirmed by Pericles in his admiration of Athenian openness: “We throw open our city to the world, and never by alien acts exclude foreigners from any opportunity of learning or observing, although the eyes of an enemy may occasionally profit by our liberality” [2.39.1].

164 Loraux, *The Invention of Athens*, 328.

165 For Loraux, the other as adversary, the external onlooker, “is an absentee, whose silent presence is presupposed by the entire ceremony; as ally or mere foreigner, he is invited to the funeral, as spectator and listener if not as interlocutor.” *Ibid.*, 79.

166 *Ibid.*, 97.

167 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend*, trans., Georges Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 20-21.

“discussion of the problems that had led to the war, nor the mistakes made in its execution; nor was it a time to wonder whether the casualties inflicted were worth the gains accrued, or indeed, the losses inflicted.”¹⁶⁸ A monologue prepared for both internal and external consumption, the oration combines speaker and interlocutor into one figure, the orator, who, rather than incite speech, silences it. With one voice, it projects a singular and totalizing view, thereby frustrating the emergence of a critical exchange of perspective and defusing the democratic potential of memory to awaken a depressed political sensibility. “Ennobling,” “seducing,” “bewitching,” – in the words of Socrates – the funeral oration puts death to use for the survival of the city.

“The sound of the speakers’ voice rings so fresh in my ear,” says Socrates, “I can hardly recall who it is I am or where in the world I am. I almost suppose I’m dwelling in the Isles of the Blessed. So skillful are our orators” [235c]. With this statement, Socrates exposes the oration to be less a counsel to the living than a pacification of their grief. Captivating through self-congratulatory speech, the oration not only confuses the sense of self of those listening, it disorients their spatial and temporal frame of reference. The charm that moves spectators to feel as though they were living in the Isles of the Blessed establishes an intergenerational homology linking past, present, and future in the timeless space of the immortal city.¹⁶⁹ “Those who lived before us,” Socrates claims, “were nurtured by a noble constitution, through which both they and their descendents to the present day, including these our dead, were good” [238c]. Rendering a general equality over the dead – who are deemed good by virtue of their birth, not their action –

168 Simon Stow, “Pericles at Gettysburg and Ground Zero: Tragedy, Patriotism, and Public Mourning” *American Political Science Review* 101, no. 2, (May 2007): 195-208, (197).

169 For Lyotard, this feeling corresponds to a series of rhetorical shifts: death in battle is a beautiful death; a beautiful death implies a fine life; Athenian life is fine; the Athenian living this life is fine; you, the listener, are fine. Lyotard, *The Differend*, 20-21. Alternatively, Saxonhouse argues “the speech transforms the dead into the living by making them part of the city that is praised by the speaker, and it transforms the living into the dead by transporting them to the Island of the Blessed.” Saxonhouse, *Fear of Diversity*, 115.

Socrates's funeral oration calls attention to the insincerity of the form, specifically, the specious notion of civic morality it defends.

Impugning the conventions of the genre through its very practice, Socrates draws "the readers attention to ethical and political deficiencies of the genre in particular and of democratic rhetoric in general by exaggerating, in his own performance, the language and commonplaces of praise."¹⁷⁰ The critique he levels against the oration amounts to a critique of rhetoric as a critical discourse. On his account, the oration problematically doles out indiscriminate praise, while failing to inquire into the truth of particulars. Ready-made (employing stock content and common knowledge), the oration betrays an indifference to truth. The speech, and the symbolic economy it puts to use, lack distinction. Offering little more than empty platitudes, they confuse real and apparent values, thereby weakening the critical sensibility of those who hear it. Whereas Socrates traditionally advances a dialogic relation promoting self-awareness in view of truth, justice, and knowledge, his oration self-consciously figures its audience as a passive receiver of linguistic manipulations and strategic machinations.

Unconcerned with truth, orators produce speeches intended to please "their audiences both by their style and by the unalloyed praise which they contain."¹⁷¹ Awarded indiscriminately, the false praise of the practice dilutes the historical reality of a particular situation (the death of citizens), and cuts short the reflective practice of moral reasoning so central to Socratic questioning. Preoccupied with style and ornament, the funeral oration is shown by Socrates to distort both history and knowledge.¹⁷² As he demonstrates, indifference to content betrays an

170 Haskins, "Philosophy, Rhetoric, and Cultural Memory: Rereading Plato's *Menexenus* and Isocrates' *Panegyricus*," 31-32.

171 Coventry, "Philosophy and Rhetoric in the *Menexenus*," 5.

172 The Athenian "public did not expect a high level of accuracy; the orator relied upon his memory and was

indifference to truth, proving that those who listen to a funeral oration are not made self-aware, but unjustifiably self-contented, and thus, politically immobilized.

Yet it is not for Pericles's lack of democratic sensibility that the funeral oration of the *Menexenus* rejects Pericles's politics, but rather its ethical deficiencies. Morally vacuous, insincere and superficial, the imperialistic pursuits defended by Pericles devalue the civic morality advanced by Socrates, that of a will toward truth and justice.¹⁷³ Though Socrates does not explicitly challenge Athenian imperialism, he implicitly suggests that its policies of material acquisition are a threat to ethical life and the pursuit of truth, justice, and knowledge. Thus, his theorization of civic morality within the conventions of the funeral oration is an immediate response to the democratic defects of Athens. The critique of Athenian self-understanding, advanced by the *Menexenus*, results in an alternate model of ethical relations informed by a virtue of filial piety. Such a virtue is not based on material pursuits, but on the ethical formation of community. Rather than provide a systematic theorization of politics – the duties of citizenship, the function of institutions, the development of law and policy – Socrates upholds an ethic of caretaking [*epimeleia*] as opposed to one of ruling [*archein*].¹⁷⁴

Pericles compels his audience to lead a noble and just life founded on material conquest by military means. In his view, the best way of life for a city and its people is rooted in the virtues

always ready to simplify a narrative for the sake of vividness or of higher praise.” Charles H. Kahn, “Plato’s Funeral Oration: The Motive of the *Menexenus*,” *Classical Philology* 58, no. 4, (October 1963): 220-234.

173 To the extent that Pericles subordinates “private and domestic affairs to public and foreign ones, and ultimately of peace to war, the implication of Socrates' revision of Athenian history is that the relations are properly reversed. ... Socrates suggests that war is for the sake of peace, and not peace for the sake of war.” Susan Collins and Devin Stauffer, “The Challenge of Plato’s “*Menexenus*”” *The Review of Politics* 61, no. 1, (Winter, 1999): 85-115, 103.

174 *Ibid.*, 111. “In both style and substance, *Menexenus* rejects the heroic account of Athenian democracy proposed by Thucydides’ Pericles, separating Athenian citizenship from the quest for immortal glory.” According to Pericles, immortal glory is an effect of human action, not fortune or divine origin, whereas “Socrates’ comic genealogy makes the greatness of Athens depend on the good fortune of her natural origin and on divine favor, not on the special bravery of Athenian men of war.” Salkever, “Socrates’ Aspasian Oration: The Play of Philosophy and Politics in Plato’s *Menexenus*,” 137.

of daring and courage. Ethical conduct is identified with military action, that is, how one responds to the challenges of war. Alternatively, Socrates's oration provides a more general account of how one ought to live. Spoken in the name of missing fathers, Socrates's exhortation to the children expresses a virtue of filial piety. Bearing loss as easily as possible means mourning in moderation. In the name of dead Athenians, Socrates advises prudence and a life of moral virtue, to not only live courageously in war, but to act virtuously in all aspects of life. For Socrates, familial authority trumps the material attachments of the imperial polis.

3. The Rhetorical Construction of Community

In the previous sections I have shown how public burial, as depicted by Thucydides's Pericles, discursively constitutes politically and ethically vacuous civic identities. I now read Pericles's oration against that of Socrates, to develop the funeral oration as a figure of the fifth century Athenian civic imaginary.

Plato's theoretical and political investments in the funeral oration are not explicit. And yet, as with the *Republic* and the *Timaeus*, the *Menexenus* theorizes the aspirations and ends of political life in Athens.¹⁷⁵ Critical of Pericles's self-referential valorization of Athens – an idealization of civic relations, albeit one rooted in the material pursuit of power – Plato constructs a city in speech. In both instances, community is figured as a discursive ideal mobilized within the imagination of listeners, inspiring a sense of belonging and propriety.

175 "The *epitaphioi* and the *Republic* both offer images that self-consciously aim not to describe Athenian life accurately, but to illuminate the political and personal virtues to which people should aspire, that is, to illuminate the possibilities of the city." Sara Monoson, "Remembering Pericles," *Political Theory* 226 no. 4, (August 1998): 489-513, 505. "The Platonic city irresistibly suggests the city of the *epitaphioi*. Characterized like it by unity, the polis of the philosopher, like that of the orators, knows none of the mistakes and difficulties of earlier humanity." Loraux, *The Invention of Athens*, 301. See also Plato's *Timaeus*, in particular lines 17a – 20c, for a description of Plato's ideal polis.

For Pericles, both citizen and city pursue their association self-consciously. This is implied by the metaphor of being a lover of one's city [2.43.1].¹⁷⁶ Bonds of citizenship are affirmed by a conscious decision: "that which makes the splendor of the present and the glory of the future remains forever unforgotten. Make your decision, therefore, for glory then and honor now, and attain both objects by instant and zealous effort" [2.64.5-6]. As Pericles makes clear, civic attachment is forged through a memory that not only tends toward identification with the greater good but with the fortune of the imperial *polis*.

Plato is suspicious of this model of civic relations, for it deliberately obfuscates truth in its pursuit of material interest. Incapable of sustaining critical inquiry, unable to instruct the *demos* in matters of truth and justice, Pericles's speech neglects what is most central to Plato's philosophical project, that is, the proper formation of the individual soul. It is with this imperative in mind that Socrates advances an alternate model of citizenship founded on familial relations and the ethical obligations there derived.

It is not on account of their actions that Socrates honors those who accept "death in exchange for the safety of the living." Before "proclaiming the nobility of their deeds," we find him admiring "the nobility of their birth," praising "their nurture and education" [237a-b]. Rather than exalt the intentions of the dead,¹⁷⁷ he reserves his reverence for tangible objects:

176 Political theorist Sara Monoson explains: "citizens must be thought of as *freely choosing* to enter into a relation with a city after having been attracted by its charms and virtues, opportunities and strengths. This *free choice* further implies that citizens have a direct, unmediated relation to the city." Monoson, "Remembering Pericles," 500. Emphasis added.

177 Socrates praises the military virtue of the dead only after recalling the nobility of their birth: "It is therefore proper to praise those men too who fought that war and now lie here ... For these men proved this, by prevailing when Greece was divided in fraternal strife, by besting those who stood first among the rest of Greece" [242e]. "These men also ought to be remembered and praised, for it was by their virtue that we conquered not only in the sea battle but in the whole war" [243d]. Pericles explicitly emphasizes the intention behind the deed: "voluntary death in battle is proof that the individual has seen the worth of the community and constitutes the highest form of *arête*." Bosworth, "The Historical Context of Thucydides' Funeral Oration," 6.

place of origin and the constitution of the Athenian *politea*. “Sprung from the land itself,” the first Athenians were nurtured “by their mother, the land wherein they dwell. And now in death they lie in the place that is proper to them, received back again by the mother who bore and nurtured them” [237c]. Socrates extends the maternal metaphor to the Athenian *politea*: “We and those who belong to us, all of us brothers sprung from a single mother, ... our equal birth according to nature compels us to seek equal rights according to law” [238e-239a]. To secure the filial bond between the living and the dead, Socrates invokes the memory of a noble birth, reminding his audience of their inter- and intra- generational obligations.

Insofar as inborn nobility is a rhetorical construct, its memory sustains a political order founded on bonds of kinship. Jacques Derrida explains: “as long as they remain faithful to the memory of their dead, to the fathers of their dead, they are bound by this testamentary tie.”¹⁷⁸ Unlike Pericles’s valorization of Athenian virtue, and the democratic institutions that sustain it, Socrates venerates a testamentary tie, an act of memory meant to secure the authority of the past. “A monumental memory begins by instituting them in telling them who they really are. The memory of their dead – their fathers of noble birth – recalls nothing less than their truth, their truth qua political truth ... The obligatory necessity of this bond of memory forms the condition of their political freedom,” which is founded on a fact of birth as opposed to an effect of action.¹⁷⁹

3.1

A rhetorical shift occurs midway through Socrates’s oration, away from its initial parody of the *epitaphios logos*, to a genuine theorization of the social and political import of memory

¹⁷⁸ Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, 100.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 100.

and mourning. This change of tone, from satirical critique to somber reflection, is marked by Socrates's consolation to those surviving fallen Athenians. In the voice of the dead, we hear Socrates instruct the living. "Let them then look to our wives and children, care for them and nurture them, so that they may forget this misfortune and thereby live lives more beautiful, more upright, and more pleasant to us" [248c]. Mourning in moderation – indeed, forgetfulness – is deemed beautiful, upright, and pleasing. "It is not by grief or lamentation that they [the living] will most gratify us ... behaving badly toward themselves and bearing their misfortunes with a heavy heart, but that they will most delight us if they bear it lightly and moderately" [248b].¹⁸⁰ On Socrates's account, mourning masters memory by closing the past off to anything that might disrupt how one lives in the present. Healing by way of detachment, mourning involves an inward and forward-looking perspective structurally committed to the past: the less I concern myself with the dead, the better I behave toward them. In other words, the dead are best remembered when they are not.

This proves difficult, insofar as the dead place demands on the living. "Citizens who have died to protect the well-being of their nurturing 'parents' – the land and constitution (freedom) – now matter-of-factly declare that they expect, indeed, are entitled to, something quite specific in return: 'We bid the city care for our parents and our sons, fittingly educating the one, worthily tending the other.'"¹⁸¹ As a surrogate parent, the city is responsible for educating and outfitting orphaned children.¹⁸² "While they are still children she [Athens] stands to them in the figure of a father, and when they reach manhood, she sends them to their own pursuits

180 "Bear the misfortune more gently," Socrates explains, "and most easily will [you] heal and be healed" [249c].

181 Monoson, "Remembering Pericles," 504.

182 Pericles's oration claims that orphaned "children will be brought up till manhood at the public expense" [2.46.1].

arrayed in full armor, indicating and reminding them of the pursuits of their fathers by giving them the tools of their fathers' virtue" [249a-b]. From the perspective of the fallen citizen-soldier, the city should not only tend to the material support of its children, so that their orphanhood is forgotten, it should also provide the necessary military training with which to acquire a virtue befitting a beautiful death. To secure the fraternal order, Socrates's speech attributes a fated and false choice to both the living and the dead in the hope of establishing a paternal relay between fathers and sons.¹⁸³

Socrates's filial model of civic relations is problematic for the way it not only reinforces gender distinctions but also subsumes political action to ethical imperatives. Moreover, his oration illustrates the militarism of the practice: "You must make it your wholehearted desire, to excel both us and those who went before us in renowned glory," and to "take care not to abuse or squander the reputation of your ancestors" [247a-b]. The explicit reference given by Socrates to the future exploits of survivors brings the testamentary tie full circle: the memory that begins with a noble birth ends with a beautiful death. This equivalence is made possible by distancing the subject in mourning from the particulars of the events left to memory. Turning feelings of attachment and loss into feelings of association and solidarity, Socrates prescribes mourning for the purpose of domesticating memory within a politically disaffected community.¹⁸⁴ With a

183 "The fine death is the model of a civic choice that is both free and determined." It attributes the same choice and the same end to the collective dead so that "their example may inspire emulation among the survivors, ... that a glorious death distinguishes a man from the rest of mankind, which awaits its fate passively." Loraux, *The Invention of Athens*, 104.

184 Ancients scholar Stephen Salkever explains: "The prosopopoeia, unlike Pericles' speech, does not call on the survivors to try to match the virtue of the dead by an all-embracing erotic commitment to Athens; nor does it hold out to them the promise of immortal life as part of the undying memory of Athenian greatness. Instead, the living are urged to do better than the dead and to do so in a truly extraordinary but thoroughly Platonic way – by interpreting the Delphic motto *Meden agan* (nothing in excess) to mean that one's virtue depends wholly on oneself and that one ought to treat life and death lightly and moderately." Salkever, "Socrates' Aspasian Oration: The Play of Philosophy and Politics in Plato's *Menexenus*," 140.

moralizing view to living life well, rather than a materialistic orientation to worldly power and earthly immortality, Socrates advises willful forgetfulness. The model of civic relations figured by his address amounts to a politically disaffecting retreat from memory.

Plato's discussion of burial rights in the *Laws* furthers this point. Legislators, the Athenian claims, best serve their community by depriving death the immediacy of its signifying power. Once a man is dead there is little that can be done. "We should never waste our substance in the fancy that he who was so much to us is the bulk of this flesh that is being committed to its grave." The living have a duty to "make the best of the case and to keep expenditure on what is, as it were, an altar of the dead about which no spirit hovers, within modest bounds."¹⁸⁵ As the Athenian makes clear, burial is a practical concern and a familial obligation. Though "to command or forbid tears would be unseemly," it is the duty of the legislator to "prohibit the carrying of a corpse through the public streets and the raising of cries as the mourners traverse through them."¹⁸⁶ While these sanctions protect the city from possible disease and infection, and mitigate the upwelling of unnecessary grief (helping those in mourning come to terms with loss), they also prevent memory from entering the realm of politics, and thus weaken its ability to critically inform one's relation to the past.

The Athenian's prescription to dissociate oneself from the objects of mourning (the corpse, the altar) affirms Socrates's idealization. This suggests that for Plato, public burial should neither demoralize nor honor the living, but should instead look to the past as a resource from which to draw lessons in civic virtue, on the battlefield and off. While there is the risk that memorializing the great deeds of the past will crush the living with a sense of their own

185 Plato, *Laws*, from *The Collected Dialogues*, eds., Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), [959c-d].

186 Plato, *Laws*, [959e-960a].

insufficiency – incapacitating them by feeling that they are little more than latecomers – both Socrates of the *Menexenus* and the Athenian legislator of the *Laws* attempt to secure a ground from which the present can appropriate the past without being buried by its symbolic weight. Remembering the dead ought to inspire action tempered by reason.

In book three of the *Republic*, Socrates describes mourning as an effeminate and distorting form of self-pity: “we should be right in doing away with the lamentations of men of note and in attributing them to women, ... in order that those whom we say we are breeding for the guardianship of the land may disdain to act like these.”¹⁸⁷ If guardians are to rule by the demands of justice, they need to be distanced from the corruptibility and equivocation of emotion. By implication, they ought to be removed from the dissimulating effects of mourning, which, unable to attain truth, can only grasp at images and representations. A properly civic relation to death means mourning, if at all, in moderation.

For Plato, mourning is a source of unreason that needs to be tamed by sobering dialectic and moral custom. The critique of mimesis and tragedy found in the *Republic* underscores this point.¹⁸⁸

The better nature in each of us, not having been sufficiently trained by reason or habit, allows the sympathetic element to break loose because the sorrow is another's; and the spectator fancies that there can be no disgrace to himself in praising and pitying any one who, while professing to be a brave man, gives way to untimely lamentation.¹⁸⁹

187 Plato, *Republic*, Book 3, [387e-388a]. In Thucydides's *History* Pericles's exhortation to the widowed strikes a similar cord, emphasizing that glory is awarded when women are least talked about among men. “Their disposition should remain unchanged and their ritual lament should be marked by self-control. If I must say anything on the subject of female excellence to those of you who will now be in widowhood, it will be all comprised in this brief exhortation. Great will be your glory in not falling short of your natural character; and greatest will be hers who is least talked of among the men whether for good or for bad” [2.45.2].

188 “What a truly ‘good man’ is able to control in his private life is, through the function of mimesis, turned into a public spectacle.” Olga Taxidou, *Tragedy, Modernity, and Mourning* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 164.

189 Plato, *Republic*, Book 10, [606a-606c].

Witnessing the suffering and grieving of others corrupts the rational (dispassionate) elements of thought. In other words, lamentation is untimely because it sympathetically identifies with the dead body, ‘a bulk of flesh being committed to its grave.’ The debasing effects of mourning thus need to be replaced with alternate feelings of attachment. Through a secularized language of glory and virtue, the funeral oration provides such an alternative, sublating individual sadness and uncertainty into a communal sentiment of civic patriotism.¹⁹⁰ Public burial thus appropriates the dead, a faceless and nameless whole, absorbing¹⁹¹ the individual citizen into the universal of the state.¹⁹²

3.2

In their introductory essay to Derrida’s *The Work of Mourning*, Michael Naas and Pascale-Anne Brault claim that rather than being an address to the dead and the past, the funeral oration is directed toward the present and the living. “What we must recognize in every funeral oration, in every memorial and gathering and tribute, is that everything we say of and even to the

190 “In refusing to lament over soldiers who had sacrificed their lives for it, the city declared that it represented all reality and the principle of all life: the *pothos* of the dead ... must be replaced by the ever-renewed memory of the valor of those who had fallen.” Loraux, *The Invention of Athens*, 47.

191 The predominant psychoanalytic reading figures mourning as a process of detachment and appropriation. In “Mourning and Melancholia,” Sigmund Freud describes mourning as a detachment that arises in “reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one’s country, liberty, and ideal, and so on.” Whether literal or symbolic, mourning attempts to break the affective attachment between a lost object and the subject in mourning. Separation begins with memory: “each single one of the memories and expectations in which the libido is bound to the object is brought up and hypercathected,” such that the lost other is interiorized by the surviving self in a process of recollection and assimilation. See Sigmund Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia” (1917), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: Hogarth Press, 1966), vol. xiv, 234, 245. Read through a Derridean frame, mourning fails because “the otherness of the other installs within any process of appropriation ... an undecidable irresolution that forever prevents the two from closing over their rightful, ideal, proper coherence ... over their death.” If being faithful to the other implies mourning its loss, and if mourning implies interiorization through memory, then the failure of memory betrays a greater fidelity. Fidelity to the other, or to the other’s memory, would mean coming to terms with the necessary incompleteness of incorporation. See Jacques Derrida, “Fors: The English Words of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok,” trans. Barbara Johnson, from *The Wolfman’s Magic Word: A Cryptonymy*, Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok, trans. Nicholas Rand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), xxii.

192 “It seems very clear that the government has the right to bury its own soldiers, and to see to it that their graves shall not remain unknown or unhonored.” *U.S. v. Gettysburg Electric R. Co.*, 160 U.S. 668, 683 (1896).

friend remains hopelessly *in us* or *between us* the living.” Mourning, thus understood, “opens up the possibility of a political space to accommodate all the others.”¹⁹³ Similarly, performance studies and tragedy scholar Olga Taxidou argues that “mourning comprises a discursive *topos* that examines the function of the law, the citizen, gender, and the power over the dead and the past in the new democratic *polis*. It becomes the site where the subject-in-the-making is confronted with the *polis-in-the-making*.”¹⁹⁴ Mourning emphasizes the mutual implication of the two emergent forms. If psychoanalytic accounts of mourning (figured through notions of detachment and loss) are right to argue for the centrality of mourning in processes of identity formation, then the funeral oration of fifth-century Athens, when read as an act of collective mourning, constitutes the civic identity proper to the imperial *polis*.

As I have argued, the Athenian funeral oration, as represented by Plato and Thucydides, informs the identity of a community struggling to articulate a proper mode of civic identification.¹⁹⁵ The practice reinforces Athenian sovereignty by making strategic use of the shared significations that determine the ethical values and moral weight of civic responsibility. To achieve this effect, it suppresses questions concerning the distribution of power, autonomy, and equality that lay at the heart of democracy (was Athenian democracy “government by the first citizen”? [2.65.9]), while failing to address the question of democracy’s relation to empire, i.e., Athenian ‘tributary’ rule over other Greek city-states (were Athenian allies subjects, suppliants, clients, or equals?). It creates an image of a dynamic and energetic *polis* for its

193 Naas and Brault, *The Work of Mourning*, 10, 19. This recalls a previous thesis of Loraux: “To praise any Athenians in Athens amounts, then, to praising *the* Athenians, all Athenians, dead and alive, and above all ‘we who are still living,’ those who coincide with the city’s present: such is the scarcely veiled purpose of the funeral oration exposed by Plato in the *Menexenus*.” Loraux, *The Invention of Athens*, 2.

194 Taxidou, *Tragedy, Modernity, and Mourning*, 187.

195 “The shift in funeral rites from the family to the jurisdiction of the state can be read as a founding aspect of the development of that very city state.” Taxidou, *Tragedy, Modernity, and Mourning*, 177.

citizens to imagine and consume, while foreclosing a critical relation to community and its multiple pasts. By distorting history, the funeral oration is able to impose an imaginary identity that preserves the permanence of Athenian hegemony at the expense of political relations constitutive of democratic community.

3.3

It is in the nature of groups not only to revisit but rewrite history according to their particular interest. Whether or not such interest reclaims pieces or disfigures entire blocks of the past is up to various custodians of memory: historians, artists, and government officials. The memory of a founding event (*autochthony*) or a punctuated moment (death in battle) can lend legitimacy to claims of belonging to a collective identity, or affirm a sense of propriety in a common history.¹⁹⁶ Informing both civic relations and how these relations are understood vis-à-vis the past, the Athenian funeral oration both affirms and legitimizes the social and political order of the present, i.e. it preserves the status quo (an effect shared by modern forms of memorialization, as we shall see in Chapter 2). As the source of an authorized ‘official’ history, the speech reminds its citizens of their communal obligations through stock lessons of civic morality. Yet the lessons it teaches and the actions it intends to inspire ignore the particulars of the present, namely, the circumstances contributing to the death being memorialized, and thus cut short the self-reflective practice of critical inquiry fundamental to democratic life.

What, then, does the funeral oration tell us about modern practices of commemoration and memorial? What lessons are we to draw from the practice regarding the use and abuse of memory? For ancients and moderns alike, the past is a resource upon which established systems

¹⁹⁶ Cohen writes: “The funeral speeches actually are striking illustrations of nation building ... Athenian examples of the common use of historical fabrication and mythical tales to confirm a nation’s connection to a particular territory and a specific history.” Cohen, *The Athenian Nation*, 96.

of authority claim legitimacy.¹⁹⁷ Though it may be “a cliché of contemporary social theory,” to say “that political communities are the products of imagination constructed by a variety of socio-cultural products,” the fact remains that the constitution of a community is an act of inclusion and exclusion.¹⁹⁸ Social partitioning plays on the shared significations that determine the ethical value and moral orientation of political community; these understandings draw upon memory to play a formative role in its consolidation. However, it is important – from a democratic perspective – that these understandings be open to the critical judgments of the public they are intended to inform.

To conclude, I would like to revisit the symbolic economy of the funeral oration by counterposing two readings of Pericles’s speech: one by Hannah Arendt, the other by Friedrich Nietzsche. I introduce these readings here to anticipate certain themes that recur throughout subsequent chapters. Arendt and Nietzsche provide a means of passage, from the ancients to the moderns, and from a discursive mode of memorialization to those that are more material in form.

4.

Plato’s *Menexenus* is not only a moral, political, and philosophical indictment of the funeral oration, it is a critique of memory and its mimetic qualities.¹⁹⁹ Recall that when asked by

197 For Cohen, Plato’s *Kallipolis* proves how communal interest justifies the cultivation of a founding myth: “In Plato’s Republic, the ideal community’s cohesion and homogeneity are explicitly dependent on its inhabitants’ false belief, purposefully inculcated by the lawgiver, that their predecessors were not born of human parents but fashioned in the earth itself” (Plato, Republic, 3.414d2-e3). “In the Republic, promulgating a foundation ‘myth’ for Kallipolis (the ideal community of that dialogue), Sokrates contends that such stories – immune from disproof because of people’s lack of direct knowledge of distant prior events – are critical to group cohesion. Even if communal leaders know these origin tales to be false, says Sokrates, such a creation tale is a ‘noble lie.’” Cohen, *The Athenian Nation*, 102.

198 Sanford Levinson, *Written in Stone* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 84.

199 For Plato, *mneme* refers to the memory of an origin, a passive and involuntary reception or appearing through affection. *Anamnesis* refers to memory as an object of an intentional search, an active recall or recollection, an attempt to overcome forgetfulness [the prefix *ana-* meaning return, retaking, recovering]. Because memory is subject to external affections, it is considered to be one of the lower forms of knowledge. Insofar as remembering can be confused with imagining, the faithfulness corresponding to the truth claim of memory is open to question.

Menexenus if he remembers Aspasia's oration well enough to recite it, Socrates responds: "I'd be reprehensible if I didn't. I learned it from her, and nearly got a whipping for whatever I forgot" [236b-c]. Rather than learn from Aspasia's speech, appropriate its structure and create his own, Socrates employs rote memorization. His unthought repetition provides neither knowledge nor understanding.²⁰⁰ This is one of the reasons why Plato disparages memory to be inferior to knowledge.²⁰¹ Yet for Pericles, the selfless deeds of those who die in battle manifest a good as great as anything that can be known, where there is "enshrined in every breast a record unwritten with no monument to preserve it, except that of the heart" [2.43.3]. How do we reconcile these conflicting views on memory?

In *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt repeatedly refers to Pericles's insistence that the *polis* assures "the mortal actor that his passing existence and fleeting greatness will never lack the reality that comes from being seen, being heard, and, generally, appearing before an audience of fellow men." "The organization of the *polis*," she writes "is a kind of organized

Plato's *eikon*, image or likeness, signifies the representation of something absent that is made manifest with the help of the imagination. In Plato's *Theaetetus*, Socrates suggests that human minds contain something like a block of wax, of varying consistency, shape, and size. He continues: "Let us recall the gift of the Muses' mother, Memory, and say that whenever we wish to remember something we see or hear or conceive in our own minds, we hold this wax under the perceptions or ideas and imprint them on it as we might stamp the impression of a seal ring. Whatever is so imprinted we remember and know so long as the image remains; whatever is rubbed out or has not succeeded in leaving an impression we have forgotten and do not know." Recollection is the recognition of an imprint, a signifying mark. The image recalled represents a former perception. *Phantasma*, what is imagined, is the inscription and the *eikon* is the reference to the inscription's other. Plato, *Theaetetus*, from *The Collected Dialogues*, eds., Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), [191d], 897.

200 As Ekaterina Haskins makes clear, "Plato demarcates the province of philosophy while indicating that philosophy is a purely educational pursuit," offering "a promise of liberating oneself from a bondage to one's cultural context by rendering cultural memory, in its various discursive instantiations, a mere substratum of true knowledge." See Haskins, "Philosophy, Rhetoric, and Cultural Memory: Rereading Plato's *Menexenus* and Isocrates' *Panegyricus*," 34.

201 For Plato, knowing means actively pursuing and attaining knowledge, whereas memory implies its mere possession. When one possesses knowledge in the form of memory, such that they can retrieve and deploy it at the time of their choosing, one is said to have control over the pieces of knowledge, though, according to Plato, he or she has none of them. Petar Ramadanovic, *Forgetting Futures: On Memory, Trauma, and Identity* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2001), 32-33.

remembrance.”²⁰² Having forced every sea and land to be the highway of their daring, Athenians have left behind imperishable monuments, the kind of fame and glory that holds fast to memory. This is the truth content of Pericles’s claim, that individual sacrifice for the good of the city merits earthly immortality, a reputation that never grows old. Arendt’s notions of plurality and action, and to a large extent her conception of politics, draw on this claim. “What is outstandingly clear in Pericles’ formulations,” she argues, “is that the innermost meaning of the acted deed and the spoken word is independent of victory and defeat and must remain untouched by any eventual outcome, by their consequences for better or worse.”²⁰³ For Arendt, speech and action enjoy a life nurtured by the activities of an engaged public, regardless of what these human abilities ultimately achieve.

Arendt’s reading of Pericles, I argue, does not so much misrepresent his understanding of earthly immortality, as it elides the militaristic upshot of his position.²⁰⁴ On Pericles’s account, Athenians have the whole earth for their tomb provided they successfully meet the challenges of war, that is, by sacrificing their lives for the development of the material power of Athens. Arendt is right to suggest that action is at home in the *polis*, where stories keep the past alive in memory, yet she fails to acknowledge that for Pericles this memory and its claim to greatness is

202 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), 198.

203 *Ibid.*, 205.

204 Though Arendt does not directly theorize the Athenian funeral oration, her comments on Thucydides’s representation of Pericles’s speech romanticize its rhetorical strategy. For Arendt, the Greek *peithein* characterizes “the kind of rhetoric persuasion that was valued in the polis as the preferred means of conducting political dialogue. *Peithein* was not only opposed to the physical violence they despised; it was also clearly distinguished from the properly philosophical *dialeghestai* ... which, like the search for truth, required conclusive proof.” Arendt rightly insists that in culture and politics the activities of thinking and judging are paramount, neither of which culminate in universal truths, but provisional meanings. However, she ignores the way in which rhetoric – and the funeral oration’s manipulation of memory makes this clear – can effect the kind of physical violence that she opposes to the world-building power of political persuasion. See Hannah Arendt, “The Permanence of the World and the Work of Art,” in *Reflections on Literature and Culture*, ed. Susannah Young-Ah Gottlieb (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 200.

gained by way of force, which for Athenians, their allies, and surely their enemies, comes at the expense of freedom. As classicist Gregory Crane explains:

When Perikles calls upon the citizens of Athens to lose themselves in their adoration of the polis, he undermines the distinctness of its citizens. Athens becomes an embodiment of power, and this power seduces each subject into the same position of submission and adoration. The power that makes of each Athenian an *erastês* [lover] foreshadows the ideological schemes and historical necessities that would make the supporters of Hitler and Stalin sacrifice their lives as well as their individuality to a truth that supposedly transcended human values.²⁰⁵

According to Crane, Arendt misrecognizes Pericles's valorization of Athenian power in terms of political community, ignoring the militaristic and collectivist agenda advanced by his speech.

This blind-spot in Arendt's reading of the oration neglects the fact that when used for instrumental pursuits, as in the case of Pericles, memory conflates time and space, thereby obfuscating internal division and neutralizing disagreement within the community. Such neutralization manifests an idealized citizen-subject: *And so died these men as became Athenians*. Thus, Pericles's oration proves the practice to be an ideological strategy, rightly criticized by Plato (and Nietzsche, as we shall soon see) for its inability to stimulate critical reflection on the ethical demands of community.

Alternatively, Socrates's speech directs "attention away from earthly immortality and political greatness" and toward a concern with living life as well as possible, "asking us to take our bearings in politics from our nature, rather than from a narrative of remarkable events."²⁰⁶

Yet Plato does not go far enough. The mock oration he portrays in the *Menexenus* presents

205 Gregory Crane, *Thucydides and the Ancient Simplicity: The Limits of Political Realism* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), 322.

206 "The lesson taught by the deeds of the war dead shifts from a standing inspiration to future heroism to a reminder of the importance of keeping your place in the hoplite phalanx and of trying at all times – not just in the pressure-filled *kairos* (critical moment) – to live the best life you can." Salkever, "Socrates' Aspasian Oration: The Play of Philosophy and Politics in Plato's *Menexenus*," 139-140.

memory as a moral imperative informed by familial duties and the virtues of filial piety.

Circumscribing memory to an ethical domain, Plato's reproach of Pericles's strategic use of memory fails to provide an adequate account of the political potential of memory to inspire judgments productive of meaning and understanding.

4.1

Arendt is right to suggest that the *polis* is a form of organized remembrance. Memory makes the intangible durable. Reflecting on the Greek *mnemosyne*, which signifies both the act of remembering and remembrance itself, Arendt argues that "it is through thinking and remembering that reality is revaluated. This revaluation makes it possible to arrest and objectify the intangible, namely events and deeds and words and stories." The Greeks sought an earthly immortality that could be "assured by poets through productive objectification, and by the polis through ceaseless narrative commemoration."²⁰⁷ It is through this latter form of narrative commemoration that Athens attempts to realize its potential immortality, to make something of itself durable in memory. Yet as we have seen, the funeral oration cuts-short the politically enabling power of memory to inspire critical reflection and judgment.

Death is mourned for the purpose of consolidating and imposing order on community. Insofar as the practice equates the death of Athenian citizens with the immortal life and material power of the *polis*, there is no need to judge the reasons, justifications, motivations, and causes of war. In effect, the funeral oration manifests an unthought acceptance, rather than an active affirmation of death (what Arendt identifies as understanding, that is, a form of reconciliation

207 Arendt, "The Permanence of the World and the Work of Art," in *Reflections on Literature and Culture*, ed. Susannah Young-Ah Gottlieb (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 191.

with the fact of human mortality). Thus, the funeral oration forsakes the democratic potential of memory by imposing meaning on a politically disaffected community.

As Arendt makes clear, reflections on loss and human mortality must cultivate judgments productive of meaning, which cannot be fixed to fictionalized conceptions, determinative judgments, or eternal ideas, but must relate to democratic practices of thinking and acting productive of community. Noting the way in which legends, “the spiritual foundations of every ancient city, empire, [and] people,” have the ability to effect historical changes of fact, Arendt argues:

The truth of the ancient legends ... was nothing but the form in which past events were made to fit the human condition in general and political aspirations in particular. Only in the frankly invented tale about events did man consent to assume his responsibility for them, and to consider past events *his* past. Legends made him master of what he had not done, and capable of dealing with what he could not undo.²⁰⁸

Offering “a truth beyond realities, a remembrance beyond memories,” legends, like the founding myth of Athenian *autochthony* contained within the funeral oration, provide explanations and interpretations of the past.

However, unlike the oration, Arendt’s legend remains bound to the realm of objective fact. “Legends,” she writes, “are not ideologies; they do not aim at universal explanation but are always concerned with concrete facts.”²⁰⁹ In both instances, the present becomes the heir of past events, and as such, responsible for and indebted to history. Yet what distinguishes Arendt’s legend from the funeral oration is the former’s insistence on a decision, that is, a critical act of judgment – in memory, one rediscovers the past so to change their relation to it. The emphasis here is on interpretation, which is not a license to distort historical fact for political gain. “Even

208 Arendt, “The Imperialist Character (On Kipling),” in *Reflections on Literature and Culture*, 168.

209 *Ibid.*, 168.

if we admit that every generation has the right to write its own history, we admit no more than that it has the right to rearrange the facts in accordance with its own perspective; we don't admit the right to touch the factual matter itself."²¹⁰ Organizing facts according to one's own perspective implies an act of judgment over the past, not a strategic manipulation of history.

Arendt praises the ancient poets and historians, notably Homer, Herodotus, and Thucydides, for their ability to prevent “the great and wonderful actions of the Greeks *and* the barbarians from losing their due meed of glory.” Releasing themselves from the particular interests of their audience and their community, these historians judged with impartiality what they deemed to be worthy of praise and reproach without succumbing to the convention, later exemplified by modern historicism, of empathizing and identifying with the victors of history (discussed in Chapter 2). “Homer decided to sing the deeds of the Trojans no less than those of the Achaeans, and to praise the glory of Hector no less than the greatness of Achilles.” On Arendt's account, Thucydides's speeches of warring parties are a living testimony to the extraordinary degree of Homeric impartiality practiced by the ancient historians.²¹¹ “To look upon friend and foe, upon success and defeat,” is characteristic of the impartiality practiced by the ancient poets and historians, which, according to Arendt, is necessary for a critical practice of reflective judgment.²¹²

210 “Writing history inevitably involves organizing and arranging facts according to one's subjective preference, that is, what is or is not relevant will change with each perspective. Yet, there should be no argument ‘against the existence of factual matter.’” Hannah Arendt, “Truth and Politics,” in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin, 1993), 238-239.

211 Arendt, “The Concept of History,” in *Between Past and Future*, 51.

212 Arendt, “Truth and Politics,” in *Between Past and Future*, 263. “The Western world has hitherto, even in its darkest periods, granted the slain enemy the right to be remembered as a self-evident acknowledgement of the fact that we are all men (and only men). It is only because even Achilles set out for Hector's funeral, only because the most despotic governments honored the slain enemy, only because the Romans allowed the Christians to write their martyrologies, only because the Church kept its heretics alive in the memory of men, that all was not lost and never could be lost.” Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, 1979), 452.

Yet if one wants to draw a connection between such judgment and the organizing power of the Athenian *polis*, following Nietzsche, “one should not invoke the glorificatory speech of Pericles: for it is no more than a grand, optimistic illusion as to the supposedly necessary connection between the *polis* and Athenian culture; immediately before night descends on Athens (the plague and the rapture of tradition), Thucydides makes it rise resplendent once again, like a transfiguring evening glow in whose light the evil day that preceded it could be forgotten.”²¹³ On Nietzsche’s count, the oration is a perversion of reality, an illusion dulling the critical faculties of its audience.

Nietzsche offers a more tempered reading of Pericles's valorization of Athenian power than does Arendt. Contrary to Arendt’s interpretation of the oration, Nietzsche reveals the speech to be a symbolic distortion of reality that reinforces the distinction between the defeated of history and those who profit at their expense (the victor/victim binary, and its political implications on historiography and contemporary memorial architecture, will be discussed at greater length throughout the remaining chapters). “It is the noble races that have left behind them the concept of ‘barbarism’ wherever they have gone; even their highest culture betrays a consciousness of it and even a pride in it (for example, when Pericles says to his Athenians in his famous funeral oration ‘our boldness has gained access to every land and sea, everywhere raising imperishable monuments to its goodness *and wickedness*’).”²¹⁴ As Nietzsche makes clear,

213 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits* (1878), trans., R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 174, §474.

214 Nietzsche continues: “This ‘boldness’ of noble races, mad, absurd, and sudden in its expression, the incalculability, even incredibility of their undertakings – Pericles specially commends the *rhathymia* [ease of mind, freedom from worry, light-heartedness] of the Athenians – their indifference to and contempt for security, body, life, comfort, their hair-raising cheerfulness and profound joy in all destruction, in all the voluptuousness of victory and cruelty – all this came together in the minds of those who suffered from it, in the image of the ‘barbarian,’ the ‘evil enemy.’” Friedrich Nietzsche, “On the Genealogy of Morals,” in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, trans., Walter Kaufmann (New York: The Modern Library, 1968), essay 1, §11.

Pericles strategically invokes the memory of the dead, interpreting their actions as a form of selfless devotion to the material power of the *polis*. This memory is meant to achieve conformity and preserve internal cohesion within a community coming to terms with the losses and suffering of war. And though the tone of Pericles's oration is defensive, his speech amounts to a noble spectacle of unambiguous praise of Athenian democracy intended to prevent Athenian citizens and their allies from wavering in their support of war. Thus, Nietzsche's interpretation of Pericles's funeral oration provides a welcomed corrective to that of Arendt, for it accurately portrays the practice as an ideological form of control that fixes all thought, opinion, and perspective on a singular civic identity in the service of an idealized *polis*.

That said, we should not miss the important lesson of Arendt's reading of Pericles: political community entails, in part, an organized form of remembrance. For memory to have a democratic effect on community, it needs to be evaluated reflectively, that is, without instrumental or strategic interest motivating how one understands the past and generates meaning for the present.

Chapter 2: Memory's Claim to Experience

That there is no autonomous, fully defined architecture, suggests the possibility of architecture's open-ended capacity for displacement, for new possibilities of meaning.²¹⁵

[T]he duration of an individual's experience of [the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe] grants no further understanding, since understanding is impossible.²¹⁶

-- Peter Eisenman

The first statement above, made by architect Peter Eisenman, asserts the inherent variability of architectural meaning, while the second claims, on behalf of the incommensurability of experience and knowledge, the impossibility of understanding. Together, Eisenman's claims reject the compartmentalization of architectural theory and practice into purely autonomous and functional registers.²¹⁷ As such, they interrupt the way in which places of remembrance are commonly understood, that is, as fixed sites of meaning built to inhibit forgetting. Thus, Eisenman's perspective suggests that contemporary memorial architecture should be experienced as an indeterminate site of meaning and as potentially productive of new, unforeseen meanings. Foregoing traditional means of representation and referential significance, memorial architecture gives rise to spaces and forms that break with the monumentalism and didacticism of traditional memorials and monuments.

215 Peter Eisenman, *Houses of Cards* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 182.

216 Peter Eisenman, "Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe," in *Materials on the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe*, The Foundation for the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe (Berlin: Nicolai, 2005), 12.

217 For example, Eisenman explicitly opposes architect Adolf Loos's claim that architecture is authorized by something external to its creation: "only a very small part of architecture belongs to art: the tomb and the monument. Everything else that fulfills a function is to be excluded from the domain of art." Symbolic expression, here falling within the realm of art, is circumscribed by Loos to a narrow field of architecture, to the tomb and the monument. Eisenman rejects this. Adolf Loos, "Architecture" in *Form and function: A Source Book for the History of Architecture and Design 1890-1939*, eds., Tim Benton and Charlotte Benton (London: Crosby Lockwood Staples, 1975).

Supporting Eisenman's claim is an implicit opposition between experience and knowledge, one that makes experience, rather than knowledge, responsible for the production of meaning. This view is not surprising considering Eisenman's critique of the idealist projections of humanist architecture (later adopted by functionalism and positivism), and their tendency to naturalize experience. On his account, the decentering of the modern subject has revealed it to be "a discursive function among complex and already-formed systems of language. ... It is this condition of displacement which gives rise to design in which authorship can no longer either account for a linear development which has a 'beginning' and an 'end' ... or account for the invention of form."²¹⁸ Yet can Eisenman forego generalizing the subject of a space saturated with experiential effects? Does the opposition he draws between experience and knowledge hold from the perspective of an embodied subject?

Eisenman's design for the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe (the Memorial hereafter) is a resource for thinking about experience and knowledge in relation to the body's materiality and the materiality of space. This recent example of memorial architecture, an anti-symbolic work of abstraction, does not ascend to the sphere of knowledge, to cognition, but descends to the sphere of depth, to affect, feeling, and perception. The 2,711 concrete stelae that make up the Memorial – upright rectangular shapes recalling grave slabs and stone coffins – are visually recognizable, yet they disrupt cognitive association. While traditional gravesites mark the place of those who are no longer living, thereby humanizing the ground upon which communities are built, the field of stelae fails to constitute a cemetery in any conventional sense. This is due, in part, to the scope and scale of the events and the anonymity of the individuals being memorialized.

²¹⁸ Peter Eisenman, "Post Functionalism," *Oppositions* 6 (Fall 1976).

Architecture, Eisenman remarks, can no longer remember life as it once did, that is, by appealing to symbolic imagery to represent human mortality. The functional register of the site, while commemorative and reflective, is thus meant to frustrate a synoptic narrative perspective. By questioning representation without the use of representational means, the Memorial is able to arouse empathy without excess (i.e., without shutting down the critical work of memory, which is to generate meanings on the past for which the present is ultimately responsible). The very materiality of its space – the smooth touch of the concrete surface, the varying shades of grey revealed by natural light, the proportion and scale of the field – resists the strictures of knowledge (cognitive appropriation, rational mediation) while opening itself to an unforeseeable experience.²¹⁹

Despite the range of experiences that the field of stelae accommodates, the Memorial does serve the practical function of acknowledging the victims of German National Socialism. To this effect, it conforms to one of the memorial tradition's defining features: to impede the flow of forgetting while enabling thoughtful remembrance. Though Eisenman wants to preserve a place for ambiguity within his design, functional concerns unavoidably enter its materialization. This reveals the inherent difficulty of questioning the nature of space in the act of its creation. Eisenman's design negotiates this difficulty by keeping both the history and the memory of the events in memorial active across time. Rather than respond to the challenges of memorialization with a didactic and syntactical message, the Memorial, by way of abstraction,

219 The tactile, which refers to the human capacity to perceive its environment through non-visual sense stimulation, deprioritizes the image and offers an affective experience through touch. "The liberative importance of the tactile," writes architecture theorist Kenneth Frampton, "resides in the fact that it can only be decoded in terms of experience itself: it cannot be reduced to mere information, to representation, or to the simple evocation of a simulacrum substituting for absent presences." Kenneth Frampton, "Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance" *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (New York: The New Press, 1998), 32.

offers the possibility of experiencing what it takes to be an inassimilable memory through an irresolvable space.

In this way, Eisenman questions the civic function of commemorative space. As his work suggests, the fact-based moral and message of public memorial need to be supplemented by experiential sites of mnemonic indeterminacy. Refigured as such, memorial architecture ought to provide local and immediate encounters with the past, provoking historical awareness, while also leaving the significance of both form and event open to judgment.

However, by relinquishing the organizing principle of memorial architecture – to give durable form to a timeless message – Eisenman introduces the possibilities of subjectivism, historical revisionism, and a relativization of knowledge. Insofar as he eschews an objective sense of history, his design jeopardizes the epistemic foundations of meaning.

As I argue below, the facts through which we come to know and understand history do not have intrinsic values, but need to be created in moments of remembrance and reflection. Following Eisenman, memorials ought to inspire an independence of thought and facilitate a practice of reflective judgment productive of meaning.

Forgoing the representational strategies of traditional memorial architecture, the non-narrative and abstract form of Eisenman's Memorial (discussed in the following chapter) addresses its audience without the support of an authorial stance, while provoking the labor of remembrance from those who inhabit its space. When viewed in light of Walter Benjamin's theses "On the Concept of History," this anonymous and pluralistic mode of memorialization serves as a political injunction. Without empathy or intentionality, the Memorial, like Benjamin's approach to tradition, has the potential to refigure the present's relation to

immovable pasts and indeterminate futures. The political significance given by Benjamin and Eisenman to the present in its moment of decision, redirects issues of memory, history, and experience away from subjectivist and objectivist conceptions of judgment, thereby making us see history for what it has always been: the unpredictable and contingent result of human action.

1. Historical Materialism: Benjamin and Marx

Marking a critical departure from the dominant notion of time and history as defined by the tradition of western philosophy, i.e. that which assumes a (linear) temporal structure of past, present, future, Benjamin's notion of time is one marked by constructedness and contingency. With historical materialism, the alternative Benjamin offers to dominant notions of history, time is no longer the accumulation and sequential ordering of moments, but an arresting of movement. Benjamin's punctuated notion of time [*Jetztzeit*] as now-time, articulates the temporality of an inventive and anticipatory moment of thought and action in which something new is realized by the remembrance of a misplaced, forgotten, or unknown past.²²⁰ Refigured by Benjamin, remembrance allows for more than mere recollection; it enables the emergence of new forms of thought and life. Bringing past and present into a momentary relation (what Benjamin refers to as a constellation, dialectical image, standstill, or monad), Benjamin's materialist historiography eschews the latent objectivism of memorial architecture informed by positivist historicism.

220 Eric Santner claims, "what is ultimately at issue in Benjamin's thought is the preparation of a form of remembrance that has passed over into the ethical and political dimensions of *act*." With Santner, this chapter develops a political account of Benjamin's notion of remembrance, understood as both a recuperative gesture and an interruptive act. Reanimating the past "can take place only based on and as a fundamental political decision to act; there can be no neutral place from which such work intervenes into the past. That is the central point of Benjamin's *Jetztzeit* – the present situation of danger and crisis." Eric Santner, *On Creaturely Life: Rilke, Benjamin, Sebald* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 89, 62.

For Benjamin, history is not the once-and-for-all of time, but the “blasting of historical continuity with which the historical object first constitutes itself.”²²¹ Translated into the terms of memorial architecture, Benjamin charges history with more than the pedagogical function of imparting immutable truths. Not only should it generate awareness and cultivate understanding, it ought to leave the meaning of that which is being remembered an open question in the present so to avoid narrative closure delimiting of political possibility.

Traversing the field of architecture to question the narrativization of history in built form will bring to relief the relation of memory to politics.²²² But before developing Benjamin’s materialist historiography and its bearing on a politically enabling practice of remembrance, it is important to consider Benjamin’s departure from teleological conceptions of history, first from that of Marx, then from modern conceptions of history more generally. Distinguishing Benjamin’s past-oriented historical materialism from Marx’s future-directed historical dialectic introduces the novelty and force of Benjamin’s critique of progress.²²³ While Benjamin is also concerned with the future, he distances himself from certain iterations of Marx’s thought by stressing the contingent nature of human relations and the unpredictable effects they have on history.

221 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), [N10a,1], 475.

222 “The objects people used and the built environment they inhabited were important media in which a sense of the past was configured and communicated. Read as a source in its own right, such evidence can provide important clues about the unfolding dichotomy between history and memory.” Maiken Umbach, “Memory and Historicism: Reading Between the Lines of the Built Environment, Germany c. 1900,” *Representations* 88 (Fall 2004): 28.

223 To anticipate Benjamin’s departure from enlightenment notions of progress, consider [N2,2] from convolute N of Benjamin’s *Arcades Project*: “It may be considered one of the methodological objectives of this work to demonstrate a historical materialism which has annihilated within itself the idea of progress. Just here, historical materialism has every reason to distinguish itself sharply from bourgeois habits of thought. Its founding concept is not progress but actualization.” Actualization is active and engaged, whereas progress, following Theodor Adorno reading Benjamin, is passive and politically detached: “part of the dialectic of progress is that historical setbacks, which are themselves instigated by the principle of progress, ... also provide the condition needed for humanity to find the means to avert them in the future.” Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 460. See Theodor Adorno, “Progress,” (1964) *Can One Live after Auschwitz?*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 138.

Marx's materialist conception of history begins with a critique of Hegelian idealism. We recall that for Hegel, history conforms to an idea whose worldly appearance is experienced in its material effects. Marx inverts the relation between Hegel's Absolute Idea and material reality.²²⁴ According to Marx, Hegelian dialectics suffers from a 'mystification' – "with him it is standing on its head. It must be inverted in order to discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell."²²⁵ By extracting the 'rational kernel' of Hegel's dialectic, that is, the insight that the ideal world of the mind reflects the material world of man, Marx is able to develop a theory of history defined by economic contradiction, the production and reproduction of material life. This teleological conception of history asserts the primacy of the economic organization of society: human history is determined according to the ways in which individuals produce their means of subsistence. With Marx, the economic structure of society, that which is perpetually constituted by the sum total of the relations of production, is "the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness."²²⁶ The action of groups and individuals provides the specific content of history, whose general form is class conflict.²²⁷

224 "My dialectical method is, in its foundations, not only different from the Hegelian, but exactly opposite to it. For Hegel, the process of thinking, which he even transforms into an independent subject, under the name of 'the Idea', is the creator of the real world, and the real world is only the external appearance of the idea. With me the reverse is true: the ideal is nothing but the material world reflected in the mind of man, and translated into forms of thought." Karl Marx, "Postface to the Second Edition," *Capital Volume I*, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 102.

225 Ibid., 103.

226 Karl Marx, "1859 Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1974), 4.

227 "History is nothing but the succession of the separate generations, each of which exploits the materials, the capital funds, the productive forces handed down to it by all preceding generations, and thus, on the one hand, continues the traditional activity in completely changed circumstances and, on the other, modifies the old circumstances with a completely changed activity." Karl Marx, "The German Ideology," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1974), 172.

Historical development conforms to a dialectical process moving from the immediate material of everyday life (economic fact), through the mediating forces of socio-economic antagonism (the contradictions of relations of production), to the realization of new historical formations and identities. “From basic economic facts,” one arrives at “the *derivation* of political, juridical, and other ideological notions, and of actions arising through the medium of these notions.”²²⁸ Contra-Hegel, Marx’s materialist dialectic does not start with intuition, but from scientific data: having abstracted socio-economic laws of motion from empirical facts, events can be explained and thus rendered historical.

In other words, Marx’s materialist conception of history applies Hegel’s dialectic to explain political action and forms of governance as effects of social and economic transformation: “With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure [the realm of politics and law] is more or less rapidly transformed.” The conflict between social productive forces and the relations of production – the contradictions of material life – alter the economic conditions of production, a transformation which, according to Marx, “can be determined with the precision of natural science.”²²⁹

From the totalizing view of Marx’s historical materialism, the natural world is seen as rational. Yet its evacuation of politics from history is an idealization. As theorist Cornelius Castoriadis persuasively argues, the historical materialism advanced by Marx and Engels

228 Friedrich Engels, “Letters on Historical Materialism,” in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1974), 760-766. “According to the materialist conception of history, the *ultimately* determining element in history is the production and reproduction of real life. More than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted.” Juridical and political institutions of society are outgrowths of economic life. Thus, the play of market forces determines the content of politics: “legal relations as well as forms of state are to be grasped neither from themselves nor from the so-called general development of the human mind, but rather have their roots in the material conditions of life,” i.e. civil society, whose “anatomy” is “to be sought in political economy.” Marx, “The German Ideology,” 4.

229 Marx, “1859 Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*,” p. 5.

does not go beyond the philosophy of history; it is simply another philosophy of history. The rationality it seems to elicit from the facts, it imposes on them. The ‘historical necessity’ it speaks of (...precisely that of a series of events that leads history towards progress) differs in no way, philosophically speaking, from Hegelian Reason.²³⁰

Opposed to Marx’s de-politicization of history, Benjamin does away with the notion of historical development as scientifically accessible and law governed. To avoid a teleological displacement of politics, Benjamin insists upon an active correspondence of past and present, which he conceives in terms of a political awakening, evoking the act of arousing, animating, and quickening that which has hitherto laid dormant: the capacity to effect worldly change through concerted action.²³¹ Asserting the primacy of politics over history – here conceived as a law-governed, goal-directed, and totalizing development of the collective singular humanity – Benjamin counters the enlightenment trajectory of undifferentiated progress with one marked by temporal rupture. Insofar as politics takes hold of history, history constitutes a political act.²³²

For Marx, politics is a witness to history. A progress bound and teleologically driven history instrumentalizes politics by referring itself to an end, thereby justifying ongoing violence in light of the greater benefits to be derived in the future. By adopting a futural perspective, Marx’s historical materialism absorbs current misuses of power, referring present exclusions to

230 Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of the Social* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998), 53.

231 Political theorist Kam Shapiro explains: “Benjamin’s ‘awakening’ refers not to enhanced self-consciousness but to the revival of the somatic potentials colonized by voluntary [intentional and instrumental] memory. Awakening is thus not a matter of becoming-conscious or representing but of redeeming or ‘activating’ the revolutionary potentials latent in the oppressive, trivial, and mundane.” Following Eric Santner, activation should not be understood “as a resurrection, an animation of the dead,” but “*a deanimation of the undead*, an interruption of the ‘ban,’ the captivation at work in the spectral fixations – the petrified unrest – that cringes/curves the psychic space of human subjects.” See Kam Shapiro, *Sovereign Nations, Carnal States* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 148; Santner, *On Creaturely Life: Rilke, Benjamin, Sebald*, 88.

232 “Politics attains primacy over history. The facts become something that just now first happened to us, first struck us; to establish them is the affair of memory. Indeed, awakening is the great exemplar of memory: the occasion on which it is given us to remember what is closest, tritest, most obvious. ... There is a not-yet-conscious knowledge of what has been: its advancement has the structure of awakening.” Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, [K1,2], 388-389.

the advance of progress (enlightenment, social justice, equality). This idea of progress neglects regress: technological and economic development, confused by market forces as social and political advances, suppresses its originary violence.²³³ Projecting history onto a goal whose development is regularized according to scientifically observable laws, Marx's materialist dialectic negates [*aufheben*] suffering, domination, and oppression.²³⁴ A punctuated act of remembrance, as found in Benjamin's materialist historiography, exposes the manner in which the achievements of the present are bought at the expense of the past.

As we shall see, Benjamin's historical materialism does not view progress as inevitable or necessary.²³⁵ For there to be genuine material progress throughout society, it is necessary that individuals think critically about the histories that inform their expectations and guide their actions. Thinking critically involves confronting what is yet to be understood, which means actively reading and reflectively judging, without which, the projection of history onto predetermined goals would exhaust our understanding of worldly phenomena and evacuate time of meaningful experiences in the present.

2. Historical Materialism: Benjamin and Historicism

233 The modern notion of progress (of which Marx's historical materialism is a variant) is understood as a historical, rather than a biological or natural concept. No longer bound to action, the idea of progress refers to an automated, mechanized, historical given. Thus understood, progress views moments of decline and decay as integral to development. From this perspective, human catastrophes are read as partial and temporary aberrations of historical development. See Reinhart Koselleck, "'Progress' and 'Decline': An Appendix to the History of Two Concepts," *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

234 Following theorist Matthias Fritsch, "the emancipatory promise needs to be divested of its tie to a logic of history that guarantees its victorious fulfillment by which, as the verdict of History, it can justify suffering in the past and in the present." Matthias Fritsch, *The Promise of Memory: History and Politics in Marx, Benjamin, and Derrida* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2005), 3.

235 "If progress were really 'necessary,' and therefore an inevitable superhuman law that embraced all periods of history alike, and in whose meshes humanity is inescapably caught, then progress is indeed best imagined and most exactly described in the following lines from Walter Benjamin's 'On the Concept of History.'" Here Arendt cites the ninth thesis of Benjamin's theses on the philosophy of history. Hannah Arendt, "Franz Kafka, Appreciated Anew," *Reflections on Literature and Culture*, ed. Susannah Young-Ah Gottlieb (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 101-102.

Historicism contents itself with establishing a causal nexus among various moments in history. But no state of affairs having causal significance is for that very reason historical. It became historical posthumously, as it were, through events that may be separated from it by thousands of years.²³⁶

-- Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History"

Benjamin's critique of historicism is not exclusive to Marx. His concept of history, at its most basic level, can be read as critical response to the historicist writings of the nineteenth-century. The philosophy of history contained within these studies, synonymous with the methodology of German historian Leopold von Ranke (1795-1896), figures humanity in terms of culture and civilization, which function as markers of a general and universal history. Though the notion of a universal history is one of the subjects of Benjamin's polemic,²³⁷ his main objection to historicism and other such philosophies of history, is their positing of a progressive account of historical development.

Historicism encompasses a variegated conception of history: teleological histories, such as those committed to human progress; specific and autonomous historical disciplines, like art history; and history comprised of objective (self-evident, neutral, naked, pure) fact.²³⁸ Each approach represents its subject as a coherent and self-enclosed totality, so to gain a larger perspective on the forces that set particular events in motion. Attempting to provide an accurate

236 Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," *Selected Writings Volume 4: 1938-1940*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 397. Historical materialism's critique of causal explanation challenges the positivist "project of discovering 'laws' for the course of historical events." Benjamin, "Paralipomena to 'On the Concept of History,'" in *Selected Writings Volume 4: 1938-1940*, 401.

237 "Historicism rightly culminates in universal history. It may be that materialist historiography differs in method more clearly from universal history than from any other kind." Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," 396.

238 Although historicism is not an univocal concept, the meaning of the term typically falls under one of the following categories: 1) universal historical observation, 2) the metaphysics of history, 3) romanticism and traditionalism, 4) objectivism and positivism, 5) relativism. This terminological partition comes from German historian Gunter Scholtz, cited in Harro Müller, "Walter Benjamin's Critique of Historicism: A Rereading," *The Germanic Review*, (September 1996).

representation of particulars, it assumes the study and representation of the past to be an end in itself, rather than a means of moral edification. “History has often been assigned the task of judging the past so as to teach one's contemporaries for the benefit of future years,” writes Ranke. “The present work makes no such exalted claims; it wants only to show how things actually were [*wie es eigentlich gewesen*].”²³⁹ Thus, to the historicist, the primary function of the historian is not to judge the past or to instruct (lessons of virtue and prudence), but to display events accurately, where accuracy is measured by objectivity resulting from the accumulation of facts as positive knowledge.²⁴⁰ By suspending judgment, history conveys the past as a form of absolute knowledge.

As a scientific discipline, historicism documents verifiable knowledge about the past by committing itself to the methodological rigors of objectivity.²⁴¹ To this effect, it approaches historical events as individual units embodying more general meanings. Under the methodological prescriptions of historians like Ranke, Ernst Troeltsch, Johann Gustav Droysen,

239 Leopold von Ranke, *Geschichten der romanischen und germanischen Völker von 1494 bis 1514*, preface to first edition 1824 (Leipzig: Dunder and Humboldt, 1885), vii. “*Man hat der Historie das Amt, die Vergangenheit zu richten, die Mitwelt zum Nutzen zukünftiger Jahre zu belehren, beigemessen: so hoher Aemter unterwindet sich gegenwärtiger Versuch nicht: er will blos zeigen, wie es eigentlich gewesen.*”

240 From an epistemological standpoint, historicism is troubled by the problem of representing events as empirically verifiable objects of knowledge. This problem, to which Ranke was well attuned, raises such issues as source selection, the validity of statements as factual truth, the use of figurative language, of literary form, of balancing narrative with explanation. However, “Ranke has too often been stamped as the historian of objectivity. But by stating the need for objectivity, Ranke also raised the problem of subjectivity in history. By subjectivity we do not mean Treitschke’s political bias but a philosophical awareness that full objectivity cannot be found and that, as Ranke wrote to King Maximilian II, ‘the subjective element introduces itself as a matter of course.’” Klemens von Klempler, “Das Briefwerk von Leopold von Ranke; Neue Briefe von Leopold von Ranke,” *The American Historical Review* 55, no. 4 (July 1950): 871-873.

241 The historicist tradition following Ranke to the middle of the twentieth century “recognized the fundamental difference between the natural sciences which sought to explain ‘the recurrent general’ and the historical or cultural sciences which required hermeneutic methods of understanding (*Verstehen*) that took into account that human behavior and institutions reflected unique constellations of meaning (*Sinnhaftigkeit*).” Thus, historicism premised itself on the assumption “that ‘the general exists only in the individual,’ that immersion into the individual establishes links to the whole, that there is ‘only one history’ (*eine einzige Geschichte*), which through historical inquiry ‘can be explained, understood, and which is filled with meaning.’” Georg Iggers, “Historicism: The History and Meaning of the Term,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 56, no. 1, (January 1995): 129-152.

and Friedrich Meinecke, history articulates an “understanding of the general through immersion in the particular.”²⁴² Thus understood, the historicist approach offers a comprehensive and unified perspective through which a particular phenomenon or subject can be grasped and made legible for human experience in general.²⁴³

A prominent feature of the historicist method is to view the past as immutable and unrepeatable; everything that has been constitutes an irreplaceable and irremovable link in the chain of human development. “History as universal history with an origin and goal often uses the metaphor of progress as form of emplotment.”²⁴⁴ One mark of progress is the development of the modern nation-state. The primacy accorded to the unrepeatable event by historicists legitimates their practice of documenting deeds of state, which run like a thread through the narratives they produce. Insofar as the state is one of historicism’s privileged objects of study, it relies on official diplomatic records to provide an accurate account of events. This, in turn,

242 “While Ranke stressed the necessity of proceeding from a critical reconstruction of the events which constitute history, he was also convinced that out of this reconstruction of the past, “wie es eigentlich gewesen,” the great forces which shaped history would become apparent.” Ibid., 131.

243 Historicism develops an internal crisis upon recognizing that all human ideas and values are historically conditioned and subject to change. The ‘crisis of historicism’ emerges as a doubt over the ability of science to provide a standard of valuation, that history, philosophy, and other cultural sciences accord to a unified system values. For example, Ranke’s introduction to *Über die Epochen der neueren Geschichte* claims that “each era is immediate before God [*unmittelbar zu Gott*], and its worth does not at all depend on what follows from it, but on its own existence, its own self.” The historical specificity accorded to each generation undermines the ground of absolute ideals upon which the collective singular humanity is based, which in turn troubles the notion of universal history. To avoid this relativization of values, historicism attempts to represent the past with reverence for cultural diversity. Yet it remains attached to the notion of an organic unity of historical processes. In effect, historicism results in a form of epistemological idealism: there is only one worldview (*Weltanschauungen*) that can provide a standard of meaning for human life.

244 “This ontologization of the history of progress permits it to be seen as a necessary, sensible continuum, a conception that is always welcomed by the conquerors and to which social democratic and materialistic positions have also fallen.” Müller, “Walter Benjamin’s Critique of Historicism: A Rereading,” 245.

subordinates the historical autonomy of the individual citizen as an actor in the world to that of the state as an agent of progress.²⁴⁵

Benjamin's reproach of historicism in the theses on the philosophy of history is directed less at historicism as a historiographical operation, and more at the unwavering faith in progress displayed by modern philosophies of history. With Benjamin, philosopher Paul Ricoeur argues that "the idea of progress is not confined to suggesting an a priori superiority of the future ... over things of the past. The idea of *novelty* attached to that of modernity ... implies at the minimum a depreciation of earlier times struck with obsolescence."²⁴⁶ Ricoeur captures the way in which historicism traces an arc of progress without theoretically engaging the constituent parts of the events it sets out to represent. "Universal history," writes Benjamin, "has no theoretical armature. Its procedure is additive: it musters a mass of data to fill the homogeneous, empty time," while excluding pieces of the past that trouble its account.²⁴⁷ That which falls out view of the official record simply has no place in history.

To produce an official record, historicism pursues its subject matter – the acts of states and the deeds of 'proper' individuals – with empathetic appreciation, and thereby aligns itself with the prevailing social, economic, and political order. As a result, the history of the defeated is constructed by those who enjoy privileged economic and political positions within society. In the words of historian Hayden White, "no appeal to 'the facts' alone can touch this construction, because these same constituencies control what will count as the appropriate kind of science for

245 "The individual who defined his identity in goals outside of or contrary to those of the larger organism (the nation, the state) was considered cancerous." Colin Loader, "German Historicism and Its Crisis," *The Journal of Modern History* 48, no. 3, (September 1976): 85-119.

246 Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 302.

247 Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," 397.

determining not only ‘what are the facts’ but also and most important ‘what can count as a fact.’”²⁴⁸

Benjamin rejects the legitimacy of the victor’s history and its claim to a monopoly of factual truth. Furthermore, his materialist historiography purges itself of the historicist preoccupation with objectivity. “Articulating the past historically does not mean recognizing it ‘the way it really was’ (Ranke). It means appropriating a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger.”²⁴⁹ Benjamin’s historical sensibility alludes to an act of meaning creation, one in which the force of history – this history, this past – is seized in a moment of temporal rupture.²⁵⁰

Taking account of historical meaning without the support of science, religion, and metaphysics forces individuals to confront the abyssal quality of meaning. Proclamations of objectivity are of little help when answering the question *what does this history mean for us?*. Benjamin’s polemic thus alerts us to the inherent vulnerability and indeterminacy of meaning, not as a danger, but as

248 Hayden White, “Forward: Rancière’s Revisionism,” from Jacques Rancière, *The Names of History: On the Poetics of Knowledge* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1994), ix-x.

249 Benjamin, “On the Concept of History,” 391. Several thinkers have criticized Benjamin for having a dangerous fascination with the moment (*Augenblick*). This preoccupation, writes historian Harro Müller, makes him “insensitive to the problems of rational procedure. He overestimates the irreversibility of the moment and underestimates massively the risks and dangers of his own conception of the moment in his rigorously dramatized scenario of crisis with its extreme rhetoric of salvation.” Jürgen Habermas arrives at a similar conclusion: “Benjamin did not realize his intention to bring together enlightenment and mysticism, because the theologian in him could not accept the idea of making his messianic theory of experience serviceable to historical materialism.” For theorist Julia Hell, Benjamin’s “angel of history” embodies “the unproductive tension between resignation and revolutionary terror.” See Harro Müller, “Walter Benjamin’s Critique of Historicism: A Rereading,” *The Germanic Review*, (September 1996); Julia Hell, “The Angel’s Enigmatic Eyes, or The Gothic Beauty of Catastrophic History in W. G. Sebald’s “Air War and Literature” *Criticism* 46, no. 3 (Summer 2004): 361-392; Jürgen Habermas, “Consciousness-Raising or Redemptive Criticism – The Contemporaneity of Walter Benjamin” (1972), *New German Critique* 17, Special Walter Benjamin Issue (Spring, 1979): 30-59.

250 For the historian who “blasts the epoch out of its reified ‘historical continuity,’” “history becomes the object of a construct whose locus is not empty time but rather the specific epoch, the specific life, the specific work.” Walter Benjamin, “Edward Fuchs, Collector and Historian,” *Selected Writings Volume 3: 1935-1938*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 262. First published in *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, fall 1937.

a political possibility. To articulate history by means of memory, one must first do away with the historicist idea of the past as an object of knowledge.²⁵¹

2.1

Historicism fails to account for the variability of scientific knowledge and the fragmentation of history. According to Benjamin, its methodology takes for granted the structure of historical temporality, assuming history's movement in a time already given.²⁵²

“There is a time of history insofar as there is one single history,” that is, the modern concept of history underwriting the development of a collective singular humanity.²⁵³ Benefiting from an “impetus coming from theology and the schema of the ‘promise’ and its ‘realization,’” the unified history of humanity, which secularizes the Judeo-Christian eschatology of salvation, is capable of projecting history as a narrative of progress and time as the fulfillment of potentialities, i.e. historical forces are presented as potentialities that move from one point to another. This subjects historical time to clock time, an automatic, mechanical, and quantitative movement. Clock time negates the capacity for beginning inherent in human action.²⁵⁴

So as to avoid this error, Benjamin's historical materialism exhibits a heightened awareness of time. In the tradition of Nietzsche and Bergson,²⁵⁵ Benjamin situates memory and

251 “An object of history cannot be targeted at all within the continuous elapse of history.” Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, [N10a,1], 475.

252 “The concept of mankind's historical progress cannot be sundered from the concept of its progression through a homogenous, empty time. A critique of the concept of such a progression must underlie any criticism of the concept of progress itself.” Benjamin, “On the Concept of History,” 395.

253 “Humanity becomes both the total object and the unique subject of history, at the same time as history becomes a collective singular.” Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 300.

254 “Freedom as an inner capacity of man is identical with the capacity to begin, just as freedom as a political reality is identical with a space of movement between men.” Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, 1976), 471.

255 According to Bergson, memory is ideational and virtual, directing individuals toward a past that can be reanimated via a present perception. “Between the plane of action ... and the plane of pure memory, ... we believe that we can discover thousands of different planes of consciousness, a thousand integral and yet diverse repetitions

history within the realm of experience. Between event and recollection lies a virtually limitless field of experiential modalities. History, as such, is not the unfolding of a time already given, but rather, the movement of time marked by human action, a movement that stutters, stammers, and wedges itself into the flow of temporal continuity, i.e. the flow of empty homogenous time. The time of history thus opens to an experience of heterogeneity and difference, the unpredictable and unforeseeable. For history to be seized in the present (which is not the same thing as making the past present), for there to be a blasting of historical continuity, time must be wrenched out of a succession of neutral nows. The historical materialist's task becomes one of accounting "for the differentials of time in the handling of historical objects and to mobilize them as the fulcrum of historical interpretation," that is, to constitute history by finding what *was* in what *is*.²⁵⁶

Thus, history names the moment in which something of the past becomes legible, insofar as it is taken account of, in a fleeting moment of insight. In such moments, past and present appear as non-identical with their own time: "the past registers its knowledge of the present at the same time that a certain knowledge of the present enables the past to emerge."²⁵⁷ Against its own preservation and praise, the past gives way to history through the spontaneity of an unintentional memory. Both subject and object of history, Benjamin's materialist historian breaks with the instrumental rationality of progress and with the causal order of homogenous time. "He knowingly becomes part of the matter by contributing to history the force of his

of the whole of the experience through which we have lived." Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* (New York: Zone Books, 2005), 241.

256 Tyrus Miller, "'Glass Before Its Time, Premature Iron': Architecture, Temporality and Dream in Benjamin's *Arcades Project*," in *Walter Benjamin and The Arcades Project*, ed. Beatrice Hanssen (London: Continuum, 2006), 249.

257 Stathis Gourgouris, "The Dream-Reality of the Ruin," in *Walter Benjamin and The Arcades Project*, 206.

interruption.”²⁵⁸ With Benjamin, politics becomes a destructive and creative act: the simultaneous interruption and production of history.²⁵⁹

2.2

History takes place as past experiences are rescued in a recuperative gesture of memorial action. To achieve this effect, memory and experience assume the character of political categories as they become historical. This uniquely political understanding of memory and experience breaks with the objectifying temporality of historicism, which attributes determinate beginnings and ends to historical events. Benjamin’s figural notion of history,²⁶⁰ in which experience is reclaimed by memory, views events as open-ended and incomplete. Memory does not lend stability or coherence to events, but draws and releases their energy. No longer a historical determination, but a political act, progress refers to the interruptive moment of the

258 Ibid., 224.

259 The simultaneous interruption and production of history is also found in Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe’s concept of the caesura. “A caesura would be that which, within history, interrupts history and opens up another possibility of history, or else closes off all possibility of history.” This concept refers exclusively to a pure event, “an empty or null event, in which is revealed – without revealing itself – a withdrawal or nothingness.” There is a caesura where immediacy is interrupted and cut-off. If the caesura is not the concept of historicity, Lacoue-Labarthe argues, then it is at least one of its most fundamental precepts. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger, Art and Politics* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 45.

260 Traces of Benjamin’s figural notion of history can be found as early as 1924, the year he begins writing *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* [*Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*]. Reflecting on seventeenth century German baroque theater, Benjamin writes: “The image of the setting or, more precisely, of the court, becomes the key to historical understanding.” “History wanders onto the stage.” As Samuel Weber notes, “the English translation obscures the movement of ‘wandering’: ‘*Die Geschichte wandert in den Schauplatz hinein*’ becomes ‘History merges into the setting.’” This clarification shows how Benjamin’s figural notion of history corresponds to a topographical model of memory. “Within this model,” writes Benjamin scholar Sigrid Weigel, “the reading of the traces and images of history is located in the scene [*Schauplatz*] of individual and collective memory ... and understood as a perceptual activity on the threshold between receptivity and action.” See Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (London: Verso, 1998), 92; Samuel Weber, “‘Streets, Squares, Theaters’: A City on the Move – Walter Benjamin’s Paris” *boundary 2* 30, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 17-30; Sigrid Weigel, *Body and Image Space: Re-Reading Walter Benjamin* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 100.

present releasing itself from the hold of historical determinism.²⁶¹ Breaking with the order of things, progress interrupts the deferral of action effective of worldly change.

Insisting on the possibility of political action, here understood as a redeeming act of remembrance that neither incorporates nor excludes the historical content upon which it reflects, Benjamin's materialist historiography preserves the disjunctive relation between past and present that lays bare history's constructedness and offers time to alternate futures.²⁶² Rather than relay causal connections (cognitive or historical), memory draws similarities between thoughts, events, and figures that break with the necessity of historical continuity.

History and memory are not binary oppositions. Though the two are interdependent, they are not the same. Unlike the modern concept of history,²⁶³ memory does not have to follow a causal structure. The reconstruction of causal sequences that lies at the heart of the historiographical operation – explaining events by their antecedents – distinguishes it from the

261 Interruption “indicates that continuity (whether it be in terms of the naturalization of chronology or the incorporation of myth into and as history) is always a secondary effect whose primary intent is the elimination of conflict.” Andrew Benjamin, *Style and Time*, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2006), 21. See also Annabel Herzog, “Illuminating Inheritance: Benjamin's Influence on Arendt's Political Storytelling,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 26, no. 5, (2000): 1-27.

262 “Memory discourses are absolutely essential to imagine the future and to regain a strong temporal and spatial grounding of life and the imagination in a media and consumer society that increasingly voids temporality and collective spaces.” Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 6.

263 The modern concept of history is premised on a sequential ordering of time understood as the linear unfolding of finite moments. History is constructed through a process of separation and relation, in which moments are gathered as events and placed within a chronological narrative. This understanding of time and history is misguided, insofar as it reads historical contingency in terms of necessity. With the modern concept of history, progress becomes the project of Mankind, “acting behind the backs of real men – a personified voice that we find somewhat later in Adam Smith's ‘invisible hand,’ in Kant's ‘ruse of nature,’ Hegel's ‘cunning of reason,’ and Marx's ‘dialectical materialism.’” A corrective to these teleologically governed accounts of history is offered by historian and theorist Reinhart Koselleck, who, with Benjamin and Arendt, locates history in ephemeral moments of action, “where time occurs or is subjectively enacted in humans as historical beings.” See Hannah Arendt, “The Concept of History: Ancient and Modern” in *Between Past and Future*, 68; Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, vol. 2, *Willing* (New York: Harcourt, Inc, 1971), 153-154; Reinhart Koselleck, “Time and History,” in *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 111.

kind of remembrance recovered by Benjamin, for whom history follows the changing landscape and uneven topography of memory.

With Benjamin, memory condenses into “dialectical images,” thought-figures that manifest an alternative temporality to the sequential ordering of linear homogenous time. Generated in particular instances of memory, dialectical images break with rule-governed processes of cognition. On the one hand there is an image, which captures the arrest of movement, on the other, dialectics, which implies movement and change. The joining of the two suggests a certain proximity and distance, that is, perspective. Yet this perspective, at once immediate and synoptic, does not enable one to see the past in its entirety, as though it were a totalizing image. The image Benjamin has in mind is not a representation, but a convergence, a simultaneity of past and present.²⁶⁴ In other words, the relation between what-has-been and the now is figural, not temporal.²⁶⁵

Dialectical images, writes Theodor Adorno, are “constellations of historical entities which do not remain simply interchangeable examples for ideas but which in their uniqueness constitute the ideas themselves as historical.” In the hands of Benjamin, these images take shape “as objective crystallizations of the historical dynamic.”²⁶⁶ Against the totalizing tendency of

264 Dialectical images [*dialektisches Bild*] are not pictorial, but ephemeral flashings or affections of experience. Neither mental nor material representations, they evince a constellation of resemblances whose form and content have become indistinguishable. Resemblances “do not so much become visible to sensuous perception or in objective, concrete form as cognizable in constellations and figurations.” Rather, perceiving resemblances involves reading traces of lived experience, “which cannot be reproduced in permanent form or in an identical representation, but can, as Benjamin shows, become cognizable in non-sensuous similitudes.” Weigel, *Body and Image Space: Re-Reading Walter Benjamin*, 114-115.

265 For philosopher Georges Didi-Huberman, Benjamin’s dialectical image retains “from Hegel the ‘prodigious power of the negative,’ though removed from any clear and distinct synthesis, any teleological reconciliation.” Image is what Didi-Huberman refers to as a “crystal of time” and a “sudden shock” where past and present come into a constellation. “To produce [or experience] a dialectical image is to appeal to the Then, to accept the shock of memory while refusing to submit or ‘return’ to the past.” Georges Didi-Huberman, “The Supposition of the Aura,” in *Walter Benjamin and History*, ed. Andrew Benjamin (London: Continuum, 2005), 8.

266 Theodor Adorno, “A Portrait of Walter Benjamin,” *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber, (Cambridge: MIT

conceptual identification, the figure of the constellation gives weight to the particular in its material immediacy. Temporary configurations of thought, constellations emerge and recede as affective correspondences. Correspondences, or similarities, do not rely on knowledge claims, nor do they depend upon empirical verification. While cognitive and empirical propositions validate claims to rational truth, they do not account for the appearance of that which resists identification, that is, forms of thought, like constellations, which have no logical necessity. Thus understood, similarities signify relations that are external to their terms: spatially and temporally situated, emerging within a specific context, holding true in their particular instantiation.²⁶⁷ The specific instantiation of these relations has to do with the way in which the present takes up the past, and in particular, how it relates to the fragments of tradition.

“It is the present that polarizes the event into fore- and after- history,”²⁶⁸ and it is “the instance of judgment which allows it to become the heir of tradition without being under any obligation to it.”²⁶⁹ Following Benjamin, events become historical posthumously such that time is renewed in punctuated moments of critical reflection.²⁷⁰ Refusing the objectifying temporality of historicism, Benjamin preserves an indeterminate space for the renewal of meaning in history.

Press, 1998), 231-238.

267 In a study of David Hume’s empiricism, Gilles Deleuze introduces a theory concerning the externality of relations: “Relations are external to their terms. This means that ideas do not account for the nature of the operations that we perform on them, and especially of the relations that we establish among them.” Relations depend on causes that go beyond those internal to their constitutive parts. Gilles Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity: An Essay on Hume’s Theory of Human Nature* (1953) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 101. Theorist Ernesto Grassi describes this activity as one of “catching sight of relationships, of *similitudines* [similarities] among things.” Ernesto Grassi, *Rhetoric as Philosophy* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2001), 8.

268 Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, [N7a, 8], 471.

269 Philippe Simay, “Tradition as Injunction: Benjamin and the Critique of Historicisms,” in *Walter Benjamin and History*, ed. Andrew Benjamin, (London: Continuum, 2005), 151.

270 This brings to mind Arendt’s discussion of meaning and understanding, both of which are born by the spectators of an action that has come to an end. “The meaning of a committed act is revealed only when the action itself has come to an end and become a story susceptible to narration.” Here, the meaning of the past converges with an

Thought in the context of contemporary memorial architecture, Benjamin's concept of history exposes some of the limitations of fixing memory to a defined place. Traditionally, architecture communicates content that, by engendering cognitive, emotional, and corporal responses, helps orient individuals in the world. Through the domestication of space, architecture is able to render distinct places of human significance.²⁷¹ To the extent that it settles individuals and communities in space, architecture mediates their relation to time. Thus, the meaning of space and form is internal to the work itself.

For example, a commemorative site, such as a grave or sepulcher, is first and foremost a referent, marking the fact of human mortality. The power to mark the passing of time brings place into being. As literary theorist Robert Harrison explains, "the grave domesticates the inhuman transcendence of space and marks human time off from the timelessness of the gods and the eternal returns of nature. That is why gods are not the original founders of place – mortals are."²⁷² What is a place, Harrison asks, if not the memory of itself?

The coherence and stability that a fixed place provides relies on a logic of identity, of being to able to stay the same over time. Benjamin rejects this logic, upending, with Adorno and Horkheimer, architecture's ability to domesticate space. Following Benjamin, Adorno and Horkheimer challenge the virtualization of memory and meaning in built form.²⁷³ For these

action in the present: storytelling. The end of one action is the beginning of another. Hannah Arendt, "On Humanity in Dark Times: Thoughts about Lessing," in *Men in Dark Times* (New York: Harcourt, 1983), 21.

271 Following Robert Harrison: "places are located in nature, yet they always have human foundations. They do not occur naturally but are created by human beings through some mark or sign of human presence." "A place is where time, in its human modes, takes place." Robert Harrison, *The Dominion of the Dead* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 18-19.

272 Harrison, *The Dominion of the Dead*, 23.

273 "The disturbed relationship to the dead – who are forgotten and embalmed – is one of the sickness of experience today. It might almost be said that the concept of human life itself, as the unity of a person's history, has become invalid: the individual's life is now defined merely by its opposite, annihilation, but has lost all concordance, all

thinkers, meaning emerges, if at all, within a relay of voluntary and involuntary memory, intentional recollections and spontaneous associations, that can never be prefigured by a logic of identity, i.e. the synthesis of place and meaning. Meaning must be appended by indeterminate experiences. Only by opening themselves to this indeterminacy can sites of remembrance be made meaningful.

2.3

Memorials typically function as conduits of meaning, gathering the past in a condensed and legible form. Benjamin's notion of memory troubles this practice. On his account, experience renders the past legible, which is to say that history is not self-contained. Institutions can help generate a general picture of history, and lend insight into past particulars, yet they should not be the final arbiters of meaning.

Meaning is neither revealed nor concealed, but created in a temporally disjunctive act: an awakening of memory; a memory that awakens. Remembrance, thus understood, not only unifies discontinuities, but also fragments, splinters, and shatters totalities, proving the temporal structure of history to be one of interruption (intervening). Less a re-membering (making something whole) than a dis-membering, a deconstitution of false totalities and empty universals, remembrance – as a political awakening – betrays the interruptive temporality of historical events. This threshold experience brings past and present to bear on each other through reflective judgment.²⁷⁴

continuity between conscious remembrance and involuntary memory – meaning.” Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 178. 274 Reflective judgment, as found in Kant's third critique (discussed in the following chapter), allows history to be thought as an event rather than a fact. As an event, history coincides with the moment of politics, which Benjamin conceives “not in terms of its substance [or terms] but as a mode of action that is ‘radical’ and single-mindedly disdainful of consistency and consequences. What matters above all is to decide.” John McCole, *Walter Benjamin and the Antinomies of Tradition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 165.

However, Benjamin is well aware that meaning can never be defined exclusively by the present, insofar as the present is subject to a future that opens up the past. Present and future share a claim over the meaning of events. To paraphrase a letter written by Benjamin to Gerhard Scholem, one must decide at each and every moment; commitment is not a once and for all.²⁷⁵

Benjamin breaks with the idea of history as chronological explanation, which not only imposes meaning externally, but also subsumes the new under what is already known. Thesis six of Benjamin's "On the Concept of History" (often referred to as the "Theses on the Philosophy of History") warns against the dangers of mistakenly attributing continuity to past and present, of uncritically accepting the logic and content of a history that identifies progress in continuity:

Historical materialism wishes to hold fast that image of the past which unexpectedly appears to the historical subject in a moment of danger. The danger threatens both the content of the tradition and those who inherit it. For both, it is one and the same thing: the danger of becoming a tool of the ruling classes. Every age must strive anew to wrest tradition away from the conformism that is working to overpower it.²⁷⁶

As this passage suggests, the moment of remembrance is defined by a danger: the danger of passing over the past and of being passed over in turn. Memory can miss the moment of remembrance through any combination of distortion, falsification, forgetfulness, and denial. Moreover, the past can be normalized to fit present-day conventions, neutralized through processes of institutional assimilation. To avoid these dangers, one must effect a break in the order of things.

Widening the horizons of experience and meaning requires an inaugurative act of remembrance that holds fast to what Benjamin describes as "an irretrievable image of the past

275 "[T]he task is not to decide once and for all, but to decide at every moment." Benjamin, *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin, 1910-1940*, ed. Gershom Scholem and Theodor W. Adorno (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), May 29, 1926, 300.

276 Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," 391.

which threatens to disappear in any present that does not recognize itself as intended in that image.”²⁷⁷ This citation first appears in an essay published three years before appearing in Benjamin’s theses, “Edward Fuchs, Collector and Historian.” The essay, which prefigures Benjamin’s critique of historicism, distinguishes a politically charged and critical perspective toward the past from that of the traditional historian. The former “must abandon the calm contemplative attitude toward his object in order to become conscious of the critical constellation in which precisely this fragment of the past finds itself with the present.”²⁷⁸ This means recognizing that there is nothing inherent in the past that makes it contemporaneous with the present.

To bring dialectical movement, as a process of interiorization, to a standstill, history must be actualized in the present. In the moment of judgment, the image localizes time and history, wresting it away from the conformity that seeks to overpower it. Reinserting time into the image reanimates the past, filling it with movement until it bursts with time.²⁷⁹ The point, which is not to be missed in Benjamin’s larger critique of enlightenment notions of progress, is that a politically enabling practice of remembrance entails an experience *with* history, not simply *of* history. It is always *this* history, which is irreducible to factual knowledge, that is originary for every present that takes up the responsibility of recognizing itself as intimated in a particular image of the past.

2.4

277 Ibid., p. 391. “History is not a connection of causes, it is a connection of affect and intention.” Werner Hamacher, “‘Now’: Walter Benjamin on Historical Time,” in *Walter Benjamin and History*, ed. Andrew Benjamin (London: Continuum, 2005), 51.

278 Benjamin, “Edward Fuchs, Collector and Historian,” 262.

279 “To put to work an experience with history - a history that is originary for every present - is the task of historical materialism. The latter is directed toward a consciousness of the present which explodes the continuum of history.” Ibid., 262.

It is with this challenge in mind that Benjamin calls our attention to the temporality of factual truth, which is implicated in relations of domination, past and present. “There is no document of culture,” writes Benjamin, “which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. And just as such a document is never free of barbarism, so barbarism taints the manner in which it was transmitted from one hand to another.”²⁸⁰ As testimonial proof of past events, historical objects help organize our understanding of what has been. But as Benjamin (and later Adorno) rightly points out, wherever meaningfulness is assumed, cultural objects contribute to processes of exclusion that maintain them as such: historical artifacts are markers of both culture and barbarism. “The false aliveness of the past-made-present,” signals “the elimination of every echo of a ‘lament’ from history.”²⁸¹ Hence the need for reflective judgment and critical thinking, neither of which promise to overcome the dialectic of culture and barbarism, but rather address the need for increasing our awareness of practices of exclusion and relations of domination.

As a recuperative intervention, critique rescues emergent and spontaneous energies implicated within the barbarism of cultural objects. Following Adorno, culture remains faithful to man on the condition that it withdraws from man. To withdraw from man, culture must disclose the contemporaneity of the present with a repressed or forgotten past, i.e. it must reveal the continuity and dialectic of culture and barbarism. The historian’s task, ‘to brush history against the grain,’ thus subverts the normative foundations of historical transmission responsible

280 Benjamin, “On the Concept of History,” 392.

281 Benjamin, “Paralipomena to ‘On the Concept of History,’” 401. See also [N5a,7] from Benjamin’s *Arcades Project*: “Barbarism lurks in the very concept of culture – as the concept of a fund of values which is considered independent not, indeed, of the production process in which these values originated, but of the one in which they survive.” Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 467-468.

for time's naturalization and objectification of the past. When heeded, this task reverses the political quietism of the ever recurring same (status quo).²⁸²

Why challenge the status quo when continuity is one of modernity's markers of progress? For starters, when individuals resign themselves to accept what is given as natural, continuity can be imposed on events that have no necessary relation to one another. Formalizing the autonomous realm of human action, as though it could be derived from an immutable law of progress, removes novelty from human experience. As social relations are normalized, political apathy deepens. This resignation, whether cynical or providential, participates in what Benjamin describes as a catastrophe of missed opportunities, critical moments that can either preserve the order of things or incite radical change. "The concept of progress," he writes, "must be grounded in the idea of catastrophe. That things are 'status-quo' is the catastrophe."²⁸³ "The enshrinement or apologia [the catastrophe] is meant to cover up the revolutionary moments in the occurrence of history. At heart, it seeks the establishment of continuity."²⁸⁴ Where progress is assumed, indifference is quick to follow. The givenness of progress as historical fact assures the development of mankind, despite the action of individuals. Progress is cheated out of itself by

282 Where there is "a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past," the historical materialist "takes cognizance of it in order to blast a specific era out of the homogeneous course of history; thus, he blasts a specific life out of the era, a specific work out of the lifework." Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," 396.

283 Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, [N9a,1], 473. See also [N10,2], 474. Benjamin's critique of the status quo is intended to "emphasize how normal and everyday violence, annihilation, and destruction have become in contemporary life – that is, to counter a stance of amazement, astonishment, or horror." A form of political and historical insurrection, it breaks with "that concept of history which is based on a notion of progress as the rule and therefore regards everything that does not fit in with the rule as an exception, a relapse, barbarism, irrationality, or something similar." When framed by a narrative of progress, history amounts to a "discourse which in the interests of knowledge, explanation, and truth" work "away at integrating the amazing [i.e. the new, the marginalized] into an order accessible to reason and thus, in the final instance, sublating its enigmatic elements." Benjamin's critique of the status quo reveals the contingent nature of progress, such that history can no longer be thought as the development of a meaningful process according to an empirical or transcendental reason. See Weigel, *Body and Image Space: Re-Reading Walter Benjamin*, 146-148.

284 Ibid., [N9a,5], 474.

acts spoken in its name.²⁸⁵ By rescuing the past from its catastrophic ‘enshrinement as heritage,’ politics breaks with the systematic complacency characteristic of progressive notions of history.²⁸⁶

For example, the work of the late twentieth-century German writer W.G. Sebald enjoins fiction and fact to articulate an image of the past that has been displaced by time and fatigued by memorial institutions. In works like *Austerlitz* and *The Rings of Saturn*, the past is given over to an experience of the present that goes beyond the realm of objective fact. “All moments of time have co-existed simultaneously, in which case none of what history tells us would be true, past events have not yet occurred but are waiting to do so at the moment when we think of them.”²⁸⁷

With Benjamin, Sebald’s spatial convergence of time turns memory into a landscape of unknown horizons.²⁸⁸

285 In an early essay on Benjamin, Jürgen Habermas claims that “progress is not at home in the continuity but rather in the interferences of the course of time.” Habermas charges Benjamin’s materialist historiography with having “a very mediated relation to political praxis.” Benjamin’s reluctance to recognizing progress in gradual, incremental reform and social change “rules out cumulative changes in the structures of domination.” For Habermas, Benjamin’s politics of pure means amounts to an “anarchistic praxis” in its renunciation of instrumentality, purposive rationality, and goal-oriented action. I disagree with Habermas’s assessment, and find the lack of such qualities to be the source of strength of Benjamin’s redemptive critique. Habermas’s claim that “an immanent relation to political praxis cannot be obtained at all from *redemptive* critique, as it can from a *consciousness-raising* one,” fails to account for the imminent relation of politics to memory advanced by Benjamin. Habermas, “Consciousness-Raising or Redemptive Criticism – The Contemporaneity of Walter Benjamin.”

286 A passage from Benjamin’s “Central Park,” which continues several of his reflections from the *Arcades Project* (notably, those related to his unrealized book on Charles Baudelaire), captures the destructive/constructive force of politics and its primacy over history. “The course of history, seen in terms of the concept of catastrophe, can actually claim no more attention from thinkers than a child’s kaleidoscope, which with every turn of the hand dissolves the established order into a new array. There is profound truth in this image. The concepts of the ruling class have always been the mirrors that enabled an image of ‘order’ to prevail. – The kaleidoscope must be smashed.” See Benjamin, “Central Park,” *Selected Writings Volume 4: 1938-1940*, 164.

287 W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*, trans. Anthea Bell (New York: Random House, 2001), 101. In another passage from *Austerlitz*, Sebald further elaborates on this feeling of temporal simultaneity: “It seems to me then as if all the moments of our life occupy the same space, as if future events have already existed and were only waiting for us to find our way to them at last.” 257.

288 While similarities abound, Sebald’s writing does not simply employ Benjamin’s methodological forms and conventions (citation, memoir, travel writing), nor does it adopt the objects and interests of his study (liminal places of passage, architecture, the remnants of historical violence, the spectral and uncanny). The “hybrid styles” of Sebald’s work converges with that of Benjamin around what Eric Santner describes as *creaturely life* – “a dimension of human existence called into being ... where the struggle for new meaning is at its most intense” (xv). For

A more immediately political project illustrates this point. Sebald's *On the Natural History of Destruction* explores the silence among Germans following the bombing of German cities during the Second World War in order to recover the critical potential of a recent past and awaken an all but dormant historical sensibility. In particular, the "Air War and Literature" essay renders visible what postwar German literature left invisible – the corpses built into the foundation of the German state.²⁸⁹ Through the figure of a natural history of destruction,²⁹⁰ Sebald discloses Germany's postwar secret: the catastrophic end of National Socialism. The essay, like many other postwar reflections on trauma, takes up the aesthetic and moral challenges of representation. For Sebald, looking at the images of dead bodies is both an ethical and political imperative. These unsettling images, and the history they reveal, force their viewers to confront the ongoing realities of violence in all of its human forms.

2.5

Benjamin, creaturely life refers to "life captured at the (ever shifting and mutating) threshold of the juridicopolitical order" (86). "Sebald's writing," Santner argues, "is deeply indebted to the Benjaminian view that at some level we truly encounter the radical otherness of the 'natural' world only where it appears in the guise of historical remnant," that is, "where a piece of the human world presents itself as a surplus that both demands and resists symbolization" (xv). Just because objects once vital to our daily lives lose their place in the symbolic order, does not mean that they are no longer humanly significant; "in some way [they] continue to address us – get under our psychic skin – though we no longer possess the key to their meaning." (17). See Santner, *On Creaturely Life: Rilke, Benjamin, Sebald*.
 289 Sebald attributes the economic success of postwar Germany to material factors, such as capital investment, and immaterial factors, like "the unquestioning work ethic learned in totalitarian society." In addition, he identifies a previously unacknowledged immaterial catalyst: "the stream of psychic energy that has not dried up to this day, and which has its source in the well-kept secret of the corpses built into the foundations of our [German] state, a secret that bound all Germans together in the postwar years, and indeed still binds them, more closely than any positive goal such as the realization of democracy ever could." W.G. Sebald, *On the Natural History of Destruction* trans., Anthea Bell (New York: Random House, 2003), 13.

290 Natural history [*Naturgeschichte*] describes a process of decay that challenges the enlightenment conception of historical progress and perfectibility. Natural history assimilates "the irregular ups and downs, the fitful accelerations and decelerations of political history as well as what in western societies is generally called progress, to the regular rhythm of life and death, growth and decay." In the work of Sebald, the concept appeals to a dehistoricization of history, as opposed to the more common understanding of natural history as an atemporal and ahistorical naturalization of history. However, from the perspective of progress, regressions are viewed as temporary aberrations, such that the limits of progress themselves become forms of progress. As Reinhart Koselleck notes, "this scheme of thought is still employed today when political ideologies prescribe linear progress that allows for interruptions but creates political legitimacy through its inexorability." See Eric Santner, *Stranded Objects: Mourning, Memory, and Film in Postwar Germany* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 65; Koselleck, "'Progress' and 'Decline': An Appendix to the History of Two Concepts," 231.

Because exclusion, exploitation, and domination are facts of life, Sebald demands that history not be indifferent to how these realities are judged. Acutely aware of this imperative, Benjamin's materialist historiography insists on a praxis of remembrance rather than an institutionalization of memory. Simply put, institutionalized memory runs the risk of acquiescence and self-contentment. This danger lies at the heart of historicism's most salient and intractable feature: empathy with the victor, that is, the tendency to read continuity – “the schema of progression within an empty and homogenous time” – back into history.²⁹¹ Echoing Benjamin, Hannah Arendt exposes the stakes of empathetically viewing the past: “The historian, by gazing backward into the historical process, has been so accustomed to discovering an ‘objective’ meaning, independent of the aims and awareness of the actors, that he is able to overlook what actually happened in his attempt to discern some objective trend.”²⁹² In search of objectivity, the deadened gaze of the historian misses the particular significance of past events. This characterizes the historian who, “transplanting himself into a remote past, prophesies what was regarded as the future at that time but meanwhile has become past. This view corresponds exactly to the historical theory of empathy.”²⁹³ Empathy alone fails to make things meaningful. As historian and theorist Reinhart Koselleck explains, “the progress of modernity, despite its universal claim, reflects only a partial, self-consistent experience and, instead, masks or obscures other modes of experience.”²⁹⁴ Uncovering these other modes of experience requires an act of

291 Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings Volume 3: 1935-1938*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 405-406.

292 Arendt, “The Concept of History: Ancient and Modern”, 88.

293 Benjamin, *Selected Writings Volume 3: 1935-1938*, 405-406. Arendt makes clear that “what mattered to [Benjamin] above all was to avoid anything that might be reminiscent of empathy, as though a given subject of investigation had a message in readiness which easily communicated itself, or could be communicated, to the reader or spectator.” Hannah Arendt, “Walter Benjamin” in *Men in Dark Times* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1995), 203.

294 Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts*, 235.

reflective judgment, one capable of unearthing the “unexpected *new* with all its implications in any given period and to bring out the full power of its significance.”²⁹⁵

“All historiography,” writes Arendt, “is necessarily salvation and frequently justification.”²⁹⁶ The latter tendency coincides with an empathetic attachment to the triumphant of history. Empathy with the victor, the motive force behind a progressive account and transmission of history, as found in the writings of Immanuel Kant,²⁹⁷ assimilates past events to a narrative framework founded on a universal subject (man, citizen) for whom history unfolds with a predetermined end (enlightenment, universal rights). As an affective identification with the triumphs and achievements of all things past, empathy with the victor passively approaches history, and thereby surrenders to progress man’s innate ability to transform the world.

The historian who practices empathy and comprehends everything assembles a mass of facts, which means that he places the objectified course of history into an ideal simultaneity in order to fill up ‘empty and homogenous time.’ He thereby strips the present’s relationship to the future of any relevance for understanding the past.²⁹⁸

This later reading of Benjamin by Jürgen Habermas captures the way in which empathetic identification²⁹⁹ and its appeal to objective fact – the source material of an official historical

295 Hannah Arendt, “Understanding and Politics,” in *Essays in Understanding, 1930-1954*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1994), 320.

296 Hannah Arendt, “A Reply to Eric Voegelin,” in *The Portable Hannah Arendt* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 158.

297 Immanuel Kant, for example, argues that “progress toward the better is assured humanity in spite of all its infirmity.” For Benjamin, such an unremitting belief in progress problematically assumes an impoverished and politically debilitated form of history. Thus he finds it is necessary to reconfigure the relationship between historical objects and how they are valued as such. Immanuel Kant, “An Old Question Raised Again: Is the Human Race Constantly Progressing,” in *On History*, trans. Lewis White Beck (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1963), 144-145. A dominant strand of discourse ethics envisions a progress without remainders: “once the interpretive battles have subsided, all parties recognize that reforms are achievements, although they were at first sharply contested.” Jürgen Habermas, “Constitutional Democracy,” *Political Theory* 29, no. 6 (2001): 774.

298 Jürgen Habermas, “Excursus on Benjamin’s Theses on the Philosophy of History,” *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, trans., Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), 13.

299 For example, Max Weber defines sociology as a scientific construction of subjectively meaningful causal explanations for human behavior. Thus understood, the objective of sociological inquiry is to arrive at a rational

record – excludes the defeated from history. The result is an affirmative historical explanation that, through a combination of omission and assimilation, mutes those past particulars which interfere with the narrative of progress it projects.

Empathetic reconstructions of the past not only legitimize former acts of violence, they also affirm a trajectory of violence that contributes to current practices of exclusion and domination.³⁰⁰ The task of redemptive critique is to show that oppression and suffering are not historical inevitabilities. Hence the turn to a praxis of remembrance, which has the capacity to awaken the present from the deep sleep of progress and its dream of an automatic accumulation of cultural achievement and economic development.

2.6

Writing history from the perspective of the victor corresponds to “successive impositions of legally codified rule that legitimizes itself by reference to supposedly just ends.”³⁰¹ To this effect, history represents domination as an immutable fact of life, depicts it as a temporary

explanatory understanding [*Verstehen*] of the social behavior of intending subjects (i.e. those who attach subjective meanings to their action). This interpretive understanding is less about identifying intentional or psychological motivations, than it is about accurately determining the meaning of a particular situation or action. As Weber explains, understanding historical events is not a matter of being in the mind of individual actors: “the ability to imagine one’s self performing a similar action is not a requisite to understanding; ‘one need not have been Caesar in order to understand Caesar.’ For the verifiable accuracy of interpretation of the meaning of a phenomenon, it is a great help to be able to put one’s self imaginatively in the place of the actor and thus sympathetically participate in his experiences, but this is not an essential condition of meaningful interpretation.” Emotional empathetic [*Einfühlung*] understanding (an imaginative participation) facilitates rational explanatory understanding, yet it need not do so. For “the empirical sciences of action, such as sociology and history,” understanding does not result in “an objectively ‘correct’ meaning or one which is true in some metaphysical sense.” Despite their methodological differences, the aim of historical analysis for both Weber and modern historiography is the realization of a systematic body of knowledge based on an empirical, rather than experiential, conception of knowledge. See Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, trans., A.M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons (New York: Free Press, 1964), 88-91.

300 Identification with the victors of history and their present-day successors lessens “those features of the historian or survivor that seem merely subjective, including individual or collective cognitive interests and capacities for experiencing and responding to human suffering – especially suffering that may be viewed as being continued today.” Fritsch, *The Promise of Memory*, 162.

301 Ibid., 103.

aberration, or ignores it entirely, thereby legitimating the law-positing and law-preserving violence of the prevailing political order.

Alert to the political stakes of empathetic identification, theorist Matthias Fritsch draws from Benjamin's 1921 essay "Toward the Critique of Violence," the nature in which "the history of state power is governed by a model according to which a victorious power institutes itself only to degenerate into a mere instrument for the conservation of its victory."³⁰² Following Benjamin, Fritsch argues that the perpetuation of violence (class, state, ethnic, religious) relies on a combination of assimilation and exclusion of past struggles to support an integrationist narrative of progress blind to its own complicity with the prevailing order. Peace "implies the lasting imposition of the will of the victor. Subsequently, the institutions of this political and legal order must seek to maintain peace by preserving themselves. Instituting power necessarily turns into conserving, administrative power."³⁰³ Benjamin's essay accounts for the instrumentality of violence through the effects of its law-positing and law-preserving trajectories: the ends of violence are inseparable from violence as means.³⁰⁴ Violent means (Max Weber's monopoly of

302 Ibid., 115.

303 Ibid., 113. For Benjamin, "the most crucial ethical issue regarding a legal system that uses its laws as violent means to an end, consists in the mutual co-implication of means and ends" (108). The "dialectic of imposition and conservation" shows that "positing violence is always already conserving violence" (115). "Power must institute itself in relatively stable (legal and political) conditions, and that it, in so doing, monopolizes violence by depriving all others subjects of the right to posit its own laws" (111). "All violence (*Gewalt*) must posit law, and all law owes itself to an imposition that cannot do without violence" (112). We find a similar conclusion in Michel Foucault's survey of history's relation to power. The traditional function of history, Foucault argues, is "to speak the right of power and to intensify the luster of power," by captivating individuals with the glory of "mighty sovereigns and their victories (and, if need be, their temporary defeats)," "to use the continuity of the law to establish a juridical link between those men and power, because power and its workings were a demonstration of the continuity of the law itself." "Power both binds and immobilizes, and is both the founder and guarantor of order; and history is precisely the discourse that intensifies and makes more efficacious the twin functions that guarantee order." See Michel Foucault, *Society Must be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976*, trans., David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), 66-68.

304 "The legal order can justify its own violence only insofar as this violence is a means to an end, but the end it serves can never be separated from itself as means, for the law, by virtue of its universality, is at bottom unconcerned with the life of those upon whom the violence it justifies is exercised or with the life of those whom this violence is supposed to protect. The violence of the legal order is concerned solely with itself, with its own

the legitimate use of violence held by the state) codify peace and enforce the legal and political order, such that legal ends pursue the institution and preservation of state power.

A brief discussion of Berlin's Neue Wache memorial, dedicated "To the Victims of War and Tyranny" [*Den Opfern von Krieg und Gewaltherrschaft*], illustrates a number of the political consequences of law-positing and law-preserving violence on memorial architecture.

Located in the center of Berlin on Unter den Linden, this relatively small memorial has a sizable history. Originally an artillery guardhouse, the Neue Wache was commissioned by the Prussian King Friedrich Wilhelm III in 1816 to provide a watch station for the *Kronprinzenpalais*. Karl Friedrich Schinkel's unassuming neoclassical design consisted of a Doric column portico and four corner towers enclosing an inner courtyard. The freestanding building first attained memorial status when it was used to commemorate Prussia's involvement in the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815). In 1930 the site was converted from a memorial to the wars of liberation into one commemorating the fallen soldiers of the First World War. At that time, the building's interior was transformed into a memorial hall capped with a glass cupola, which came to be known as the "Memorial [*Gedächtnisstätte*] for the Fallen of the World War." Following the devastation of the Second World War, the memorial was once again reconstructed and renamed, now a "Memorial for the Victims of Fascism and Militarism." In 1969 an eternal flame was added to the hall. Two years after German reunification, a statue of a mourning mother embracing her dead son was placed in the center of the renovated hall. Today the Neue Wache stands as the "Central Commemorative Site of the Federal Republic of Germany."

Tracing the arc of the Neue Wache's development reveals how a memorial, which is

majesty – without, however, ceasing to present itself as a means and reverting to what all legal violence once was: immediate manifestation. Peter Fenves, "'Out of the Order of Number': Benjamin and Irigaray Toward a Politics of Pure Means," *Diacritics* 28, no. 1 (1998): 43-58.

supposed to represent an eternal image or a timeless idea, can be adapted to fit a range of political contexts.³⁰⁵ “This modest memorial,” writes art historian Juliet Koss, “more than any other state building has been programmatically used in each of its concrete historical forms to provide the then current German state with a unifying image of national legitimation.”³⁰⁶ As Koss makes clear, the Neue Wache both memorializes the victims of war and tyranny and heroizes a civic ideal, thereby fulfilling the ethical function of justifying the loss of life in times of war.³⁰⁷ Yet, the lack of distinction between perpetrator and victim in one of the memorial’s most recent inscriptions betrays a failure to acknowledge those parts of the past that trouble the unifying image the memorial attempts to provide.³⁰⁸ Today, as it has throughout much of its history, the Neue Wache contributes to the legitimation of political order through strategically exclusionary readings of the past.

To articulate an image of the world capable of rendering visible fragments of the past, practices of memorialization must be attentive to both the victims and the victors of history. With this image in mind, Benjamin’s historico-political project becomes a kind of counter-historiography, but not in the sense of a victim’s history, which would at best inscribe the formerly excluded within a politically neutralizing narrative. Rather than perpetuate a logic of exclusion, Benjamin gauges the fault lines of the past to preserve their heterogeneity. In this

305 Following Howard Mansfield, “in history, unlike heredity, we choose our ancestors. We choose with monuments, markers and history books. We choose also with bulldozers, by what we remove.” Howard Mansfield, *In the Memory House* (Golden: Fulcrum Publishing, 1993), 26.

306 Juliet Koss, “Coming to Terms with the Present,” *Grey Room* 16, (Summer 2004): 116-131.

307 This follows theorist Henry Pickford’s claim that the memorial is “coded above all as a military memorial, whereas the overwhelming number of the dead did not belong to the military, but rather the civil sphere of society. It is the recoding of a breakdown of civil society (the rise of National Socialism) in the traditional trappings of a national war memorial that most condemns the Neue Wache.” Henry W. Pickford, “Conflict and Commemoration: Two Berlin Memorials,” *Modernism/Modernity* 12, no. 1 (2005): 133-173.

308 As a result of public dissatisfaction over the sterile and indiscriminate language of the dedication, a separate memorial to Jewish victims was commissioned, along with two bronze tablets which now stand aside the Neue Wache’s entrance: on the left a history of the building, on the right an enumeration of those in memorial.

way, the remembrance of losses and defeats, whose abuses extend well beyond the moment of law-positing violence, energize present struggles against constituted (instituted) power by generating counter narratives to a tradition complicit with the barbarism of humanity.³⁰⁹ Though “no one may easily claim a good conscience with regard to history and the appropriation of a culture by the survivors, ... not all heirs are equally implicated in the suppression of the claim past oppression has on present and future generations.”³¹⁰ A genuinely political view of progress reflects on how the victors and victims of history are distinguished from one another over time.

2.7

Adorno writes that Benjamin “wanted to eradicate progress from philosophical reflection. In Benjamin progress obtains legitimation in the doctrine that the idea of the happiness of unborn generations – without which one cannot speak of progress – inalienably includes the idea of redemption.” Redemption, that is, for the countless dead generations who have remained invisible to the eyes of progress. From the perspective of a politics attuned to the visibility of both the victors and victims of history, and the negotiation of who qualifies as such, “progress would be the very establishment of humanity in the first place, whose prospect opens up in the face of extinction.”³¹¹ Benjamin’s redemptive notion of progress, in which Adorno recognizes the establishment of humanity, draws near Arendt’s notion of the common world. Like Benjamin, Arendt stresses the fragility of action and the perishability of what it brings into being.

309 Similarly, Foucault’s genealogical approach offers an interventionist form of historical production: “the successes of history belong to those who are capable of seizing these rules [the rule of violence and domination encoded into the rule of law] to replace those who had used them, to disguise themselves so as to pervert them, invert their meaning, and redirect them against those who had initially imposed them.” Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” *The Foucault Reader*, ed., Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 86.

310 Fritsch, *The Promise of Memory*, 168-174.

311 Adorno, “Progress,” *Can One Live after Auschwitz*, 128.

Despite their differences, these thinkers expose the illusory character of humanity when used to pursue the ends (and end) of history.

Empathy with the victor amounts to political resignation, an apathetic subjection to relations of domination, forms of oppression, and practices of exclusion.

Whoever has emerged victorious participates to this day in the triumphal procession in which current rulers step over those who are lying prostrate. According to the traditional practice, the spoils are carried in the procession. They are called ‘cultural treasures,’ and a historical materialist views them with cautious detachment. For in every case these treasures have a lineage which he cannot contemplate without horror.³¹²

The classification, itemization, and display of historical artifacts, that is, the institutionalization of a historical inventory of ‘cultural treasures,’ evacuates the past of its energy to awaken and inspire meaningful action capable of returning spontaneity to human events. “While the materialist historian *constructs* a particular past according to the dictates of the hour, the historicist painstakingly *reconstructs* some by-gone era out of a tell-tale need to *forget* the present. Part tourist, part archaeologist, he seeks to ‘relive’ the past through an idle act of ‘empathy.’”³¹³ Here, Benjamin scholar Irving Wohlfarth identifies the historicist use of the past to be symptomatic of a desire to forget current abuses of power. “From time immemorial,” writes Benjamin, “historical narration has simply picked out an object from” within the continuous elapse of history.

But it has done so without foundation, as an expedient; and its first thought was then always to reinsert the object into the continuum, which it would create anew through empathy. Materialist historiography does not choose its objects arbitrarily. It does not fasten on them but rather springs them loose from the order of succession.³¹⁴

312 “Empathizing with the victor invariably benefits the current rulers.” Benjamin, “On the Concept of History,” 391-392.

313 Irving Wohlfarth, “Et Cetera? The Historian as Chiffonnier,” in *Walter Benjamin and The Arcades Project*, 19.

314 Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, [N10a,1], 475.

Releasing fragments of the past from the ‘order of succession’ describes Benjamin’s strategy of remembrance. Memory does not choose its objects randomly for the sake of adding to a mass of facts and dates, but rather interrupts sequential orders and reveals the way in which predetermined continuities leave in place practices and hierarchies of exclusion by empathetically justifying violence. If history is to manifest meaning, it cannot amount to a progressive catalogue comprised of content indifferent to its display. History does not lie in waiting of discovery. Past events become historically meaningful through judgment, which means reading the past without being determined by a chronological structure or logic of progress. It is for this reason that memorials, and other such commemorative spaces, ought to provoke within their audience questions of meaning, while also facilitating a critical practice of judgment.

2.8

Progress, in a deeply political sense, must first orient itself toward the past. For Benjamin, this means becoming aware of a temporal index by which the past is referred to redemption.

The past carries with it a secret index by which it is referred to redemption. ... If so, then there is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one. Then our coming was expected on earth. Then, like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a *weak* messianic power, a power on which the past has a claim. Such a claim cannot be settled cheaply. The historical materialist is aware of this.³¹⁵

315 Benjamin, “On the Concept of History,” 390. Habermas, like Horkheimer earlier, identifies within the ‘secret agreement’ a ‘mystical causality’ which evinces a conservative effort by Benjamin to rescue the past. However, as Benjamin is well aware, redemption can miss, and the historical index carried by a particular past, can pass without notice. Still, the criticisms of Habermas and Horkheimer fail to recognize remembrance as a transformative experience in which the present changes through a critical juxtaposition with the past. See Habermas, “Consciousness-Raising or Redemptive Criticism – The Contemporaneity of Walter Benjamin,” and Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, [N8,1], 471.

Redemption, the moment at which memory gives itself over to thinking an event in creation, is an active receiving, as opposed to a passive accepting. The temporal index of history refers both to its origin and to the moment of its legibility, that is, the moment at which a past demands to be read (this interruptive force displaces origins, if for only a brief moment). Benjamin's concept of origin does not signify the "act or fact of beginning,"³¹⁶ but an event that is both singular and incomplete, one whose meaning is contained within its emergence and deferred to posterity. "On the one hand it needs to be recognized as a process of restoration and reestablishment, but, on the other hand, and precisely because of this, as something imperfect and incomplete."³¹⁷ Becoming aware of the historical index of things can be thought of as a mindful inheritance, an active decision to carry forward a tradition that makes one responsible for the lessons and stories to which it pertains.³¹⁸ Inheritance, Jacques Derrida insists, has a radical and necessary

316 "Origin, n. 1b," *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., eds. J.A. Simpson and E.S.C. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989). OED Online Oxford University Press. April 7, 2007. <http://dictionary.oed.com/>.

317 "Origin [*Ursprung*], although an entirely historical category, has, nevertheless, nothing to do with genesis [*Entstehung*]. The term origin is not intended to describe the process by which the existent came into being, but rather to describe that which emerges from the process of becoming and disappearance. Origin is an eddy in the stream of becoming, and in its current it swallows the material involved in the process of genesis. That which is original is never revealed in the naked and manifest existence of the factual." Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 45.

318 Though it is informed by a progressive historical ontology, Habermas's theory of constitutional democracy (developed from his discourse theory) also offers a mode of altering one's relationship to the past through the transmission and reception of a codified tradition of legal rule. Habermas argues that "the allegedly paradoxical relation between democracy and the rule of law resolves itself in the dimension of historical time, provided one conceives the constitution as a project that makes the founding act into an ongoing process of constitution-making that continues across generations." In his view, constitutional democracy is not the site of intergenerational struggle, but intergenerational community: each generation is responsible for the maintenance and maturation of their inherited system of rights and rule of law. "A constitution that is democratic – not just in its content but also according to its source of legitimation – is a tradition-building project with a clearly marked beginning in time. All the later generations have the task of actualizing the still-untapped normative substance of the system of rights laid down in the original document of the constitution." Thus understood, constitutional democracy is a learning process in which the inheritors of a rule of law correct and develop the normative content of a system of rights. "It is the trace, not the event," writes political theorist Bonnie Honig, "that [Habermas] seeks to recollect. It is the trace not the event that he secures when he says that those who tap the system of rights must orient themselves toward a beginning from which they take their bearings and build a tradition." This beginning is not just any beginning, but one "clearly marked" in time, that is, an origin in support of a foundational myth endowed with a logic of progress. Like Kant, Habermas problematically commits himself to the view that mankind improves over time: "once the interpretive battles have subsided, all parties recognize that reforms are achievements, although they were at first

heterogeneity: “An inheritance is never gathered together, it is never one with itself. Its presumed unity; if there is one, can consist only in the *injunction to reaffirm by choosing*.” This injunction demands that “*one must filter, sift, criticize, one must sort out several different possibilities that inhabit the same injunction.*”³¹⁹ It is a claim and an appeal made by the dead on the living to actively receive and be responsible for history.

The past holds a claim over the present and the future: to be called by memory. “Someone who pokes about in the past as if rummaging in a storeroom of examples and analogies still has no inkling of how much in a given moment depends on its being made present [*ihre Vergegenwärtigung*].”³²⁰ The power to actualize what was once possible, but that can never originate in ourselves alone, bears the mark of history’s indexical function. This power comes from an expectation of others towards us, a past filled with missed opportunities that demands fulfillment.³²¹ Benjamin’s concept of history renews the time consciousness of modernity by reminding us that “it is always the ‘dead letter’ in which the ‘living spirit’ must survive, a deadness from which it can be rescued only when the dead letter comes again into contact with a life willing to resurrect it, although this resurrection of the dead shares with all living things that it, too, will die again.”³²² Here Arendt draws on Benjamin’s notion of

sharply contested.” Jürgen Habermas, “Constitutional Democracy: A Paradoxical Union of Contradictory Principles?” trans., William Rehg, *Political Theory* 29, no. 6 (December 2001): 766-781. Bonnie Honig, “Between Decision and Deliberation: Political Paradox in Democratic Theory,” *American Political Science Review* 101, no. 1 (February 2007): 1-17.

319 “That we *are* heirs does not mean that we *have* or that we *receive* this or that, some inheritance that enriches us one day with this or that, but that the *being* of what we are *is* first of all inheritance, whether we like it or know it or not.” Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx* (New York: Verso, 1999), 16.

320 Benjamin, “Paralipomena to ‘On the Concept of History,’” 405.

321 “To all past epochs [Benjamin] ascribes a horizon of unfulfilled expectations, and to the future-oriented present he assigns the task of experiencing a corresponding past through remembering, in such a way that we can fulfill its expectations with our weak messianic power.” Habermas, “Consciousness-Raising or Redemptive Criticism – The Contemporaneity of Walter Benjamin,” 14.

322 Hannah Arendt, “The Permanence of the World and the Work of Art,” *Reflections on Literature and Culture*, 174.

redemption [*Erlösung*] to articulate a non-deterministic orientation toward the past in which the inanimate is brought back to life by breathing itself into the present. “In the look backward a look forward announces itself.”³²³ This dynamic temporal relay implies that memory has no permanence of its own. Remembrance cannot be institutionalized, only enacted.

Acknowledging this responsibility rescues the past from the oblivion of being forgotten or misused in the present.

We might think of Benjamin’s notion of redemption as a wound that never heals, a circle that never closes. Because time is never one with itself, the past holds out to the present, and the present opens onto the past, either an eternal repetition of the same, or an unending reconfiguration. Benjamin opts for the latter. Past and present return possibility to each other in moments of remembrance. Through memory, the past is given an affective resonance contemporaneous with the present. Remembrance as redemption reanimates politically enabling perspectives. Producing resemblances rather than identities rescues missed opportunities, lost chances that, when related to the present, redeem the marginalized, repressed, and forgotten.

As a rescuing [*Rettung*] of the past, redemption bears witness to the unredeemed suffering of human violence. For Max Horkheimer, Benjamin’s concept of redemption betrays an idealistic theology. In a 1937 letter to Benjamin, Horkheimer emphasizes the immutability of the past. “The determination of incompleteness is idealistic if completeness is not comprised within it. Past injustice has occurred and is completed. The slain are really slain.” Yet Horkheimer misses the way in which the past is never complete from the perspective of memory. In reference to Horkheimer’s note on the irreparability and finality of the past, Benjamin writes:

323 Redemptive remembrance means “salvation from forgetting, from discredit, from disdain, from incorporation as products of culture in the victory parade of the conquerors.” Müller, “Walter Benjamin’s Critique of Historicism: A Rereading,” 245-246.

“The corrective to this [historicist] line of thinking may be found in the consideration that history is not simply a science but also and not least a form of remembrance [*Eingedenken*]. What science has ‘determined,’ remembrance can modify.”³²⁴ Benjamin’s appreciation for the mnemonic dimension of history is compatible with Horkheimer’s claim that the dead are really dead. What is not finalized (i.e. interminable), from Benjamin’s perspective, is our relationship to the dead, that is, how we understand the past and derive meaning from its passing.

Events have an after-life in memory. When attentive to the historical index of past events, remembrance sharpens our understanding of the present, without reducing it to what has been. “Only for a redeemed mankind,” writes Benjamin, “has its past become citable in all its moments.”³²⁵ Though it is wrong to think that past events can be fully integrated into the present, they can be made manifest in thought and action, snapshot experiences that refute the formalization of universal narratives. The weak messianic power of the present, that which marks the historical moment of bearing witness, arrives through a double-citation. The past carries a referential index *for* and *of* a particular time, thus marking two times: the now/instant of memory, and a future time, a time to-come, which refers to the constitutive iterability of meaning. To actualize what was once possible means not only citing the past, but being open to the possibility of being cited by it in turn.

Thus, to write history is to cite *and be cited by* the past, a simultaneous tearing of the historical object from a given context, and wrenching of its mode of reception.³²⁶ Citation is an

324 Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, [N8,1], 471. From Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin’s translation of *The Arcades Project*: “*Eingedenken*: Benjamin’s coinage from the preposition *eingedenk* (‘mindful of’) and the verb *gedenken* (‘bear in mind,’ ‘remember’). This verbal noun has a more active sense than *Erinnerung* (‘memory’).”

325 Benjamin, “On the Concept of History,” 390.

326 “To write history thus means to *cite* history. It belongs to the concept of citation, however, that the historical object in each case is torn from its context.” Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, [N11,3], 476.

act of inheritance that is as much a taking as it is a giving. The instantiation of history as an event of memory “consists of a ‘destructive’ gesture of interruption targeting the ‘stream of transmission,’ and a careful and ‘constructive’ unfolding of the result of this interruption.”³²⁷ A destructive mode is demanded by the messianic structure (historical index) of the object or event in its becoming historical.³²⁸ The prefiguration (historical index) of an object made historical through remembrance refers to the manner in which, as Matthias Fritsch puts it, “the past – which is always a particular past, a specifically condensed ‘image’ – *claims* us in asking to be read.”³²⁹ In other words, a particular past places a demand on a particular present. This weak messianic force is not continuous or complicit with a narrative of progress, but breaks with the victors history to fulfill the ethical and political charge of remembrance. Rather than conceive this task as the realization of an end or goal, Benjamin’s secularized (non-eschatological, non-teleological) messianism refers to “the unknowability and openness of the future, and, ... the irruptive retrieval of hitherto buried images of the past.”³³⁰

327 Fritsch, *The Promise of Memory*, 171.

328 In a brief essay published in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* in November 1931, Benjamin sketches the historical modality of the destructive character. “The destructive character only knows one watchword: make room [*Platz schaffen*]. And only one activity: clearing away. His need for fresh air and open space is stronger than any hatred.” In view of historical continuity and progress, Benjamin’s historical materialist-cum-storyteller adopts a destructive perspective to impede the flow of forgetting residing within empty homogeneous time. Characterized by “an insuperable mistrust of the course of things and a readiness at all times to recognize that everything can go wrong,” the destructive character “stands in the front line of the traditionalists. Some people pass things down to posterity, by making them untouchable and thus conserving them; others pass on situations, by making them practicable and thus liquidating them. The latter are called destructive.” This liquidation (emptying, clearing) remobilizes time by giving way (making space available) to the unintended of history. “No moment can know what the next will bring. What exists he [the destructive character] reduces to rubble – not for the sake of the rubble, but for that of the way leading through it.” Walter Benjamin, “The Destructive Character,” in *Selected Writings: Volume 2: 1927-1934*, ed. Howard Eiland, Michael W. Jennings, Gary Smith (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), 541-542.

329 Fritsch, *The Promise of Memory*, 28.

330 “Benjamin cannot be said to subscribe to the secularization of messianic eschatology in terms of the unconscious, rational, progressive production of history that orients it toward its end in a transparent and liberated humanity. Rather, Benjamin associates the messianic with those layers of history that are forgotten or cast aside by the progressive march of such history.” *Ibid.*, 47.

One such materialization of memory can be found in Berlin. Sponsored by the German Senate to commemorate the once vibrant Jewish community living in the Bavarian Quarter [*Bayerisches Viertel*] of Berlin's Schöneberg District,³³¹ *Places of Remembrance* [*Orte des Erinnerns*], a permanent installation created by artists Renata Stih and Frieder Schnock, lays bare forgotten images of the past. Installed in 1993, *Places of Remembrance* consists of eighty rectangular signs individually hanging from street lampposts in the neighborhood surrounding Bayerischer Platz. The colored pictograms display readily identifiable images on one side (a dog, a park bench, a clock, a loaf of bread) and short texts, dated in a small lettering, on the other. The signs appear anonymously, with no indication of the artists' names. As such, they deny their viewers the familiarity of an authorial stance, and forego the purposefulness and intentionality that such a stance provides.

The signs themselves have no message, no didactic function. The texts repeat anti-Semitic decrees from the years between 1933 and 1945. Through direct commands conjugated in present-tense German, the signs emerge as reappropriations of a lived past, thereby effecting a break in time. As such, they avoid the subjective trappings of testimony and other forms of historical representation. The unassuming display of civil ordinances refigures the signs as vehicles for temporal and spatial dislocations. Placing the signs in an immediate relation with the present not only impedes forgetting, but also returns the signifying power of the ordinances back to the past. Dedicated to the victims of the quarter, the memorial installation demands that viewers consider: "How could thousands of people ignore the politics of marginalization and

331 "The census count of May 1933 revealed that 7.4% of Berlin's Jewish population, or 16,261 "Germans of the Jewish faith" [Deutsche jüdischen Glaubens], lived in Schöneberg, predominantly in the Bayerisches Viertel." Caroline Wiedmer, "Remembrance in Schöneberg," in Renata Stih and Frieder Schnock *Orte des Erinnerns* (Berlin: Haude & Spenersche, 2002), 7.

destruction? How could they look away while people were gradually dehumanized, until finally they appeared simply as objects to be destroyed?”³³² By reentering the public sphere, the citations – and the histories they recall – are made anew, again and again.³³³

One can find an explanation of the signs on a much smaller sign hanging below:

Denkmal: Places of Remembrance in the Bayerisches Viertel – Exclusion and Discrimination, Expulsion, Deportation, and Murder of Berlin Jews in the Years 1933 to 1945. This matter of fact self-description identifies the signs as a memorial [*Denkmal*], as marking places of remembrance. In this regard, Stih and Schnock’s installation participates in the memorial tradition of preserving the past in the present: the signs attempt to prevent the history of the neighborhood in which they are housed from being denied historical significance. Yet, as liminal materializations of the past, the signs play on a mimetic indeterminacy foreign to the traditional memorial model; they can be equally appropriated and disappropriated within the urban landscape.³³⁴ As a result, their interruptive force varies with each new experience.

Receding into the noise of the visible background, only to emerge again with the force and immediacy of a shock, the signs resist mnemonic closure.³³⁵ To the degree that *Places of*

332 Wiedmer, “Remembrance in Schöenberg,” 8.

333 “The simple items and pictograms mimic the informational aesthetics of today’s advertising, and of public announcements; the signs neutral images obey, as Stih puts it, ‘an aesthetics of normality,’ an aesthetics that allows them to blend into the iconography of today’s urban text in the same way that anti-Semitic sentiments and decrees had blended into consciousness fifty years earlier.” With time, locals may forget that the signs are there, but when others stop to look, they are once again made aware of the past. Following Wiedmer, the signs occasion a perpetual reinscription of the neighborhood with its history. *Ibid.*, 9.

334 Working with a notion of memory that is not carried by the art work itself, Stih and Schnock contest traditional efforts at memorialization. Ironic, self-effacing, and decentralized, their projects perform interventions into the narrative fabric of daily life. Decontextualizing the object of reflection, so to strip it of aesthetic innocence, their work not only resists artistic convention, but also challenges prevailing norms governing public memorial. As such, their work goes beyond questions of representation, transforming the relation between spectator and spectated into one of mutual curiosity.

335 Koss, “Coming to Terms with the Present,” 120. If the signs become normalized, if they are absorbed by their surroundings without thought or pause, they answer their own question of how could *this* happen. If their visibility remains, if their disruptive force endures, the more successful the signs impede the flow of forgetting. In either case,

Remembrance enables a critical relation with the past, it instantiates the quality of rupture effected by a redemptive act of remembrance.

2.9

Monuments, memorials, and the objects they set to memory, make a claim to immortality.³³⁶ But “how might one create something to commemorate an absence ... through a medium that itself struggles against its own tendency to disappear?”³³⁷ Benjamin’s politics of pure means – a constitutive violence unconcerned with self-preservation or institutionalization, referring solely to its enactment – responds to this challenge through an abyssal opening of the Derridean ‘to-come.’

Often expressed in terms of a messianic without messianism [*messianique sans messianisme*], Derrida’s notion of the ‘to-come’ corresponds to an atheological openness (without content, without religion), a quasi-transcendental hospitality open to whatever and whomever may come. Similarly devoid of intention, Benjamin’s politics of pure means does not appeal to preconceived ends for its legitimation, but gains validity in its self-instantiation. For Derrida, the promise of emancipation relates to an idea of justice distinguishable from law and right, one that is informed by an unconditioned arrival. This atheological messianism accords to an idea of democracy which he describes as a ‘democracy to-come,’ a democracy without a

the signs may end up dividing “their audience, once again, into perpetrators and victims.” For Koss, “the decrees slip all too easily into the present.” By distinguishing a marginalized group from the community the project addresses, it “reinscribes Berlin’s Jews – both past and present – within a conception of the community endorsed by National Socialism, perpetuating precisely those Nazi stereotypes it claims to deplore even as it aims at the perceptual reconfiguration of its viewers.” (124). Koss concludes, “the project is either insensitive to the feelings of living Jews or misguided in presuming their absence; in either case it is naïve in reducing German and Jewish identity to mutually exclusive categories.” (127).

336 “Intentional commemorative value aims to preserve a moment in the consciousness of later generations, and therefore to remain alive and present in perpetuity.” Alois Riegl, “The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and Its Origin,” trans. Kurt W. Foster and Diane Ghirardo, *Oppositions* 25 (1982): 21-51.

337 Here Koss builds on writer Robert Musil’s claim that “there is nothing in the world so invisible as a monument.” Koss, “Coming to Terms with the Present,” 75-78.

horizon of expectation. The “messianic opening to what is coming, that is, to the event that cannot be awaited *as such*, or recognized in advance,” such a “a hospitality without reserve, which is nevertheless the condition of the event and thus of history is the impossible itself.”³³⁸ Paradoxically signaling an urgency and awaiting without expectation, Derrida’s ‘to-come’ remains impossible. However, from the perspective of remembrance, one called into being by the imminence of a historical-index demanding to be read, the messianic is a revolutionary force.³³⁹

This is what I take to be Benjamin’s ‘blasting of historical continuity,’ where memory takes the form of an infinitely recomposable (iterrable) constellation of past and present. Wrenching part from whole liberates history from an empathetic notion of progress and gives way to a political praxis that draws and releases its energy from events of memory rather than the facts of history.³⁴⁰

338 Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 65.

339 There can be “no to-come without some sort of messianic memory and promise.” The messianic is not a religious concept, which is to say that it does not have the totalizing or providential qualities of messianism. The messianic is “without horizon of expectation and without prophetic prefiguration. The coming of the other can only emerge as a singular event when no anticipation sees it coming, when the other and death – and radical evil – can come as a surprise at any moment.” This absolute surprise that interrupts history, which wrenches it apart from any semblance of continuity (Benjamin’s “blasting of historical continuity with which the historical object first constitutes itself”), arrives in a moment of decision, which for Derrida implies an act that is “always that of the other.” Yet, whatever and whomever may come “does not exonerate me of responsibility.” An ever present possibility, the to-come “entails the greatest risk, even the menace of radical evil. Otherwise, that of which it is the chance would not be faith but rather programme or proof, predictability or providence, pure knowledge and pure know-how, which is to say, annulment of the future.” In other words, the future is both out of my control and yet something that I am utterly responsible for, since it is my actions, in response to an unknowable to-come, that will determine the significance of that which unexpectedly arrives. Jacques Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of ‘Religion’ and the Limits of Reason Alone,” in *Religion*, ed. Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 83, 56.

340 Meaningful experience [*Erfahrung*], as found in tradition, “is formed less from discrete facts [*Gegebenheiten*] fixed rigidly in memory [*Erinnerung*] than from accumulated, often unconscious data that flow together in memory [*Gedächtnis*]. *Sie bildet sich weniger aus einzelnen in der Erinnerung streng fixierten Gegebenheiten denn aus gehäuften, oft nicht bewußten Daten, die im Gedächtnis zusammenfließen.* My translation. Benjamin, “Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire,” (1939) *Illuminationen*, *Ausgewählte Schriften* 1 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1977), 186.

As we have seen, Benjamin's notion of memory responds to the latent objectivism of memorial architecture – informed by positivist historiography – by recovering the temporally disjunctive and politically enabling aspects of remembrance. However, by affirming the mutual correspondence of past and present through the figures of dialectical image, constellation, and awakening, Benjamin's threshold experience of reflective judgment seemingly opens itself to the subjectivist trappings of thinking history as a private and particular experience of memory. In other words, Benjamin's turn away from objective history to memory can be mistakenly read in a subjectivist light.

For Benjamin, memory is without meaning if it fails to initiate an open-ended temporal relay with past and future. By taking account of this relay, storytelling (discussed in the following chapter) releases memory from a depoliticizing subject-object binary. Norms of judgment, as such, are not self-legislated, nor are they determined by objects given by history to reason. Storytelling is neither objectivist (does not claim universal truth) nor subjectivist (does not relativize meaning). Rather, Benjamin's inaugurative notion of remembrance contained within storytelling eliminates the objectivist need for concepts from which to subsume particular insights of memory. The understandings achieved by this reflective practice are not private achievements, but public acts.

We recall that one of the effects of the historicist concern with objectivity is the devaluation of aesthetic judgment as merely subjective. Charges of presentism and relativism, leveled on behalf of scientific conceptions of objectivity, run throughout experiential notions of historical understanding. On this charge, a history informed by memory rather than facts yields a particularist understanding of the past. To the extent that they fail to consider alternative

opinions and perspectives in their formation of meaning, subjectivist accounts of history are, epistemologically speaking, unintelligible. Benjamin's praxis-oriented approach to historical narration, storytelling, obviates this difficulty by acknowledging a plurality of viewpoints on the past. With Benjamin, memory attains its worldly reality in the form of meaning through the weaving of multiple threads of tradition.

The meaning that follows from an act of remembrance informed by a reflective practice of judgment is not governed by epistemological or empirical truth claims, which is to say that historical understanding does not lay claim to an authoritative knowledge of the past. In this view, no timeless truth can be distilled from the multiplicity of narratives framing our understanding of the past.

Making memory politically meaningful is not about claiming a universally valid truth, but about reclaiming the past from hegemonic, dogmatic, homogenizing pretensions to truth. To relate the task of memory to the critical inquiry of truth, "whose living flame continues to burn over the heavy logs of what is past and the light ashes of what has been experienced," is to understand memory as an act of immanent critique.³⁴¹

In its production of meaning, immanent critique acts upon both subjects and objects of reflection, thereby changing both. To this effect, objectivist attempts to ground their investigations of truth and knowledge in a fixed and necessary conceptual structure are frustrated by immanent critique's refusal of a priori foundations. Put simply, there are no universal standards or criteria from which to adjudicate claims to experience and knowledge. That is not to say that individuals constitute their objects of knowledge, or that judgment is a private

341 Benjamin, "Goethe's Elective Affinities," *Selected Writings Volume 1: 1913-1926*, 298.

affair.³⁴² For Benjamin, history is determined by particular experiences that, in a historically situated act of judgment, are themselves called into question.

Yet, by foregoing universal categories and principles of understanding, immanent critique can potentially open the door to an arbitrary and idiosyncratic production of meaning. If critique is subjectively conditioned,³⁴³ i.e. if knowledge conforms to subjective experience, how does judgment, and Benjamin's notion of memory in particular, avoid the charge of radical subjectivism?

In his 1917-1918 study "On the Program of the Coming Philosophy," Benjamin problematizes the concept of experience offered by Kant (neo-Kantian empiricist notions of experience in particular) by displacing the terrain of critique itself. The task of future epistemology, Benjamin explains, "is to find for knowledge the sphere of total neutrality in regard to the concepts of both subject and object; in other words, it is to discover the autonomous, innate sphere of knowledge in which this concept in no way continues to designate the relation between two metaphysical entities."³⁴⁴ Situating critique within a sphere of knowledge that is open to experiences that are both temporal and figural, Benjamin thus refigures objectivity as a perceptual and affective determination of reflection.³⁴⁵ However, if the

342 As Arendt reminds us, "political judgments are decisions. As decisions, they have a 'foundation that cannot but be subjective.' Nevertheless, they must remain independent of all subjective interests." Arendt, *Reflections on Literature and Culture*, 199.

343 From an objectivist perspective, modern subjectivism, initiated by the epistemological demands of Kantian critique, leads to a relativization of knowledge. These demands follow from the idea that knowledge is not given by objects independently of our cognitive faculties. Due to the fact that the unconditioned transcends knowledge, the latter must be based on appearances cognized by self-reflective rational agents.

344 Walter Benjamin, "On the Program of the Coming Philosophy," *Selected Writings Volume 1: 1913-1926*, 104. *Die autonome ureigene Sphäre der Erkenntnis auszumitteln in der dieser Begriff auf keine Weise mehr die Beziehung zwischen zwei metaphysischen Entitäten bezeichnet.* Benjamin, "Über das Programm der kommenden Philosophie," *Angelus Novus*, Ausgewählte Schriften 2 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1966), 33.

345 "Reversals of the conventional subject-object terminology ... dramatize the fact that the medium of reflection represents the indifference point [*Indifferenzpunkt*] between subject and object in the romantics' conception of critique." McCole, *Walter Benjamin and the Antinomies of Tradition*, 90-93.

objective dimensions of memory do not follow from an a priori universal structure of knowledge, as they do from an objectivist standpoint (where reality is pregiven, existing independently of experience), to what extent does Benjamin's epistemology lay claim to historical knowledge and understanding?

From a historicist perspective, knowledge and understanding are attained only after reality has been accurately represented by way of general concepts and universal categories.³⁴⁶ Lacking such ontological footing, historical knowledge would sway with the subjective winds of personal inclination. To avoid this relativization of knowledge, historicism attempts to define an epistemological domain free of self-referentiality, away from personal experience and the prejudices contained therein. By inserting itself into the spirit of the age, historicism overcomes the temporal distance separating it from its objects of inquiry, thereby preventing cultural biases from corrupting its analysis.

Yet by applying the methodology of the natural sciences to the study of history, society, politics, and culture, historicism divests lived experience, preserved and transformed by way of tradition, of its authority. As explained by Hans-Georg Gadamer's rehabilitation of the authority of tradition, temporal distance is a "positive and productive condition enabling understanding. It is not a yawning abyss but is filled with the continuity and custom of tradition, in the light of which everything handed down presents itself to us."³⁴⁷

346 Following philosopher Richard Bernstein, objectivism relates to "the basic conviction that there is or must be some permanent, ahistorical matrix or framework to which we can ultimately appeal in determining the nature of rationality, knowledge, truth, reality, goodness, or rightness." Richard Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1983), 8-10.

347 "The true historical object is not an object at all, but the unity of the one and the other, a relationship that constitutes both the reality of history and the reality of historical understanding." Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 297-299.

Gadamer wants to remove the wedge dividing tradition and reason, so to conceive tradition in terms commensurate with human freedom. In his view, tradition is not an unquestioned condition, but an authority that must be claimed and acknowledged if it is to be understood and acted upon. The elements of freedom and history inherent in tradition need to be “affirmed, embraced, cultivated,” and preserved.³⁴⁸ By recognizing prejudice,³⁴⁹ a form of pre-judgment, to be an indispensable feature of understanding, Gadamer recovers tradition from the methodological and political conservatism of positivist historiography. With Benjamin, he opens received pasts to acts of judgment generative of new constellations of meaning. The historical immediacy of meaning suggests its revisability, and the always partial and provisional formation of understanding.

If reflective judgment dissolves the antinomies of subject and object, aesthetic experience – which is always partisan, as in the experience of a monument or memorial – describes a mode of self-understanding achieved in the process of understanding something other than the self.

Despite the differences separating Gadamer’s hermeneutic approach to tradition from Benjamin’s materialist historiography, both are attuned to the critical role played by experience in the transmission and reception of the past.³⁵⁰ This similarity is evident when one considers

348 Preservation, which for Gadamer is “active in all historical change,” “is as much a freely chosen action as are revolution and renewal.” Ibid., 282-283.

349 “If we want to do justice to man’s finite, historical mode of being, it is necessary to fundamentally rehabilitate the concept of prejudice and acknowledge the fact that there are legitimate prejudices.” Ibid., 278.

350 John McCole distinguishes the two perspectives on tradition as follows: “Benjamin’s dialectic of historical interpretation resembles Gadamer’s hermeneutics: reception involves contact between the present and specific moments of the past which are not always equally accessible; and reception is never just passive acceptance but always creation anew.” However, “in a different way than Gadamer’s notion of an ongoing dialogue with the past, Benjamin’s image of awakening holds out for the idea that in the synchronicity of historical moments the true image of the past can be glimpsed.” “Benjamin explicitly rejects the presumption that the effective history of a work represents a more or less adequate unfolding of it. He presumes, instead, that the interests that guide the traditioning process tend to distort the work, systematically and tendentiously,” without suggesting “that either the structure of works or their reception consigns them to a history of disparate (much less contingent) effects.” McCole, *Walter Benjamin and the Antinomies of Tradition*, 290-291, 299-300.

Gadamer's concept of play, which signifies the mode of being produced by aesthetic experience. A non-purposive participatory experience, play releases spectatorship from the subject-object binary by emphasizing the mutual involvement of what are traditionally understood to be the subjects (spectators) and objects (works of art) of aesthetic experience. Unconcerned with the pursuit of goal-oriented action, play "signifies the distance necessary for seeing, and thus makes possible a genuine and comprehensive participation in what is presented before us."³⁵¹ Read in terms of memorial architecture, play suggests that space, form, and order are not conditions of subjective awareness over objects of experience.³⁵² Rather play, the experience of non-intentional self-controlled activity, suspends the object of reflection from conceptual appropriation, thereby upsetting the instrumental pursuit of knowledge.³⁵³ Not only are the contents of memorial architecture (history, tradition, narrative) not self-enclosed, but architecture's means of representation, through which its contents are displayed, are not self-contained. This means that in both content and form, tradition signals its own incompleteness. As such, it makes a claim on those to whom the past is handed down to experience the past as an event of tradition.

This event of tradition does not follow from abstract valuations, but rather mnemonic insights, upon the basis of which self-understanding, as related to historically situated objects of reflection and conditions of experience, is constituted. Thus, from the perspective of

351 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 124.

352 For Gadamer, architecture is "an artistic solution to a building problem" that preserves the underlying motivations (problems) of its origination. "Something in it points back the original" purpose of its construction. Though architecture engenders meanings that are local and contingent, it avoids the mere particularity of subjectivism by demanding an account of its own historicity, that is, by referencing the historical, aesthetic, and political context determining its production. "Architecture explodes that prejudice of the aesthetic consciousness according to which the actual work of art is what is outside all space and all time, the object of an aesthetic experience." *Ibid.*, 149-151.

353 "The movement of playing has no goal that brings it to an end; rather, it renews itself in constant repetition." "It is part of play that the movement is not only without goal or purpose but also without effort." *Ibid.*, 104-105.

remembrance put forward by Benjamin, memorial architecture has the potential to upset the dichotomy of abstract particularity and objective historical knowledge through the production of affects transformative of our relation to reality.

Chapter 3: Memorial Architecture as Storyteller

In the memorial's silence in terms of the traditional ideas of image and meaning, it becomes political. Unlike other site-specific work that has no memorial or political program, it is the memorial's obdurate lack of obvious symbolism that makes its public claim to creating the sense of a dual time: one experienced in the present; the other, the possible remembrance of another experience of the past in the present.³⁵⁴

-- Peter Eisenman, "The Silence of Excess"

A rippling field of concrete pillars, Peter Eisenman's Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe [*Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas*] unfolds a minimal and subdued aesthetic, yet one that is thoroughly engaged with its geographic surrounding and place in history.

Composed of 2,711 upright rectangular stelae, the spare and schematic Memorial lacks designated points of entry and exit, and does not offer its visitors an organizational logic from which to carry out the labor of remembrance. Rather than objectify or aestheticize the past, the Memorial responds to its claims by offering each visitor a unique and subjectively inflected experience with history.

In his theoretical work, Eisenman resolutely denies the possibility of achieving a complete understanding of the past based on objective knowledge of the events that memorial architecture commemorates. Rather, he insists on the complexity of memory and the subject's need to create meaning for itself. As the epigraph above suggests, Eisenman's Memorial's bifurcated temporality shifts memory's relation to time away from the temporal abstractions of past, present, and future to more dynamic and open-ended encounters with experience.

Understood as an intervention into the temporal rhythms of daily life, experience provokes a

354 Hanno Rauterberg, *Holocaust Memorial Berlin: Eisenman Architects* (Baden: Lars Müller Publishers, 2005), inset.

perceptual and tactile awareness on subjects who are neither present nor removed from the passing of time and the movement of space. The convergence of past and present generated by experience displaces understanding from its cognitive register, resignifying it as an affective and experiential modality. By contracting time, this displacement precludes the Memorial from being judged determinatively, that is, according to a universal concept or rule that would reveal its intended meaning uniformly to each and every subject, regardless of his or her location in time and space. The Memorial does not represent, nor does it explain or depict, a universal meaning for past events. As I argue below, the creation of meaning is immanent to an act of judgment, which places of remembrance, like the Memorial, ought to facilitate.

Eisenman's design for the Memorial intends to be a response to what he describes as a radical alteration of the terms marking death. It purposefully foregoes the convention of representing an eternal meaning through symbolic imagery, and refuses to adopt the traditional notion of ground as a self-contained marker of place, that is, as a datum of reference from which to orient oneself spatially. The Memorial's relation to ground is not site specific, but particular to one's experience of its enveloping space. To this effect, the Memorial denies ground as a condition of presence. No longer an objective determination, presence accounts for a subjective relation abstracted from time and space. Eisenman explains:

the experience of being present in presence, of being without the conventional markers of experience, of being potentially lost in space, of an un-material materiality: that is the memorial's uncertainty. When such a project can overcome its seeming diagrammatic abstraction, ... then such a work becomes a warning, a mahnmal [memorial], not to be judged on its meaning or its aesthetic but on the impossibility of its own success.³⁵⁵

355 Ibid., inset.

On Eisenman's reading of the tradition, memorials succeed when they convey a message by way of representation. Rejecting the norms, conventions, and ends governing the tradition, Eisenman's Memorial deliberately suspends any judgment of its meaning and its aesthetic.

Rather than view it as a self-contained site of meaning, Eisenman proposes that spectators lose themselves in the experience of being present in the presence of the Memorial, giving time to the memory of the dead without expecting to achieve a deeper understanding or effect some greater significance. If anything, the Memorial should function as a warning against thought's totalization and any external or systematic imposition of meaning.³⁵⁶

It is with these goals in mind that Eisenman designs an experiential site of memory, one that throws the work of memory back upon the self. Describing the relation between the Memorial and its underground Information Center, Eisenman writes: "the uncertain frame of reference that results further isolates individuals in what is intended to be an unsettling personal experience."³⁵⁷ By placing uncertainty at the center of the work, Eisenman refers questions of meaning and understanding to the individual visitor. The strength of this strategy lies in its ability to break with the universal approach to history, intent on asserting an authoritative interpretation of the past. These histories, and the timeless truths they assert, are problematic, I would argue, for they close down the democratic space of reflective judgment. Opening itself to multiple meanings and indeterminate effects, Eisenman's Memorial has the potential to reactivate this space.

356 According to Eisenman, the Memorial is designed "to reveal the innate disturbances and potential for chaos in all systems of seeming order, the idea that all closed systems of a closed order are bound to fail." Peter Eisenman, *Peter Eisenman: Feints*, ed., Silvio Cassarà (Milan: Skira, 2006), 152.

357 *Ibid.*, 152.

In light of his understanding of how memorial architecture tends to close down the space of reflective judgment, it is puzzling that Eisenman agrees to the addition of an Information Center, whose exhibition halls serve as the Memorial's interpretive hub. As I show in greater detail below, such a center is a direct response to the risk that Eisenman's Memorial, focused as it is on generating individual encounters with the past, inevitably brings with it: namely, the risk of sliding into a subjectivist frame of history, in which meanings are what the subject creates for him or herself. This risk raises not only the problem of historical revisionism, but also that of collective memory and its political meaning. Although the Shoah may well be, for some spectators, a personal matter, that is, something that has affected them in a deeply private way (e.g., through the loss of friends and family), surely our understanding of the Shoah, initiated by the Memorial, must be more than a private issue. How might such a memorial, and memorial architecture in general, transcend the immediacy of personal experience without giving hostage to the objectivist account that Eisenman rightly wishes to challenge?

In order to pursue this question, I turn to Walter Benjamin. His concept of history, understood here as a politics of remembrance, enables a way of seeing architecture as the capacity to keep in productive tension the relationship of the objective to the subjective, and the present to the past. In Benjamin's account, the past comes into existence for us insofar as it takes on meaning, and such meaning is not given in the objective structure of events but is created through an active form of remembrance, the mode of which can be found in his praxis-oriented conception of storytelling. Storytelling is a form of historical transmission that is neither objective nor subjective. As we shall see, this alternate form of transmission communicates experience, rather than knowledge, that makes history meaningful and thus politically

significant. For many things have happened that have little or no place in memory as it relates to political community. The sheer factuality of past events, in short, is not enough to guarantee their political significance. No objectivist account of the past can possibly satisfy this condition of meaningfulness.

Storytelling troubles our assumptions that memory and its meanings can be presented and preserved with definitive certainty (e.g., the true story), and so it encourages participation, interpretation, and critical reflection. By distinguishing storytelling – a form of counsel that is less an answer to a question than a provocation for its continuation – from historicism (a teleological account of historical development documenting verifiable knowledge about the past), Benjamin exposes modernity's failure to generate and share meaningful experiences. To think of history as the interruption of linear movement that typically defines lived experience, rather than the communication of objective knowledge, is to open a space for a political praxis animated by critical self-reflection and political judgment. Thus, Benjamin's 1936 essay “The Storyteller” [*Der Erzähler*] enables us to orient our understanding of the past toward a politics attuned to the task of thinking through memory: that which energizes meaningful action in the present by reminding us of our innate ability to think, judge, and act.

1. Storytelling

Historicism offers the ‘eternal’ image of the past; historical materialism supplies a unique experience with the past.³⁵⁸

-- Walter Benjamin, “On the Concept of History”

Benjamin is less concerned with the story as a form than as a medium capable of shocking, interrupting, and awakening a dormant historical sensibility. Historicism mistakenly

358 Walter Benjamin, “On the Concept of History,” *Selected Writings Volume 4: 1938-1940*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 396.

assumes that the past can be captured in a totalizing and complete image. As we have seen, it is this historicist sensibility that informs the practice of representation of traditional memorial architecture. With storytelling, Benjamin allows for a richer practice of representation and sense of historical transmission: the past being intended for a moment in which the meaning of an event changes as it is received by the inheritors of a tradition who bring to it their own life experiences.³⁵⁹ We recall that the act of inheritance is an interpretive one in which individuals judge for themselves the histories that inform their collective and personal sense of self. Because the act of inheritance will vary with each generation, it is likely that its medium, tradition, will also change over time. Thus, the question of tradition becomes one of transmission, which is to say, how different individuals understand and take up the past as an inheritance that gives meaning to the present.

If the giving, receiving, and claiming of the past is an immediate concern for memorial architecture, then by what means should it be communicated? Specifically, in what mode can the past be communicated such that it facilitates an ongoing reception of history that leaves open the human desire for understanding and its search for meaning? Following Benjamin, I argue that storytelling awakens an otherwise politically depressed ethic of experience: meaning is not external to the act of its creation, but rather internal to the historical sense of a self awakened by experience, past and present.

359 Similarly, Gadamer's notion of linguistic tradition, which he understands as "tradition in the proper sense of the word – i.e. something handed down," emphasizes the active dimensions of tradition, transmission and reception, as they relate to memory. "It is not this document, as a piece of the past, that is the bearer of tradition but the continuity of memory. Through it tradition becomes part of our own world." Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Continuum, 2005), 391-392.

Storytelling is the art of repeating stories, where to repeat means also to re-create. The sharing of experience [*Erfahrung*]³⁶⁰ involved in storytelling imparts wisdom, intelligence, and counsel, as opposed to knowledge, instruction, and information.³⁶¹ Information circumscribes experience: information is temporary, living for only that moment in which it is new; information is explainable, meaning it assigns reasons and justifications for an occurrence; the purpose of information is to convey an event, “to isolate what happens from the realm in which it could affect the experience of the reader.” That is to say, the function of information is to make something universally communicable without affecting those who hear it, i.e. without interfering with the determinate relay between experience and knowledge. Supplying ‘a handle for what is nearest,’ information communicates an event through cognitive, rather than experiential, integration.³⁶² Unlike cognitive integration, which adheres to an abstract logic of determinate specification to produce agreement between objects of perception and their conceptual apprehension, experiential integration is disintegrative: it does not have a regulative relation to judgment, but a relation that is inventive, imaginative, reflective, and critical.³⁶³

360 The German *Erlebnis* signifies an isolated experience, whereas *Erfahrung* pertains to an accumulation of experiences.

361 “Counsel woven into the fabric of real life [*gelebten Lebens*] is wisdom. The art of storytelling is nearing its end because the epic side of truth – wisdom – is dying out.” Benjamin, “The Storyteller: Observations on the Works of Nikolai Leskov,” in *Selected Writings Volume 3: 1935-1938*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 146.

362 Walter Benjamin, “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” *Selected Writings Volume 4: 1938-1940*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 316-317.

363 Benjamin rejects the subject-object binary, and its metaphysical presuppositions, as an adequate form of relating experience, judgment, and knowledge. “It simply cannot be doubted that the notion, sublimated though it may be, of an individual living ego which receives sensations by means of its senses and forms its ideas on the basis of them plays a role of the greatest importance in the Kantian conception of knowledge. This notion, however, is mythology, and so far as its truth content is concerned, it is the same as every other epistemological mythology.” “Cognizing man, the cognizing empirical consciousness, is a type of insane consciousness.” Walter Benjamin, “On the Program of the Coming Philosophy,” *Selected Writings Volume 1: 1913-1926*, eds., Marcus Bullock, Michael Jennings (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), 103-104.

Benjamin claims that “one of the essential features of every real story [is that] it contains openly or covertly something useful.” And this something useful is saturated with real life experience. “In every case the storyteller is a man who has counsel for his readers.” Yet counsel is not a mere means to an end. For Benjamin, storytelling “is less an answer to a question than a proposal concerning the continuation of a story which is in the process of unfolding.” To seek counsel “one would first have to be able to tell the story.”³⁶⁴ Storytelling features a built-in logic of expectation. A storyteller anticipates that his or her audience will one day recount what it has heard, for only then will its wisdom reveal itself meaningfully.

Benjamin’s emphasis on the renewability of a story brings to relief one of the most salient differences between storytelling and traditional historiography. Storytelling is not the repetition of an original, whether it is empirical (information) or cognitive (knowledge³⁶⁵), but the telling of what is necessary, or rather meaningful, for a particular time. A story is inexhaustible; it has a wealth of meanings beyond its telling, a life that cannot be explained away.³⁶⁶ “Traces of the storyteller cling to a story the way the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel.”³⁶⁷ With the accumulation of experiential traces (associations, correspondences, similarities) comes a thickening of the testimonial layer. “In the process of transmission a work acquires functions and meanings that leave behind both the author’s intention and the reception

364 Benjamin, “The Storyteller,” 145-146.

365 Benjamin complicates Kant’s division of knowledge and experience by situating knowledge within the realm of experience. Whereas for Kant, knowledge is timeless, eternal, and self-same, and experience is ephemeral, singular, and momentary, knowledge, as understood by Benjamin, is an experience of a passing singularity, that is, an immediate insight or intuitive understanding whose condition of possibility is experience. In the essay “On the Program for the Coming Philosophy,” Benjamin makes the case that Kant’s understanding of knowledge is incompatible with modern historical, social, and aesthetic conditions, which lack the critical distance (from the object of reflection) necessary to experience anything other than the determined knowledge of the ever same.

366 “It is half the art of storytelling to keep a story free from explanation as one recounts it.” Benjamin, “The Storyteller,” 148.

367 *Ibid.*, 149.

of the work by contemporaries in its original context.”³⁶⁸ A story evokes a past irreducible to a stock of information (facts, names, and dates), such that new meanings emerge within the traces of the telling.

1.1

With storytelling, Benjamin is interested in the communicability of experience: the possibility of interiorizing a story and making it one’s own, and the ability to share what one has made. “The storyteller takes what he tells from experience – his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale.”³⁶⁹ This process of interiorization – making a story one’s own – reorients perspectives, and thereby inspires critical reflection against normalizing tendencies of objective knowledge. Unlike a history that looks upon its content as something fixed and stable, a story works with an experience that is open and active. The storyteller imparts informal knowledge, hearsay, as opposed to verifiable fact.³⁷⁰ “Intelligence that came from afar – whether over spatial distance (from foreign countries) or temporal (from tradition) – possessed an authority which gave it validity, even when it was not subject to verification.”³⁷¹ In other words, the wisdom communicated in a story draws its authority, power, and legitimacy from the act of sharing experiences, not from the making of epistemological or empirical truth claims.

368 John McCole, *Walter Benjamin and the Antinomies of Tradition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 297.

369 Benjamin, “The Storyteller,” 146.

370 Benjamin concludes his essay by relating the storyteller to teachers and sages, those who have counsel many of life’s situations. “He is granted the ability to reach back through a whole lifetime (a lifetime, incidentally, that comprises not only his own experience but much of the experience of others; what the storyteller knows from hearsay is added to what is most his own).” *Ibid.*, 162.

371 *Ibid.*, 147.

A story, and the wisdom that emerges in its telling, does not lay claim to immediate verifiability, nor does it have to sound plausible. A story that sounds unbelievable has as good if not better a chance of being remembered than one grounded in reason and fact.

There is nothing that commends a story more effectively than that chaste compactness which precludes psychological analysis. And the more natural the process by which the storyteller forgoes psychological shading [*psychologische Schattierung*], the greater becomes the story's claim to a place in the memory of the listener [*auf einen Platz im Gedachtnis des Horenden*].³⁷²

Unconstrained by reality, the storyteller can choose to forego explanation, so as to encourage a suspension of disbelief in its audience. Narrative play that borders on the fantastic not only helps commit a story to memory, it contributes to its evolution and afterlife. Because the story changes through transmission, it need not stand on its own: a story does not have to appear ‘understandable in itself,’ nor does it have to give an accurate or full account of the pure ‘in itself.’ A story is not a fixed object, but a dynamic force; its teller is not concerned with an exact recounting, but with fidelity to an affective truth of experience. For these reasons, we should approach a story with a curiosity similar to that of a child who investigates things unfamiliar no matter how strange, the details of which append a yet-to-be decoded vocabulary of experiential knowledge.

To be curious is to be mindfully exposed. Storytelling, and the memories it inspires, achieves a certain distance from the object of reflection. “The kind of memory that can lend coherence to ongoing, accumulating experience depends on associative richness rather than mechanical precision in recalling discrete facts.”³⁷³ In this sense, the affective response inspired by storytelling resembles that of involuntary memory. Involuntary memory, as opposed to

372 Ibid., 149.

373 McCole, *Walter Benjamin and the Antinomies of Tradition*, 7.

intentional recall, characterizes the recovery of a past experience in a perception or sensation.

The images and experiences involuntary memory brings to mind have yet to be organized by reason and consciousness into a body of knowledge. Remembrance, in effect, entails an active and passive mindfulness – *passive*, insofar as what is brought to mind is involuntary, that is, beyond the intention of a knowing subject (non-purposive), *active*, in that a referent evokes a memory that needs to be taken-up in order to be received.

Involuntary memory is spontaneous and unexpected. Whereas voluntary memory involves the conscious act of recalling information about a past experience, involuntary memory brings to mind – through affection, perception, and sensation – what has not yet been integrated as knowledge by consciousness, namely, traces of experience.³⁷⁴ Remembrance as redemption recovers this residue. Memory bears truths whose unities are immediate as they are disintegrative. Redemptive remembrance is akin to involuntary memory in the sense that it is not the effect of an intending subject. Rather, remembrance is “an *event* of meaning, that is not essentially determined by human subjectivity and to which human subjects *answer* in the initiative by which they write their history.”³⁷⁵ To articulate itself historically vis-à-vis tradition, the present must activate the interruptive force of memory.³⁷⁶

374 Whether voluntary or involuntary, memory is virtual. Part simulation, part representation, recollection “remains attached to the past by its deepest roots, and if, once realized, it did not retain something of its original virtuality, if, by being a present state, it were not also something which stands out distinct from the present, we should never know it from memory.” Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* (New York: Zone Books, 2005), 134.

375 “The stamp of truth is dangerous and critical because it puts the present fundamentally in question and indeed *destroys* it as the present of a consciousness that conceives itself in relation to the linear continuity of the representation of historical time.” Christopher Fynsk reads Benjamin’s historical index as both “the date of its emergence and of its expiration (not ‘must sell by’ but ‘must be read by’ and ‘will not be readable before’).” Christopher Fynsk, “The Claim of History,” *Diacritics* 22, no. 3/4 (Fall/Winter 1992): 115-126.

376 Theorist Susan Buck-Morss offers a different reading of Benjamin’s relation to tradition than the one posed here. “Far from lamenting the situation [the rupture of tradition], Benjamin saw precisely here modernity’s uniquely revolutionary potential. The traditional manner whereby the new generation was brought out of its childhood dreamworld had the effect of perpetuating the social status quo. In contrast, the rupture of tradition now frees symbolic powers from conservative restraints for the task of social transformation, that is, for a rupture of those

This redeeming act does not change or commemorate the past, but subverts the logic of its exclusion. The insignificant (quotidian, unexceptional, mundane) sensations and material of everyday life, marginalized and dismissed for more pragmatic and pressing concerns, appear from nowhere, out-of-time, as in a flash. Their insignificance is shown to be a cultural construction. Benjamin's historical materialist knows this; his task is to expose the arbitrary and contingent nature of accepted norms and conventions.³⁷⁷

1.2

To quicken a politics of remembrance, stories must be repeatable. Being able to repeat a story requires committing it to memory, such that the affective truth of the experience – past and present – resonates long after the story has come to an end.³⁷⁸ The more completely a story is integrated into the fabric of one's experience, "the greater will be his inclination to repeat it to someone else someday."³⁷⁹ Thus, spectators become actors by adopting aspects of a story and making it their own. "The cardinal point for the willing listener," writes Benjamin, "is to assure himself of the possibility of reproducing the story. Memory is the epic faculty par excellence," enabling those who listen to reflect on, so as to ultimately judge, an experience of the present-past.³⁸⁰

social conditions of domination that, consistently, have been the source of tradition." Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and The Arcades Project* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1991), 278.

377 "The everyday forms of interaction Benjamin invokes proceed without an established formula or codified agreements between autonomous individuals but rather by 'indirect' means. Benjamin likens these everyday negotiations of social space to the general strike; they displace social codes without the object of establishing a new dictator." Benjamin's notion of political subjectivity eschews sovereignty. Rather than locate the political stakes of aesthetics in finite demands, temporary aberrations, surprises, and shocks (i.e. aesthetic play), it cultivates "a critical and 'calm' experimentation with new patterns of thought and action." See Kam Shapiro, *Sovereign Nations, Carnal States* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 157-158, 165.

378 A story "does not expend itself. It preserves and concentrates its energy and is capable of releasing it even after a long time." Benjamin, "The Storyteller," 148.

379 Ibid., 149.

380 Ibid., 153.

For Benjamin, memory demands a certain amount of self-forgetfulness. “The more self-forgetful the listener is, the more deeply what he listens to is impressed upon his memory.”³⁸¹

This view is shared by Hannah Arendt, who describes self-forgetfulness as a kind of disinterested joy experienced by those who, in moments of reflection, suspend their immediate concerns. Without self-forgetfulness, she argues, it is difficult to achieve the appropriate distance from which to judge reflectively. “This distance cannot arise unless we are in a position to forget ourselves, the cares and interests and urges of our lives.”³⁸² So to encourage this condition, storytelling figures its audience as more than a point of address. It implies participation, the losing of one’s sense of self in a story such that the purposeful intentions of everyday life are suspended.

The self-forgetfulness involved in the transmission of tradition suggests that unlike the isolated experience of reading a modern novel, storytelling is not a purely subjective act, but a participation in an event of tradition, i.e. intersubjective. Tradition signifies the communicability and intelligibility of experience, as opposed to a self-contained body of knowledge. The customs and beliefs that inform our practices, what is usually thought of as tradition, must be broken with in order to enact tradition; listeners are inscribed within tradition as they share in the participatory experience of a telling.³⁸³ In other words, the communicability of experience depends on the active participation of an audience.³⁸⁴ The storyteller appeals to its listeners for a

381 Ibid., 149.

382 Hannah Arendt, “The Crisis in Culture: Its Social and Its Political Significance,” in *Between Past and Future* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 210.

383

384 “The act of judgment is the act whereby a spectator becomes simultaneously an actor. The historian makes, and is also made by, the object of history.” “Judgment is the act that intervenes in what is possible. The judgment halts the infinity of potentiality ... it is the interruption of the movement between infinite and finite.” Dimitris Vardoulakis, “The Subject of History: The Temporality of Parataxis in Benjamin’s Historiography,” in *Walter Benjamin and History*, 132-134.

non-empirical form of validation; again, what the storyteller communicates must have an affective resonance, that which stimulates reflective (non-determinative) judgments. Because there is no stable ground from which to judge, it is only through acts of judgment that community, however tenuous and ephemeral, is formed.

Storytelling, and the judgment it inspires, not only deepens communal sensibility, but arouses an ethic of participation.³⁸⁵ Telling a story, which is always from a particular perspective, involves imagining what the world looks like from multiple perspectives. Drawing on the Greeks, Arendt depicts storytelling as an immortalizing act that gives the fleeting affairs of men a kind of worldly permanence. For Arendt, the exchange of perspective and opinion involved in storytelling extends the duration of human action beyond the time and space of its emergence, while also making durable the public realm in which it appears. In short, storytelling makes events comprehensible, intelligible, and ultimately meaningful. Because these meanings are always contingent, local, and partial, they are in need of constant renewal. Political judgment enables us to rearticulate our meanings in a world of indeterminate change. Sharing experience in an exchange of perspective gives shape to a speaking and listening, thinking and judging, and in all senses of the word, acting community.

New forms of experience contribute to the development of new forms of communication. As the medium through which experience is communicated changes (according to economic and social imperatives), from storytelling to the mass dissemination of information, so does the form of community it engenders, from a participatory culture, to one increasingly defined by individualism and isolation.

³⁸⁵ Storytelling is a form of sociability. "The storyteller maintains the unity of political community." Kia Lindroos "Scattering Community: Benjamin on Experience, Narrative and History," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 27, no. 6 (2001): 19-41.

For Benjamin, the decline of storytelling is marked by the rise of the novel, whose point of departure is “the individual in his isolation, the individual who can no longer speak of his concerns in exemplary fashion,³⁸⁶ who himself lacks counsel and can give none.”³⁸⁷ Like the reader of the printed press, the novel reader consumes information lacking intelligence, content devoid of tradition.

However, tradition does not require oral transmission. The act of storytelling does not privilege one mode of reception over all others. Auditors, spectators, and readers alike can access tradition: “A man listening to a story is in the company of the storyteller; even a man reading one shares this companionship. The reader of a novel, however, is isolated, more so than any other reader.”³⁸⁸ Whereas the communal thread of storytelling is spun from the sharing of experience – wisdom, intelligence, counsel – the detached isolation of the novel reader is confirmed with each bit of disposable information he consumes. “The reader of a novel seizes upon his material more jealously than anyone else. He is ready to make it completely his own – to devour it as it were.”³⁸⁹ Nothing is further removed from the communal ethic of storytelling than the individual consumption of information.

386 Examples matter because they provide alternative perspectives. This generative capacity relates thought to the imagination in a productive way. Political judgment demands this non-reproductive faculty of the imagination so as to produce meaning. It is through this production of meaning, and not the rational confirmation of knowledge, that political judgments attain their special exemplary validity. By drawing similarities, examples seek out connections that are not based on the subsumption of a particular under a rule: it is *this* particular raising itself to the generality of a universalizable rule that the example activates. Examples make it possible to relate similarities in ways that are sensible rather than representational, so as to establish connections that are neither subsumed under an already existing identity nor applied to an object of representation.

387 Benjamin, “The Storyteller,” 146.

388 Ibid., 156.

389 Ibid., 156. The novel reader transforms its content into an object of possession, a property over which one assumes ownership. The novel as property is bound to the propriety of the self: one grounds and founds the other by reinforcing the closed system of an autonomous subjectivity. Within the narrative frame of the novel, a reader’s encounter with death can be a source of self-confirmation. “At the end of the story, death is thus *seen* to befall others, while the reader lives on to retell or reread the story. The visible end of the hero, or of the enemy, can thus

1.3

Following the First World War, Benjamin diagnoses a change in the structure of human experience. The atrophy and impoverishment of modern experience, characterized by a shift from *Erfahrung* to *Erlebnis*, that is, from genuine [*echte*] lived experience to the alienated and subjective experience of inner life, is symptomatic of the increasing dissociation of memory from experience.³⁹⁰ Removed from actions that go beyond mere use, the modern subject loses its ability to integrate sensations and perceptions, the residue of lived experience, which, in turn, weakens its ability to recall lived events as memorable and communicable. In today's hyper-culture of mass information, an increasing impatience with complexity and ambiguity, and a growing aversion to paradox, betrays this deficiency – the inability to share meaningful experience.

Consequently, individuals are less capable of sharing experience through the telling of a tale. “Never has experience been more thoroughly belied than strategic experience was belied by tactical warfare, economic experience by inflation, bodily experience by mechanical warfare, moral experience by those in power.”³⁹¹ Benjamin's diagnosis, following from the atrophy of

be taken to define the distance that the spectator hopes will protect him from a similar fate.” Samuel Weber, *Targets of Opportunity* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 87.

390 As Beatrice Hanssen explains, the loss of “experience and tradition resulted from the introduction of a new, modern temporality, driven by far-reaching forms of mechanization and acceleration.” Sensitive to the temporal dislocations of modern experience, “Benjamin concluded that the modern condition came about through a split in the faculty of memory or the realm of collective tradition.” Hanssen's reading of the modern shift from *Erfahrung* to *Erlebnis* is informed by Benjamin's critique of Kantian epistemology found in his “On the Program of the Coming Philosophy.” Here, Benjamin claims that “an objective relation between the empirical consciousness and the objective concept of experience [*Erfahrung*] is impossible. All genuine experience [*echte Erfahrung*] rests upon the pure 'epistemological (transcendental) consciousness,' if this term is still usable under the condition that it be stripped of everything subjective.” See Beatrice Hanssen, *Walter Benjamin's Other History* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 178; Benjamin, “On the Program of the Coming Philosophy,” 104.

391 “Beginning with the First World War, a process became apparent which continues to this day. Wasn't it noticeable at the end of the war that men who returned from the battlefield had grown silent – not richer but poorer in communicable experience?” Benjamin, “The Storyteller,” 144-145. “Proust could emerge as an unprecedented phenomenon only in a generation that had lost all bodily and natural aids to remembrance [*Eingedenken*].” Walter

communicable sensibility experienced by soldiers returning from the First World War, accurately describes the devaluation of modern experience. The ensuing catastrophe of an all-pervasive human complacency is reflected and institutionalized in various forms of media and advertising.³⁹² Adhering to the demands of brevity and simplicity, dominant modes of social, political, and cultural communication diminish our capacity for collective spontaneity.³⁹³ The print media of Benjamin's time and the virtual media of the late twentieth-century share the same logic of immediacy: "nowadays no event comes to us without already being shot through with explanation."³⁹⁴ From the perspective of communicable experience, both have a perverse effect on the structure of human perception: the content of information stands alone such that it seldom participates in an event of tradition.³⁹⁵

In Benjamin's account, tradition signifies the communicability of experience, rather than a unified body of values or knowledge. The impoverishment of experience described by Benjamin relates to an increasing disaffection with, and further dissociation from, tradition.³⁹⁶ "Thoroughly alive and extremely changeable," tradition marks the way objects are handed down

Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), [K1,1], 389.

392 "Criticism is a matter of correct distancing. It was at home in a world where perspectives and prospects counted and where it was still possible to adopt a standpoint [implied: judgment]. Now things press too urgently on human society. ... Today the most real, mercantile gaze into the heart of things is the advertisement. It tears down the stage upon which contemplation moved, and all but hits us between the eyes with things as a car." Benjamin, *Selected Writings Volume 1: 1913-1926*, 476.

393 Reading Benjamin, Kam Shapiro argues that the modern atrophy of experience replaces traditional culture with "the virtual or 'imagined community' of a mass culture divorced from the habitus that constitutes tradition." For Shapiro, the loss of experience characterized by Benjamin manifests an inability "to *assimilate* stimuli in habitual patterns of action," thus deflating the political potential of the present. See Shapiro, *Sovereign Nations, Carnal States*, 138-140.

394 Benjamin, "The Storyteller," 147.

395 "Modern forms of communication broadcast discrete items of information, but the demands of 'freshness, brevity,' and prompt consumption work against their assimilation. As a result, *Erlebnis* thrives at the expense of *Erfahrung*." McCole, *Walter Benjamin and the Antinomies of Tradition*, 276.

396 "What distinguishes the novel from all other forms of prose literature – the fairy tale, the legend, even the novella – is that it neither comes from oral tradition nor enters into it." Benjamin, "The Storyteller," 146.

from the past.³⁹⁷ For there to be a critical relation to the past, one that would enable the kind of judgments constitutive of community, experience must enter tradition – not tradition as a given set of inherited meanings or customs that one is bound, by tradition, to uphold, but tradition as an ongoing practice of creating and communicating meaning about the past. For this past – what has happened – cannot be changed. What can be changed is one’s relationship to the past, and this involves an act of critical judgment.

Such judgment, by which one alters not the past but one’s relation to it, is at stake in contemporary memorial architecture. For experience to enter tradition, sites of remembrance must offer more than a didactic and commemorative relation to the past, for such a relation leaves each of us in an ultimately static and passive relationship to the immutable events of history. Adhering to the logic of progress, institutionalized memory bleaches the barbarism of history out of cultural artifacts, while storytelling, in its critical and reflective modes, dredges the past and lays bare the horrors of historical transmission.³⁹⁸ The point is not just to reflect on the horror; rather, it is to know how to go on precisely in the face of that experience.³⁹⁹ It is a matter not only of knowing what happened but of acknowledging it.

397 Benjamin, “Work of Art in the Age of Reproducibility,” in *Selected Writings Volume 4: 1938-1940*, 256. Benjamin’s understanding of tradition accord to the O.E.D., which defines tradition as follows: an “action of transmitting or ‘handing down’, or fact of being handed down, from one to another, or from generation to generation; transmission of statements, beliefs, rules, customs, or the like, esp. by word of mouth or by practice without writing. The collection of precepts and customs which forms the basis of the Talmud and is held to embody the oral tradition of Jewish law.” “Tradition, 4a,” *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., eds. J.A. Simpson and E.S.C. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989). OED Online Oxford University Press. 16 Oct. 2006. <http://dictionary.oed.com/>.

398 “The liberation of culture,” writes Habermas in his early treatment of Benjamin, “is not possible without overcoming the repression anchored in institutions.” Jürgen Habermas, “Consciousness-Raising or Redemptive Criticism – The Contemporaneity of Walter Benjamin” (1972), *New German Critique* 17, Special Walter Benjamin Issue (Spring, 1979): 57.

399 Adorno’s reflections on post-Auschwitz politics, culture, education, and philosophy make a similar intervention. These reflections will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Acknowledgment is not a problem of certainty, or an epistemic question of truth.⁴⁰⁰ It is a form of understanding through which we act upon what we know, account for it in some socially significant way. For example, we may know that people are being tortured in our name, but what would it mean to acknowledge it? What is needed is not necessarily more knowledge of the torture – more evidence in the form of photos, documentation, or, to take the Shoah, more photos of bodies, piles of shoes, or collections of hair. Don't we already know enough? Isn't it a matter, rather, of altering our relation to these facts, transforming what we know into something socially and politically significant? What storytelling does, and what memorial architecture ought to do, is not to give us yet more knowledge – though it may well do that – but to provoke a critical awareness of what we already know, provoke, that is, our acknowledgment. To awaken democratic energies, memorialization and commemoration must avoid turning the past into an object of knowledge, a history comprised of souvenirs and cultural artifacts.⁴⁰¹ Tradition cannot be reduced to a storehouse of information.⁴⁰²

Like Benjamin, Theodor Adorno calls attention to the political significance of tradition by reclaiming the relation between tradition and action, such that each draws from and returns

400 Philosopher Stanley Cavell's resignification of acknowledgment moves the term away from a dialectic of recognition and infuses its meaning with active connotations. "Acknowledgment goes beyond knowledge. (Goes beyond not, so to speak, in the order of knowledge, but in its requirement that I *do* something or reveal something on the basis of that knowledge." Acknowledgment is a matter of what we do with respect to our knowledge of others, of how we perceive and project our expectations of others in light of what we know. It pertains to an ethical and political mode of orienting oneself to reality. Stanley Cavell, "Knowing and Acknowledging," in *Must We Mean What We Say? A Book of Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 257.

401 Souvenirs, like the contents of a novel and the information of the daily press, are disposed of shortly after their reception (consumption). In her reading of Benjamin's critique of the transmission and appropriation of cultural treasures, Benjamin scholar Beatrice Hanssen describes historicism's 'bad habits' as 'museal monumentalism and souvenir hunting.' Beatrice Hanssen, "Introduction," in *Walter Benjamin and The Arcades Project*, ed. Beatrice Hanssen (London: Continuum, 2006), 5.

402 "'To wrench the tradition from the conformism that wants to seize it'" means "to prevent what freezes it in a normative system which will decide on the usages of the past." Philippe Simay, "Tradition as Injunction: Benjamin and the Critique of Historicisms," in *Walter Benjamin and History*, ed. Andrew Benjamin, (London: Continuum, 2005), 155.

life to the other without obligation or reverence. “To renounce radically the possibility of experiencing the traditional,” writes Adorno, “would be to capitulate to barbarism out of devotion to culture.”⁴⁰³ Placing objects of tradition within a sweeping narrative in order to draw out a lesson, or explain a phenomenon, rather than allow works to appear for the sake of themselves, illustrates Adorno’s point. When tradition is no longer practiced, but merely preserved, memorial institutions contribute to the increasing functionalization of culture and withdrawal from lived experience. As citizens of good conscience, we frequent memorial institutions, like the increasingly popular heritage museum, to better understand our collective pasts; yet these cultural sites leave us with a lingering sense of meaninglessness precisely at that point where they, in their didactic mode of representation, appear to leave no meaning up for question.

Adorno’s reflections on the modern functionalization of media upend this relation. “The German word, *‘museal’* [*‘museumlike’*],” he argues, “has unpleasant overtones. It describes objects to which the observer no longer has a vital relationship and which are in a process of dying. They owe their preservation more to historical respect than to the needs of the present.”⁴⁰⁴ To restore the past’s vitality and help fulfill the political needs of the present – to view the world from a plurality of perspectives, to think, judge, and act reflectively – memorial institutions ought to promote indeterminate experiences vis-à-vis tradition. To make an archive out of tradition is to deprive it of all that is active and alive.

403 Theodor Adorno, *Prisms*, trans. Samuel Weber and Shierry Weber (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998), 176.

404 *Ibid.*, 175. “Museums are like the family sepulchers of works of art. They testify to the neutralization of culture.” With Adorno, critical theorist Sigrid Weigel argues that “the movements of excavation which are on the trail of meaningful individual pieces, culminates in a catalogue of the places where the findings are made or even of the vain search. This catalogue – in that it is distinguished from the *inventory* of retrieved objects – appears as it were as a different form of written record.” See Sigrid Weigel, *Body and Image Space: Re-Reading Walter Benjamin* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 101.

Benjamin's theoretical engagement with historicism – a discourse of exclusion, predicated on false assumptions of causality and mistaken beliefs in universal progress – reveals the political shortcomings of the modern concept of history. In particular, Benjamin's polemic questions its tendency to read causality into the past, a practice that evacuates history of contingency – the possibility of conceiving alternate beginnings and ends – at the expense of human freedom.

However, in today's culture of commemoration, whose nostalgic sensibility betrays an insatiable desire for authenticity, and in the increasingly popular genre of "victims' history," there is a race to the archive and a fight for the claim to its legitimate heir. Benjamin's chronicler, who displays "the happenings with which he deals" as "models of the course of the world," captures the archivist character.⁴⁰⁵ Rather than explain, the chronicler displays through narrative. Yet this narrative tells no story at all, relaying a complete image of the past without judgment. "The chronicler who narrates events without distinguishing between major and minor ones acts in accord with the following truth: nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost to history." This is a problem, for "only a redeemed mankind is granted the fullness of its past."⁴⁰⁶ Being that the future is unknown and indeterminate, this fullness, and hence redemption, remains incomplete.

"Redemption," Benjamin claims, "depends on the tiny fissure in the continuous catastrophe," a fissure that can only be opened by momentary acts of remembrance.⁴⁰⁷ Seen in

405 Benjamin, "The Storyteller," 152.

406 Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," 390.

407 Walter Benjamin, "Central Park," in *Selected Writings Volume 4: 1938-1940*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 185.

the light of a fulfilled past, a redeemed mankind would signal the end of history. But, insofar as events have an afterlife of contestable meanings, history has no end.

The desire for an all-encompassing history, excluding no detail, a history for which nothing is lost, is a common error made by public memorials. The factual display of history in its totality inhibits the emergence of similarities and correspondences, modes of critical thinking that facilitate reflective judgment. Under the chronicler's totalizing light, in which all is revealed, the present is blinded from the task of thinking history anew.

Read through Benjamin's materialist historiography, memorial architecture ought to avoid imposing meaning (foreclosure) and reconciliation (forgetting), and instead excite a practice of judgment generative of meaning and understanding. Being temporally marked, architecture reflects the values and norms of its inception, while adapting to the needs of the present. Thus, Benjamin's materialist historiography speaks to memorial architecture as an immanently collective practice: in their reception and production, sites of remembrance have the capacity to quicken collective energies.

2. Building Sites of Meaning

The power of storytelling to inform a democratically enabling practice of memorialization lies in its ability to reorient our understanding of a problem or an event, such that a new or changed perspective emerges that in turn affects how we think and act.⁴⁰⁸ If a critical relation to the past is necessary for a transformative political praxis, it is imperative that our sites of remembrance not function as an archive merely chronicling things we ought to remember. To paraphrase Nietzsche, too much history can have a paralyzing effect on human

408 Following McCole: "No insight into the new without a profound experience of tradition, no penetration of tradition without a clear perception of the new." McCole, *Walter Benjamin and the Antinomies of Tradition*, 21.

experience, overwhelming individuals and societies to the point of inaction.⁴⁰⁹ The past (or what Nietzsche refers to as the ‘It was’ of time) does not budge. Every attempt to undo the past (that is, what has happened and cannot be changed) leads to a sense of helplessness and ultimately a debilitating form of resentment [*ressentiment*]. It is no surprise that Benjamin cites Nietzsche’s *On the Use and Abuse of History for Life* in the theses on the philosophy of history: “We need history, but our need for it differs from that of the jaded idlers in the garden of knowledge.”⁴¹⁰ Confining sites of remembrance and the histories they evoke to the production of objective knowledge limits the range in which human experience can be understood.

Abstracted from experience, the surplus of information produced by contemporary memorial institutions atrophies life’s plastic powers, that is, its ability to give and receive form to experience. Insofar as experience informs our sense of the world, and the unique perspectives that give it shape, our experiential horizon must remain open, not only in the metaphorical space of history, but in all spheres of human life, including those in which we physically inhabit. That we are persons-in-the-world means that our physical location matters for the nature of our experience. If memorial architecture is to transcend the instrumental function of objective knowledge, it must consider the experiential implications of form, matter, order, and space.

This means coming to terms with the limits of representation and explanation. An explanation is a means of relating an event to other events through cause and effect. As such, it

409 “Provided the memory is continually stimulated by a stream of new things worth knowing which can be stored tidily away in its coffers, one finally widens the dubious gulf between content and form to the point of complete insensibility to barbarism.” Friedrich Nietzsche, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life” (1874), *Untimely Meditations*, ed., Daniel Breazeale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 79.

410 Benjamin, “On the Concept of History,” 394. See Nietzsche, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” 59. Nietzsche’s critique of historicism, in the words of Michel Foucault, questions “the form of history that reintroduces (and always assumes) a suprahistorical perspective: a history whose function is to compose the finally reduced diversity of time into a totality fully closed upon itself; a history that always encourages subjective recognitions and attributes a form of reconciliation to all the displacements of the past.” See Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” *The Foucault Reader*, ed., Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 86.

attempts to account for the reasons why an event happened the way it did. To explain is “to answer the question ‘Why?’ through a variety of uses of the connector ‘because.’”⁴¹¹ The narrative sequence formed by explanations imparts a logical coherence on a series of antecedents and consequents, i.e. on the events it sets out to explain. Whether an explanation correlates causes and conditions so to understand an event in terms of general and universal laws, or it relays the intentions and motivations of conscious agents so to achieve a subjective sense of why an occurrence took place the way it did, the logical coherence that follows evacuates the past of its historical contingency: it could have been otherwise.⁴¹² Ignoring the contingent haphazardness of human action not only dulls our ability to hold critical perspectives, it transforms experience into a kind of objective fact. Reducing experience to an object of knowledge cuts short the reflective act of judgment demanded by democratic practice. Thus, if sites of memorial are to preserve the possibility of meaning creation for future generations, they cannot afford to relegate memory to the realm of historical fact.⁴¹³

This task is made all the more difficult by the fact that the current proliferation of memorial institutions exists in an inverted relation to the experience of memory.⁴¹⁴ We trust our

411 Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 182.

412 As Arendt, citing Henri Bergson, explains: “In the perspective of memory, that is, looked at retrospectively, a freely performed act loses its air of contingency under the impact of now being an accomplished fact, of having become part and parcel of the reality in which we live. The impact of reality is overwhelming to the point that we are unable to ‘think it away’; the act appears to us now in the guise of necessity.” Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, vol. 2, *Willing* (New York: Harcourt, Inc, 1971), 30, 138-139.

413 Facts are “designed for their expiration: expiring either in the redemption, fulfillment and resolution of their intention or expiring in the miss of this redemption.” If it is to adhere to the reconfigurability of memory, history cannot account for facts without also taking up the question of their possibility and impossibility, that is, their immutability and their fragility. “When past things survive, then it is not lived-out (*abgelebte*) facts that survive, facts that could be recorded as positive objects of knowledge; rather what survives are the unactualized possibilities of that which is past.” Werner Hamacher, “‘Now’: Walter Benjamin on Historical Time,” in *Walter Benjamin and History*, ed. Andrew Benjamin (London: Continuum, 2005), 41-43.

414 The paradox of memory, and particularly nostalgia, writes theorist Svetlana Boym, is that “the stronger the loss, the more it is overcompensated with commemorations, the starker the distance from the past, and the more it is prone to idealizations.” Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 17.

memorials to remember for us, yet the more memory is institutionalized, the less meaningful it becomes. This is evinced by the increasing fetishization of artifacts by curators and tourists, which runs the risk of mistaking a piece for an always implied whole.⁴¹⁵ Insofar as facts are invested with an intention (whether it be justification, legitimation, validation, etc.), they lack the autonomy entrusted to them institutionally and socially. Partial and fragmentary, facts do not stand on their own.⁴¹⁶ Thus, assigning causal connections – unreflectively adding up the facts – is symptomatic of an empathetic identification with the victors and their present heirs. As Benjamin describes, “empathy with the past serves not least to make the past seem present. It is no coincidence that this tendency accords very well with a positivist conception of history ... [which] is secured at the cost of completely eradicating every vestige of history’s original role as remembrance [*Eingedenken*].” Sites of memorial, and the narratives they project, should not only account for historical facts, they must also provoke a practice of remembrance transformative of our relation to facts.

This, however, proves difficult, insofar as the organization of space that defines all architecture assumes its own meaningfulness. In other words, the fashioning of our lived environment unavoidably invests both its form and function with signifying content. Simultaneously contaminated and ennobled by practical concerns, structural imperatives, and aesthetic values, architecture cannot be free from purpose, nor can it be purely functional. “An axiomatic, that is to say, an organized ensemble of fundamental and always presupposed

415 “The souvenir [*Andenken*],” writes Benjamin, “is the complement to ‘isolated experience’ [*Erlebnis*]. In it is precipitated the increasing self-estrangement of human beings, whose past is inventoried as dead effects. ... [T]he souvenir comes from the defunct experience [*Erfahrung*] which thinks of itself, euphemistically, as living [*Erlebnis*].” Benjamin, “Central Park,” *Selected Writings Volume 4: 1938-1940*, 183.

416 Factual truth cannot stand on its own, but requires discursive supports. Facts alone, Arendt claims, possess “no trace of self-evidence or plausibility for the human mind.” Hannah Arendt, “Truth and Politics,” in *Between Past and Future*, 251.

evaluations,” traverses through the field of architecture: “*architecture must have meaning, it must present it and, through it, signify.*”⁴¹⁷ Willingly or reluctantly, architecture cannot avoid the positing of meaning it always assumes.

2.1

Does architecture, with its distinctive properties and resources, take part in the act of storytelling, and if so, how? Is the medium capable of providing historical and cultural narratives, whether religious or secular? Can architecture say something in terms other than its own vocabulary (form, composition, structure, materiality, etc)? Should we be more concerned with what a building looks like, or with what it does?

Questions surrounding the relationship between architecture as merely functional or as a potential medium contributing to meaning have often been addressed through two complementary binaries: aesthetics and ethics, form and function. Take the first conceptual pair, aesthetics and ethics. When architecture is viewed as an art rather than a science, aesthetic concerns trump those of ethical imperatives. From this perspective, ethical valuations may help justify an approach to a particular problem within the design process; however, these valuations ought not interfere with the aesthetic value of the work as a whole. Submitting architecture to ethical demands compromises its ability to project an authentic aesthetic perspective.

Still, architecture is distinct from other arts insofar as it gives shape, form, and order to the spaces of lived experience. Space constitutes the realm in which things appear, and, as such, helps orient our intentions within a given field of reality. Because architecture is a form of mediation between people and space, architects cannot ignore the ethical and political valuations

⁴¹⁷ Jacques Derrida, “Point de folie – Maintenant l’architecture,” in *Architecture Theory Since 1968*, trans. Kate Linker (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2000), 573.

that inform their practice. In other words, ethical and political concerns are internal to the architectural practice on account that it produces an involuntary social framework, that is, the places and contexts that allow individuals to organize themselves socially.⁴¹⁸

Looking beyond the aesthetics-ethics divide, architecture theorist Alberto Pérez-Gómez claims: “architecture cannot be reduced to a historical collection of buildings, whose main significance may be to offer superfluous pleasure through disinterested contemplation, or to a technical solution to pragmatic necessities.”⁴¹⁹ I believe this is correct. The built environment cannot be apprehended in exclusively oppositional terms, nor can it be rendered meaningful through false binaries. Yet one finds hierarchies and categorical abstractions throughout the tradition: one is either for ethics or aesthetics, functionalist or anti-functionalist, abstract or figurative, and so on. Having to decide between one and the other, in an either/or logic, not only presents a false choice, it is reductive of the manifold registers involved in the act of building – ethics and aesthetics, form and function, mutually involve one another. Aesthetics without ethics denies its worldly appearance, while ethics devoid of aesthetic content is purely speculative. Similarly, form cannot be divorced from function, for architecture is never neutral in the ethical

418 From a strictly ethical point of view, architecture takes a normative stand on how people interact with one another and their environment, and thus, ought to articulate a communal disposition that promotes the public good. A proponent of this perspective, architecture theorist Karsten Harries argues that architecture should help orient individuals in a rapidly changing and increasingly unfamiliar world. On his account, building is an ethical expression, meaning it articulates the moral compass and aesthetic attitude of a given society. Because this ethical expression is in constant flux, there needs to be an open relay between the act of building and the communal ethic. Along these lines, architecture theorist Alberto Pérez-Gómez claims that “the main concern of architectural discourse is *ethical*, seeking to find appropriate language that may frame a project in view of the common good.” While some works have an overtly ethical dimension, such as urban rebuilding projects and specialized projects like museums, hospitals, parks, and education facilities, the built environment as a whole needs to be considered from a comprehensive notion of the ethical function of architecture. See Karsten Harries, *The Ethical Function of Architecture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997); Alberto Pérez-Gómez, *Built Upon Love: Architectural Longing after Ethics and Aesthetics* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006); Sigfried Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974).

419 Alberto Pérez-Gómez, *Built Upon Love: Architectural Longing after Ethics and Aesthetics* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 204.

orientations it adopts and the aesthetic perspectives it projects. The architectural practice unavoidably implies the ethical *and* the aesthetic: the meaning of a built structure will emerge through use and through (with and against) the image it sets out to represent (or abstract itself from).

Architecture, in this sense, is a non-verbal language that is at once silent and communicative. The meaning of a particular structure is given in relation to those who inhabit its space. In other words, the significance of a site emerges in the relay between a material expression and the recognition of its meaning. This expression can manifest itself in an immediate and direct manner, or one that is latent and implicit. Though a work may deny the positing of meaning, its representational qualities, whether they are figurative or abstract, cannot control the interpretive act constitutive of meaning. In effect, a work can choose whether or not to appeal to symbolic resources, but this choice only bears in a mediated way on the life of meaning of the work as a whole.

A symbol is generally understood as a sign used to communicate a meaning within a shared set of norms and conventions. As such, it represents something by means of another. While a symbol stands for something other than itself, it need not have a logical relation to that which it sets out to represent. In other words, symbolic meaning does not follow from appearance, as is the case with an icon (a sign that resembles that which it refers to), but from an external significance that corresponds to a given representation.⁴²⁰ As a representation of that which is absent, a symbol allows for the recognition of something immediate but intangible. It visually represents that for which it stands.

420 In the symbol, Gadamer finds the inner unity of image and meaning. "The symbol is the coincidence of the sensible and the nonsensible," that is, "the coincidence of sensible appearance and suprasensible meaning." Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 64-67.

Though architecture can assume a particular stance vis-à-vis symbolism, it can never completely remove itself from the production of the symbolic effects. Take, for example, two tall skyscrapers, architectural manifestations of American capitalism, monumental in scale, but otherwise lacking symbolic content. Banal, sterile, audacious, narcissistic – these adjectives were commonly used to characterize the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in downtown Manhattan. “The World Trade Center towers never inspired the loyalty and affection of New York’s great skyscrapers of the past.” So writes architecture historian Michael Lewis in a *New York Times* commentary several days after the fall of Minoru Yamasaki’s World Trade Center. “A spectacular site but a lackluster performance, at best a colossal piece of minimalist sculpture – so ran the consensus.” According to this consensus, these were buildings that people looked at with awe because of the enormity of their size, not because of what they stood for.

Critic Eric Darton sharpens Lewis’s point, capturing the silent gravity of the towers: “Yamasaki’s abstract sculptural ethos achieved a kind of chilling perfection in his World Trade Center design. Here you find yourself in the presence of two monumental structures whose formal relationship gives us no indication of their purpose or intent.”⁴²¹ Their very duplication deprived each of attaining an iconic singularity. From the perspective of representation, the buildings themselves had nothing to say. Yet, when read as signs of neoliberal globalization, as they were by the perpetrators of the attacks of September 11, 2001, the Twin Towers were immediately invested with signifying content, at once transformed from landmarks bereft of meaning into global symbols. Attacked, in part, for their economic and cultural significance, the towering works of modernist architecture attained an iconic status previously unrecognized. “In

421 Eric Darton, *Divided We Stand: A Biography of New York’s World Trade Center* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 118-119.

their absence,” Lewis concludes, “the World Trade Center towers are more a monument than ever. The physical void they leave is itself a poignant memorial, an aching emptiness that is the architectural counterpart to a human loss.”

The fall of the Twin Towers illustrates the way in which even while denying traditional representational structures (image, façade, surface aesthetics), the built environment can take on a network of immediate associations. In other words, architecture can acquire a symbolic function without appealing to symbolic resources, that is, without having symbolism be imposed on it through artifice (what a building looks like is just as important as its scale). Urban space can fulfill a symbolic function without the direct or intentional use of representational content. This is due in part to the fact that a structure acquires symbolic resonance through use, and as such, assumes alternate significations according to the normative valuations of particular economic, social, political, and cultural contexts.

Furthermore, architecture has the strange capacity to reflect (echo and imitate) and determine (inform and influence) social practice. “This seemingly paradoxical condition of being able to both engineer and exemplify our social activities seems to have both a synchronic and asynchronous nature.”⁴²² This strange temporality suggests a built-in reflexivity, a feedback loop, between the social body and the built environment. Architecture has an inherent reflexivity, a dynamic relay that is both adaptive and reactive as it gives and receives new social significations.

With varying degrees of success, architecture can influence the normative valuations by which it is measured. For example, a building can be aggressive or passive, argumentative or

⁴²² Peter Wheelwright, “What is an Event...and What is its Duration?” from *In the Cause of Architecture*, an online journal from the *Architectural Record*, <http://archrecord.construction.com/inTheCause/0402WhatisEvent/MIT.asp>.

conciliatory, reflective or inert, so to arouse a desired set of affections in those who inhabit and/or view its space. To this effect, architecture has the capacity for intention. It can comfort and console, agitate and disturb, bring thought and action to movement and arrest. When it comes to memorial architecture, the architect can guide the tempo, gaze, rhythm, and mnemonic force of the built environment, through an array of techniques and strategies. Here, lighting, material, form, and scale go beyond mere use-value; they exceed their instrumental function. The architect, like the storyteller, emphasizes certain details in order to draw out an affective response, inflecting his or her own take on the space it projects.

That is not to say that the architectural endeavor can freely choose to privilege reason over emotion, form over function, ethics over aesthetics, or any combination thereof. Not only does this oppositional structure present a false choice, for reasons made clear above, it reduces the play of signification inherent in built form, flattening-out the multiplicity of affections that it is capable of projecting, while endowing the constructive act with too much control, as though thinking and feeling were mutually exclusive planes, passively awaiting their staging and direction of the all-seizing and all-knowing architect.⁴²³

It is important to realize that each participant-spectator will ultimately project his or her own fears and desires, ambitions and intentions, onto the space it inhabits. Each spectator carries a bundle of expectations and associations informed by experience and knowledge.⁴²⁴ There is no

423 “The architect is neither a mystical creator . . . nor a productive engineer.” “Once a work inhabits the public realm it is beyond the architect’s control. An expressed intention can never fully predict the work’s meaning, and others decide its destiny and its final significance.” Pérez-Gómez, *Built Upon Love: Architectural Longing after Ethics and Aesthetics*, 205-207.

424 On this point, the narrative structure of the built environment, which emerges through its symbolic register, converges with the narrative structure of storytelling – both give way to the imagination. Ceding to the imagination is inevitable, as it allows us to integrate our perceptions and affections within a field of experience. The imagination gives uniformity and coherence to our experience of the world.

blank-slate upon which the architect can inscribe intention: the work is always produced with, against, and in history.

As such, the symbolic function of a memorial depends on how viewers position themselves with respect to the past it represents, which will require that a memorial opens itself up to the community of spectators it presupposes and the multiplicity of perspectives they bring. For architectural theorist and Benjamin scholar Andrew Benjamin, the symbol depends on an ideal commonality, one that it sustains and reinforces. “The symbol presupposes what it demands,” namely consensus, a totalizing and unified vision of progress, rationality, and identity.⁴²⁵ And yet because of its public nature, a memorial must convey meanings beyond itself, a task complicated by the fact that the context in which it conveys is highly variable: a memorial both assumes and resists alternate significations under ever changing social, political, and cultural circumstances.⁴²⁶

On the surface, memorials are visual references of memory, a past made present. Using a variety of symbolic resources, they evoke the memory of an individual or an event. Reflecting the social, political, and aesthetic values of their time, memorials are seemingly defined by their symbolic function, which is founded on the unity and inner correspondence of outer form and inner meaning. Ideally, symbolic totality imparts an aesthetic sensibility, moral awareness, and

425 Following Georges Bataille, Andrew Benjamin argues that “to naturalize unity is to forget its fabrication.” “The resistance to the symbol has to involve a rethinking of unity,” and by implication, a rethinking of community and what it means to share something in common. Andrew Benjamin, *Style and Time*, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2006), 65-66.

426 Foucault is right to say that each society has its regime of truth; a memorial signifies the values of the present even as it reads those of the past. “Each society has its regime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements.” Michel Foucault, “Truth and Power,” in *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 73.

knowledge. But under Walter Benjamin's redemptive gaze – an allegorical perspective⁴²⁷ – symbolic unity dissolves, blurring the boundaries demarcating external and internal, signifier and signified. Benjamin's notion of remembrance proves symbolic unity to be provisional and fragmented. This suggests that if the past is to be historical, it cannot have a determined relationship to the present. Memorials enact remembrance to the extent that the past they refer to manifests itself not only in knowledge, but in meaning, which cannot be fixed in stone, but must be constructed, undone, and rebuilt by spectators in particular times and places.⁴²⁸

3. The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe

Today's anti-monumental architecture, characterized by its varying degrees of abstraction and minimalism, assumes an ethical orientation to the provision of a non-redeeming narrative of that which it takes to be unrepresentable, namely, death. Memorial architecture that takes as its starting point the impossibility of its own task, responds to the moral and political obligation to remember and the ethical hazards of doing so by means of representation (being unfaithful to the past). A recent example of such architecture is Peter Eisenman's Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe. Against the over-laden symbolism and predilection for nostalgia that defines the tradition, the Memorial looks to preserve memory "as an open question in the present."⁴²⁹

Acknowledging both the memorial duty to never forget, and its attendant dangers, foremost,

427 In a reading of Benjamin, architectural theorist Hilde Heynen writes: "In allegory, divergent elements of different origin are related to each other and given a signifying relationship by the allegorist that remains extrinsic to its component parts." "The symbol derives its significance from its inner being, while allegory resolutely limits itself to the external. Symbols permit one to get a glimpse of totality and unity, while allegory reveals the world as a desolate landscape with ruins scattered here and there as silent witnesses of disaster." Like Heynen, Eric Santner characterizes allegory as "the symbolic mode proper to the experience of irremediable exposure to the violence of history, the rise and fall of empires and orders of meaning." Thus, the element of creative destruction that inhabits Benjamin's allegorical mode challenges the unified order of symbolic meaning. See Heynen, *Architecture and Modernity*, 108; Eric Santner, *On Creaturely Life: Rilke, Benjamin, Sebald* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 18-20.

428 "A memento has value as a memento only for someone who already – i.e., still recalls the past. Mementos lose their value when the past of which they remind one no longer has any meaning." Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 146.

429 "The Peter Principles," *Architecture: The AIA Journal* 87, no. 11 (Nov 1998): 87-93.

acting under the weight of a unified and homogenized past, the Memorial attempts to distance itself from the monumentalism of traditional commemorative architecture.

In this regard, Eisenman's Memorial corresponds to the genre of counter-monuments, sites for which the burden of memory falls on those who come looking for it. "The aim of the counter-monument is not to console but to provoke, not to remain fixed but to change, not to be everlasting but to disappear, not to be ignored by the passerby but to demand interaction, not to remain pristine but to invite its own violation."⁴³⁰ The Memorial realizes these intentions. Neither self-contained nor self-referential, it makes one acutely aware of both its necessity and its inherent limitations. As a counter- or anti- monument, the Memorial questions the meaning of death without itself providing an answer.⁴³¹

To fulfill this intention, Eisenman's design begins with the following premise: "an individual can no longer be certain to die an individual death, and architecture can no longer remember life as it once did," by commemorating one's life with a marker, such as a headstone. Thus, the Memorial sets the memory of the Shoah to store, memorializing not one individual, but a nameless mass. To memorialize the victims of genocide – the state-sponsored, systematic persecution and annihilation of a given people⁴³² – is to memorialize an abstraction. Eisenman

430 James Young, "Germany's Memorial Question: Memory, Counter-Memory, and the End of the Monument," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 96, no. 4 (Fall 1997): 853-880. Responding to a question on the openness and centrality of the Memorial as providing a localized space for anti-Semitic graffiti and vandalism, Eisenman argues that "it's a danger worth taking, because it's there." Ross Benjamin, "Memory and the Holocaust," *The Nation*, (May 31, 2005), <http://www.thenation.com/doc/20050613/benjamin>.

431 Ideally, counter monuments represent death "only as a question and no longer as an answer, only as demanding meaning and no longer as establishing meaning." Reinhart Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 323-324.

432 As defined by Article II of the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide: any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) Forcibly transferring children of the

seems to be aware of this fact. Because these deaths are anonymous, no one narrative can capture, represent, and express their individual fate. There is both a surplus and a deficit of narrative content. Though these deaths are real, the individual circumstances and experiences of each death remain inaccessible. Eisenman's memorial has nothing to say on the matter, and thus offers no narrative. It chooses abstraction over representation.

3.1

“The memory of the Holocaust,” Eisenman argues, “can never be one of nostalgia,”⁴³³ that of a “sentimental longing for or regretful memory of a period of the past.”⁴³⁴ According to Eisenman, memorial architecture must soberly and self-consciously reject sentimentality, and instead opt for animate pasts. He writes: “The traditional monument is understood by its symbolic imagery, by what it represents. It is not understood in time, but in an instant in space; it is seen and understood simultaneously.”⁴³⁵ Conversely, the Memorial has no goal, “no working one's way in or out.” “The duration of an individual's experience of it grants no further understanding, since understanding is impossible.”⁴³⁶ The memorial sees itself as a renewable source of reflection, forcefully inviting those who pass by to engage their surroundings in ways

group to another group. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, <http://www.ohchr.org/english/law/genocide.htm>.

433 Peter Eisenman, “Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe,” in *Materials on the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* (Berlin: Nicolai, 2005), 10.

434 “Nostalgia, n. 2a,” *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., eds. J.A. Simpson and E.S.C. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989). OED Online Oxford University Press. 16 Oct. 2006. <http://dictionary.oed.com/>. Nostalgia – a longing for a different time and/or place – as defined by Svetlana Boym, has three traits: it lies at the intersection of personal and collective memory; it can be prospective and retrospective; it is fundamentally ambivalent. See Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*.

435 This formulation directs our attention to the problematic of spatializing time and temporalizing space, the former defining much of the tradition of western philosophy. Catherine Malabou's account of the metaphysical understanding of time, as discussed in Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*, rightly argues that “a spatial determination – the point – serves to characterize a temporal determination – the instant. But such a conception of time, seeming to reduce temporality to nothing but the form of juxtaposition, strikes us today as temporality stripped of all future.” Catherine Malabou, “The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality, Dialectic,” *Hypatia* 15, no. 4 (2000), 198.

436 Eisenman, “Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe,” 12.

that are at once intimate and strange. “There is no nostalgia, no memory of the past, only the living memory of the individual experience. Here, we can only know the past through its manifestation on the present.”⁴³⁷

This stands in stark contrast to the program elaborated by Wolfgang Thierse, President of the German Bundestag at the time of the Memorial’s inauguration. “The memorial honours the victims and warns future generations to protect human rights, to defend the constitutional state, and to safeguard the equality of all people under the law.”⁴³⁸ Thierse’s formulation, consistent with teleological and progressive theories of history, not only consigns the present to a predetermined task – to protect and defend the juridical framework of the liberal democratic state – it implicitly discredits those forms of political association falling outside of its view. This prescription is all the more dubious when we consider it, particularly the safeguarding of human rights, from the perspective of the events in memorial. Following a trajectory ranging from Karl Marx to Hannah Arendt, it becomes clear that human rights alone cannot prevent their own violation. Insofar as the claim to human rights pertains to individuals protected by the legal institutions of a nation-state, those who are stateless are without rights, a fact made painfully clear by German National Socialism. Turning the Memorial into a monument of liberal democratic rights (the proposed Freedom Tower and National September 11 Memorial at the World Trade Center raise similar questions, which are addressed in Chapter 4) reduces one’s experience of history to a lesson no less ideological than those instituted by authoritarian regimes.

3.2

437 Ibid., 12.

438 Wolfgang Thierse, “Preface,” in *Materials on the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe*, 6.

As it stands today, the Memorial consists of a field of 2,711 concrete stelae and an underground information center. The stelae, varying in height from .5 meters to 4.5 meters, are arranged in a grid like pattern on 19,073 square meters. Each stela is 95 centimeters wide and 2.375 meters long, the distance between them wide enough for individual passage. The field brings to mind the image of a burial ground, each stela symbolizing the destruction of human life. Their upright stone-like shapes “reference the sarcophagus, as a block-shaped, reclining form, as well as the ground-level grave slab, whose proportions approach that of a human body.”⁴³⁹

Walking through the Memorial places one in an isolated and indeterminate condition, the undulating stelae distorting and heightening the viewer’s perception. The fragmentation of space within the Memorial arouses feelings of fragility and vulnerability. The site is an enclosure without limit: those inhabiting its space are absorbed by that which itself resists spatial integration. Almost breathing, the field of jutting concrete rhythmically creates and envelops space. Silently expressing, without representing, a dissonant negativity, the Memorial – as an architectural work – forgoes the needs and desires of dwelling. As Eisenman describes, an intentional “slippage occurs in the grid structure, causing indeterminate spaces to develop within the seemingly rigid order of the monument. These spaces condense, narrow, and deepen to provide a multilayered experience from any point in the gridded field.”⁴⁴⁰ The site’s topographic unevenness and its enveloping space are meant to induce feelings of vulnerability and disorientation.⁴⁴¹ Taking in the city proves difficult once in the center. So does relating oneself

439 Günter Schlusche, “A Memorial is Built,” in *Materials on the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe*, 22.

440 Eisenman, “The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe,” 11.

441 “Whoever passes through this seemingly endless sea of stone blocks, leaves the noise of the street behind, is on their own, is hardly able to avoid a feeling of distress, a palpable sense of anxiety.” Thierse, “Preface,” 6.

to the Memorial, which as a whole refuses visual appropriation. The result is spectatorship without spectacle.⁴⁴² The lack of a unified and omniscient vantage point imparts a fragmentary and partial view, denying both symbolic and literal closure.

The Memorial's field of stelae "suggests that when a supposedly rational and ordered system grows too large and out of proportion to its intended purpose, it in fact loses touch with human reason."⁴⁴³ Eisenman's faith in human reason to orient morality seems strangely misplaced when seen from the perspective of Adorno and Horkheimer's critique of rationality.⁴⁴⁴ This is further complicated by his refusal to represent the events in remembrance through traditional symbols. While his design successfully avoids the monumental symbolism of nineteenth and twentieth-century memorial architecture, the organization of the field suggests linearity, uniformity, and order – references to a totalizing logic set on a monumental scale.

Open year round and accessible at any hour, the Memorial has no official points of entry or exit, making its field borderless (symbolizing the incomprehensible). It evokes feelings of loss, isolation, and uncertainty, as opposed to those of belonging, place, and identity. Visitors of

442 Following Guy Debord, the spectacle signifies the self-generated production of appearances which, by objectifying social relations, attribute a false sense of unity and a distorted image of progress to late-capitalist society. The spectacle does not correspond to a collection of images, but rather, a social relationship mediated by images. The accumulation of images and appearances throughout society obfuscates political relations, removing them from the sphere of action to that of alienated spectatorship. As Debord explains, "spectators are linked only by a one-way relationship to the very center that maintains their isolation from one another. The spectacle thus unites what is separate, but it unites it only *in its separateness*." Effecting isolation through automatization, the spectacle, "serves as total justification for the conditions and aims of the existing system. It further ensures the *permanent presence* of that justification, for it governs almost all time spent outside the production process itself." Monumental in size and scale, Eisenman's Memorial is spectacular in its own right, individuating through a manipulation of form, space, and order. Yet it breaks with the dissimulating logic of the spectacle by allowing for an autonomous mode of spectatorship. In other words, the Memorial is not governed by any one mode of representation or reception. As such, it interrupts the interest-based politics of the spectacle, and breaks with its functionalization of action. See Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967), trans., Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 2004), 22, 13.

443 Eisenman, "The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe," 10.

444 "The not merely theoretical but practical tendency toward self-destruction has been inherent in rationality from the first, not only in the present phase when it is emerging nakedly." Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944), ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), xix.

any memorial unavoidably bring with them a bundle of expectations, prejudices, and knowledge, which is either challenged or confirmed by their experience. Whether one's experience of the site is immediate or prolonged, Eisenman's Memorial intends to leave each alone with his or her private response. The Memorial, as such, is devoid of storytelling. This is not to say that one's experience of it is barred from tradition, that one leaves without a story to tell. Though one's experience of it remains individual, the Memorial provides the ground from which to engage in an exchange of perspective and experience.

3.3

As a memorial against that which we generally associate with fascism – technology, homogeneity, rationality, xenophobia – the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe takes a step in the right direction. So as not to effect an empathetic identification with the victor, the Memorial acknowledges the victims of a society's own violence as opposed to the suffering of those committed by others (e.g., the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum). For Günter Schlusche, coordinator of planning and construction for the Memorial, Eisenman's design "memorializes not the great acts of a people, a ruler or dynasty, but rather a singular crime against humanity, committed in the name of Germany."⁴⁴⁵ The Memorial, according to Schlusche, is a national memorial like no other. It does not celebrate a beginning or founding (though one could argue that constructing the Memorial on the heel of German national reunification participates in a myth of origin), rather, the Memorial honors the Jewish victims of German National Socialism in a way that both acknowledges the present's responsibility for its inherited past, while also distancing itself from it.

445 Schlusche, "A Memorial is Built," 28.

The Memorial, as such, is both self-effacing (conciliatory) and self-aggrandizing (congratulatory).⁴⁴⁶ With its heightened visibility (located in the center of Berlin, near the commercial-retail spectacle that is Potsdamer Platz)⁴⁴⁷ and symbolic location (sitting atop soil once dividing East and West Germany, neighboring foreign embassies, and within walking distance of the Reichstag and Brandenburg Gate), the Memorial gives architectural expression to a Germany that is mournful, introspective, and transparent. Its space attempts to provide an experiential site of identification with victims and survivors, without which, Jürgen Habermas argues, the moral core of compassion and empathy would remain absent.⁴⁴⁸ Empathetic understanding is achieved without overwhelming spectators to the point of silence, thoughtlessness, and abjection. The Memorial does not blind spectators with past traumas, but rather provides the necessary context and distance from which to apprehend them. If monuments are designed to honor the present through an enduring memory, and memorials are designed to honor the past by impeding the flow of forgetting, then the Memorial inhabits a zone of indeterminacy somewhere between the two.⁴⁴⁹

Shortly after the Memorial's inauguration, Eisenman supported the claim made by theorist Giorgio Agamben that the Memorial embodies the 'memorable' – that which must be

446 Karen Till, *The New Berlin: Memory, Politics, Place* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 202.

447 Responding to the question of the centrality of a memorial to the Shoah in the capital of Germany, Berlin, Eisenman argues, "It had to be in the center. ... They wanted to put it in Alexanderplatz, and I said absolutely not. They wanted to put it in Kreuzberg, and I said it has to be right here, in your face. That I wouldn't back down from." Ross Benjamin, "Memory and the Holocaust," *The Nation*, (May 31, 2005), <http://www.thenation.com/doc/20050613/benjamin>.

448 Jürgen Habermas, "Der Zeigefinger. Die Deutschen und ihr Denkmal," from *Die Zeit*, March 31, 1999. "The sponsor [of the Memorial] is every citizen who finds himself the clear inheritor of a culture in which this was possible – in the context of a tradition that they share with the generation of perpetrators. With their memorial, they establish at once a connection with the perpetrators, the victims and their descendents." Translation by Wolfgang Benz, "A Memorial for Whom," in *Materials on the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe*, 33.

449 This follows Arthur C. Danto's distinction that "we erect monuments so that we shall always remember, and build memorials so that we shall never forget." Arthur C. Danto, "The Vietnam Veterans Memorial (Washington, D.C.)," *The Nation* (August 31, 1985): 152(4).

catalogued and archived – while also manifesting the ‘unforgettable’ – that which remains silent, and is incapable of being archived or catalogued.⁴⁵⁰ This balance may be the Memorial’s greatest strength and its most apparent weakness. As critics Gerd Knischewski and Ulla Spittler note, the Memorial

could be read as representing a cemetery and thus accentuate the aspect of mourning and grief for the dead (who, in reality, had not found a grave); it could be seen as symbolising the emptiness and void left behind and thus emphasize the loss for the German society; or it could be regarded as a symbolic reminder for the Germans themselves and an avowal of their belief in constitutional patriotism and the values of a civil society as the framework for the Berlin Republic. ... The memorial could fulfill different, even conflicting purposes, thus potentially failing them all.⁴⁵¹

To combat this openness of meaning, the Memorial includes an Information Center (which Eisenman initially opposed), intended to make the unthinkable cognitively ascertainable, that is, to complement the subjective response provoked by Eisenman’s original design.

Situated underground, the eight hundred square meter Information Center is designed to supplement the abstraction above with information intended to “personalize and individualize the horrors of the Holocaust,” through “a sober, factual and sensitive delivery of knowledge, with an emphasis on informative rather than on memorial aspects.”⁴⁵² The Center adds to the site a cognitive dimension for which the field alone is silent. It contextualizes the Memorial’s abstraction, turning what would otherwise be an affective response into knowledge built on

450 Giorgio Agamben, “Die zwei Gedächtnisse,” from *Die Zeit*, May 4, 2005.

451 Gerd Knischewski and Ulla Spittler, “Remembering in the Berlin Republic: The Debate About the Central Holocaust Memorial in Berlin,” *Debatte* 13, no.1 (April 2005): 25-42.

452 Curators Sibylle Quack and Dagmar von Wilcken, “Creating an Exhibition About the Murder of European Jewry,” in *Materials on the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe*, 40-42. A chronological timeline documenting the exclusions and atrocities of German National Socialism between 1933 and 1945 is displayed along the entrance wall of the Information Center. To provoke unique encounters with the individual destinies of the victims, personal and official documents are set in the floor of the exhibition space, which is organized around three rooms: A Room of Fates, which relays the life stories of twelve Jewish families from various parts of Europe; A Room of Sites explores the geographic dimension of the methodical extermination European Jews; A Room of Names provides access to the names of the murdered Jews of Europe during the Shoah.

factual information about the victims. Lifting victims out of anonymity through the telling of personal histories, “increases one’s readiness to encounter an individual fate, with attention and empathy.”⁴⁵³ In this way, the Center serves as an objective reminder of ‘the past as it really was’ and thus as a corrective to what critics see as the overly subjective experience of Eisenman’s Memorial. In the view of these critics, the Memorial carries with it the risk of historical revisionism, which threatens to incite ethically vacuous and depoliticized understandings of the past.

The Memorial’s inclusion of the Information Center, which relies on a didactic model of memorialization, may attenuate the risk of subjectivism and revisionism, but it also undercuts Eisenman’s penetrating critique of objectivism and the historical ontology that supports progress driven conceptions of history. Indeed, the archival impulse of the Information Center may make the Memorial memorable (and legible), but at what cost? Does the compilation and consolidation of documents, artifacts, and various other forms of media not displace the labor of remembrance, cutting short the reflective work of reconciliation demanded by the Memorial? Benjamin’s critical account of information suggests as much, for not only is the archive inhabited by what it tries to stave off, namely forgetting, the sought after individualization of the victims in memorial assumes a positive mimetic engagement that excludes the possibility of denial or disavowal, while subsuming critical thought to pathos.

To provoke empathy with the victims (in this case, the murdered Jews of Europe), not the victors, runs the risk of flattening out a distinction that demands constant vigilance, that is, between the victors and victims of history. Being attuned to past exclusions is not about rewriting history according to the interests of a particular group, class, or identity, but about

453 Ibid., 48.

exposing the local and contingent effects that the victor-victim binary has on politics.⁴⁵⁴

Memorials cannot, and should not, be everything to everyone, for like the truths they awaken, memorials signify histories that are inescapably partial and incomplete. It is the responsibility (discussed in Chapter 5) of the critical public they demand to be alert to the representations they manifest and those they forego.

Even when we think we have appropriately memorialized the real victims, we lose track of the practices of exclusion that any act of memorialization necessarily brings with it. It is unavoidable that some groups, each with their own unique claim to recognition, get left out; others have their history distorted, etc. But there is no such thing as an all-encompassing (complete and comprehensive) memorial that would include everyone who could possibly count as a victim. The idea of a total memorial is a fantasy. That said, the function of a memorial is not to include everyone, but to make individuals aware that when some are remembered, others are forgotten. Memorials ought to make visible what remains invisible, that is, our practices of exclusion, which are part and parcel of every practice of inclusion. Only then is the past made meaningful in the present.

On this count, Eisenman's Memorial succeeds, as it self-consciously, yet no less critically, draws from the national history of Germany's mass extermination of European Jews. Yet while Eisenman is correct to suggest that we ought to have an active view toward the past,

454 Like those advanced by victims' narratives, counter-histories assert the contingency of history and the necessary exclusions of its discourse. The strength of such historical revisions lies in their ability to release local, hidden, and repressed knowledges, as the work of Michel Foucault makes clear. However, these critical histories should not be viewed as unmitigated forms of resistance. The provisional interventions they achieve inevitably reenter the economy of power they contest. Following Foucault, "it would be a mistake to regard this discourse on race struggle [or any other counter-history] as belonging rightfully and completely, to the oppressed, or to say that it was, at least originally, the discourse of the enslaved, the discourse of the people, or a history that was claimed and spoken by the people. It should in fact be immediately obvious that it is a discourse that has a great ability to circulate, a great aptitude for metamorphosis, or a sort of strategic polyvalence." See Michel Foucault, *Society Must be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976*, trans., David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), 76.

his claim that our experience of the Memorial should yield no further understanding requires further examination. Does this statement mean that the systematic extermination of Jews throughout Europe is meaningless, or rather, does it suggest that remembering the Shoah through lived experience is the condition in which the past remains active as a resource for reflective judgment? Informed by Benjamin's notion of storytelling, my reading of Eisenman's Memorial sides with the latter. As noted at the outset of the chapter, the Memorial refuses to conceive of understanding in cognitivist terms, that is, as a determinate relay between experience and knowledge. This refusal asks that we not resign ourselves to the impossibility of understanding, as it is through understanding that we respond to memory's double injunction: to learn from the lessons of the past while acting beyond the throw of its shadow that is only too quick to follow.

Eisenman's Memorial rightly emphasizes the experiential and affective dimensions of memory, yet by including an Information Center, it risks a retreat from the ethical and political implications of its critique of didacticism and representation. The impulse to pull back from the experiential implications of the work's minimalist, abstract, and schematic form stems from the threat of subjectivism, which is also to say, revisionism. Cultural historian Joachim Schlör explains: "If the initiators of the memorial nevertheless decided to set up a place of information, they have only brought out more clearly a contradiction." "The more accurate, the greater the detail of our knowledge of the mechanisms of dictatorship, the more records and eyewitness accounts of the murder of six million Jews are piled up, the more our lack of comprehension grows."⁴⁵⁵ In effect, the Memorial falls prey to the cognitivist trappings of objectivism, whose historical ontology presupposes that memorials ought to convey information and stimulate

⁴⁵⁵ Joachim Schlör, *Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas, Memorial to the Murdered Jews in Europe* (Berlin: Prestel, 2005), 54.

rational processes of deliberation with a view toward learning from the past so as not to repeat its mistakes.⁴⁵⁶ As history shows all too well, knowing the causes and effects of moral failure, social injustice, and political wrong in no way prevents their recurrence.

Still, the demand for truth, knowledge, and recognition is real, and it is not my intention to deny it. The problem is that those memorials claiming to provide the most objective historical account often fail to evoke a need to understand the past, that is, to come to terms with what cannot be changed. Understanding the past involves altering our relationship to it. On this count, modern-day memorial museums, which appear to leave no doubt as to what happened, to whom and by whom, can leave us with that dual sense of aggressiveness and helplessness in relation to the past that Nietzsche diagnosed as *ressentiment*.⁴⁵⁷ They confront us with facts, but they do not necessarily help us make sense of what we know. For more knowledge, and thus more facts, are not enough. From a political perspective, knowledge stands in need of

456 Drawing on Jürgen Habermas's notion of "learning from catastrophes," political theorist María Pía Lara argues that societies ought to confront their past with a view toward legal ends if they are to achieve a critical understanding of history and a moral orientation for political action. While Lara rightly emphasizes the revisable character of historical understanding, she mistakenly attributes understanding with legal and moral ends. According to Lara, the challenges of collective memory should be met within the juridical realm: "the socially constructed understanding of evil needs the rule of law to reconsider links between collective memory and accountability" (27). Only then do we learn from catastrophes, and are able to translate knowledge into legal action (165). This morally infused theory of remembrance problematically assumes that the end of understanding is consensus, that is, "a collective agreement regarding the means by which to implement laws to prevent future catastrophes" (100). Lara shares Habermas's faith in the ability of social institutions, increasingly international in reach, to right past wrongs and preempt their recurrence. Despite the valuable insights both thinkers provide on the subject of historical understanding, neither one recognizes the non-institutionalizable character of understanding, which can never "liberate us from the burdens of the past," but only effect a critical awareness and appreciation for the gifts of thinking, acting, and judging (89). See María Pía Lara, *Narrating Evil: A Postmetaphysical Theory of Reflective Judgment* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), and Jürgen Habermas, "Learning from Catastrophes: A Look Back at the Short Twentieth Century," *The Postnational Constellation: Political Essays*, ed., Max Pensky (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001).

457 An "imaginary revenge," cast by a "venomous eye," Nietzsche characterizes *ressentiment* as the vengeful desire to seek a causal agent "guilty" for one's suffering, so to anaesthetize oneself from enduring further pain. Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Genealogy of Morals," in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, trans., Walter Kaufmann (New York: The Modern Library, 1968), essay 1, §10-11; essay 2, §11; essay 3, §14-16.

acknowledgment.⁴⁵⁸ It is not as if we are unaware of the historical and ongoing realities of internment camps. The point, however, is that we do not acknowledge these realities, that is, we fail to act upon what we know.

Educational and cultural institutions, like the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), best meet the demand of knowledge by advancing and disseminating information, preserving the memory of those who suffered and encouraging their visitors to reflect upon the moral and spiritual questions raised by the events they represent. However, institutions entrusted by the public to generate awareness and provoke understanding of historical events should also orient and enable the formation of a critical public capable of acknowledging what they know and making the kind of political judgments that are essential to democracy. Put simply, we need our inroads to memory to allow for more than one-way conversations with the past. As with the USHMM, the Memorial's capitulation to the cognitivist demand for truth and knowledge interfere with its ability to effect an intersubjective understanding of the events it memorializes.

3.4

Both Peter Eisenman and Walter Benjamin propose thoughtful and original ways of representing the past. To conclude, I would like to draw out some of the differences and similarities distinguishing these imaginative forms of historical representation from more conventional practices so to better understand the political implications of remembrance as it relates to experience.

458 As Cavell explains, "the concept of acknowledgment is evidenced equally by its failure as by its success. It is not a description of a given response but a category in terms of which a given response is evaluated. ... A 'failure to know' might just mean a piece of ignorance, an absence of something, a blank. 'A failure to acknowledge' is the presence of something, a confusion, an indifference, a callousness, an exhaustion, a coldness." Cavell, "Knowing and Acknowledging," 264.

While Eisenman's Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe is ostensibly non-narrative in form, Benjamin's notion of historical transmission features the role of narrative, specifically that of storytelling, to provoke a critical understanding of history through the exercise of political judgment. In effect, both narrative (Benjamin's storytelling) and non-narrative form (Eisenman's Memorial) create spaces for judgment, whether real or imagined. For Eisenman, urban space represents the material of history, i.e. history is narrativized through its architectural manifestations. Buildings are palimpsests of space, monuments that are transformable as they are transitory.⁴⁵⁹ To think of architecture in terms of a palimpsest – a manuscript or piece of writing material upon which the original has been effaced to make room for later writings, but of which traces remain – is to view the built environment as something to be read and acted upon. Yet the narrative possibilities of the literary text and the urban text differ radically with respect to the worlds they create. Architecture implies an immediate and visceral engagement. The human body unavoidably experiences *this* space, always finding itself temporally and spatially situated, limited and enabled. Architecture confronts us with imminent spaces: the fact of embodiment means that we are always already exposed to built forms.

The mode of historical transmission put forward by Eisenman, and the critical engagement with history and tradition it occasions, plays on this vulnerability. Though the Memorial is open to all and at all times, the topography of the field of stelae denies collective experience. Yet, with or against our own volition, the space involves us, demanding that meaning be drawn from it. The non-narrative and abstract form of the Memorial not only

459 The topography of the city should not be understood as “the past become space or stone,” but as that which is readable “as the topography of a collective memory in which mnemonic symbols and traces reveal themselves to reading.” On the notion of architecture as palimpsest, see Sigrid Weigel, *Body and Image Space: Re-Reading Walter Benjamin* (New York: Routledge, 1996), Chapter 8; Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

eschews storytelling, but also the iconography (artifice and inscription) of traditional monuments and memorials. Rather than appeal to symbolic representation and cultural artifacts for its legitimation, the Memorial is in/validated through singular instances of thought and judgment. Pragmatic and provocative, the site leaves the mnemonic work open to those who inhabit its space. Consciously forgoing nostalgia, sentimentality, and empathy, it attempts to impart a provocative encounter with the past. The Memorial, as such, does not impose a perspective of reconciliation or closure, but one that is open-ended. It is this indeterminacy, between the Memorial and meaning, that risks throwing each spectator back on his or her own ineffable interpretation.

As we have seen in Eisenman's Memorial, architecture has the unique capacity to move individuals away from their familiar modes of perceiving and understanding the built environment that surrounds them. This enables individuals to think and act outside of strictly instrumental, functional and moral, considerations. To achieve this effect, space and form must self-consciously avoid imposing knowledge. "The in-between in architectural space," which is always an indeterminate relation, a non-identity,

is not a literal perceptual or audible sensation, but an affective somatic response that is felt by the body in space. This feeling is not one arising from fact, but rather from the virtual possibility of architectural space. . . . Such a possibility does not exist in philosophic or linguistic space but only in architecture. . . . Only in architecture can the idea of an embodied and temporal virtuality be both thought and experienced.⁴⁶⁰

Beginning with the fact that sensual perceptions intensify and ease our experiences, Eisenman's architecture plays on the corporeal sphere of reality that informs our spatial orientation. Every experience is set on a subjective dimension of time upon which different sensual perceptions

⁴⁶⁰ Peter Eisenman "Foreword," in Elizabeth Grosz, *Architecture from the Outside* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), xiv.

appear and disappear as they intersect with one another. These perceptions can stimulate an affective resonance in the subject that inhabits their space. The resultant experience is individual and singular. To this effect, architecture predicates perception and affection, but does not predetermine meaning.

Aware of the architect's inability to prescribe value and regulate judgment, Eisenman attempts to impart uncertainty unto the built environment. Challenging the normative conventions of architecture, his work exposes the uneasy space that lies between the binary oppositions that define the tradition – form and function, structure and ornament, ethics and aesthetics – leaving it up to the embodied subject to resolve their tension.

By rejecting conventional memorial didactics – informing through universal maxims, recognizable imagery, and symbolic constructs – Eisenman's design is ambivalent as to whether or not there is a lesson to be learned from the events it sets to memory. This, in turn, begs the following questions: is a memorial the most appropriate means of instruction? Should memorials commemorate collective acts of violence with a view toward justice, truth, reconciliation, or forgiveness? How might this complex constellation of objectives limit and enable the production of alternate meanings?

The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe leaves these questions unanswered. The absence of moral and message allows the work to resist instrumentalization, and thereby deny the pragmatic function of social unification (homogenization, equalization, socialization) once the motive force behind memorialization. To this effect, the Memorial does not participate in the monumental form of representing history discussed above and in the previous chapter. It is less concerned with providing solutions to the one of modernity's most unremitting problems – the

crisis of meaning following secularization, and its after-effect, the crisis of identity following the withering away of national boundaries – than with bringing these problems to bear on their own ambiguity. What we are left with is an assemblage of experiential nodal points which remain sensitive to the political pressures of time and place – infinitely reconfigurable, yet no less fragile to the temporal dislocations of history.

Like Eisenman's Memorial, Benjamin's concept of historical transmission serves as a political injunction, demanding critical reflection, non-determinative judgment, and concerted action. Yet unlike the silent and strictly subjective experience of history offered by the Memorial, Benjamin's integrative (participation, repetition) and fragmenting (non-conclusive, non-determinative) engagement with history, storytelling, appeals to the intersubjective dimensions of affect and intellect, thus redefining how we think and feel history, moving away from a teleological (sequential, linear, causal) unfolding of self-contained moments, toward an experiential (interpretive, speculative) moment of interruption. Benjamin's storytelling does not claim to represent a static, self-same, the way it was, but rather a plastic narrative, malleable to the particular inflection of each historical moment. Open to multiple encounters, memory, like the memorial in which it is housed, invites an ongoing reception resistant to material or metaphysical once-and-for-all.

Chapter 4: Architecture in Pursuit of Absence

“I had a simple impulse to cut into the earth. I imagined taking a knife and cutting into the earth, opening it up, an initial violence and pain that in time would heal.”⁴⁶¹ Looking back on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, architect Maya Lin recalls the originary violence of her attempt to come to terms with the American legacy of the Vietnam War. Figuring loss in terms of trauma, she offers a subjective experience of time through which an architecturally embodied memory becomes an agent of healing. To expose the symbolic effects of war on human life, her design opens up the earth, leaving individuals free to contemplate and reflect, so to resolve for themselves their most intimate of feelings in the most public of spaces.⁴⁶² By making explicit the necessary violence of memorialization, her work attempts to draw out the emotive life of memory. As literary theorist David Simpson explains: “all monuments are implicated in violence, whether in what they represent (a war, a massive loss of life), in what they image iconographically (the gash in the earth of the Vietnam Wall), or in what they stimulate in the afterlife of public conflict and debate.”⁴⁶³

In this chapter I address the subjectivist turn in contemporary practices of memorialization. Initiated by Lin’s Vietnam Veterans Memorial, this turn is characterized by an overwhelming concern on the part of architects, artists, and curators to provide an open and indeterminate space for individual reflection. Breaking with the tradition of reading monuments and memorials as didactic spaces of unitary meaning (informed by teleologically oriented and progress bound enlightenment conceptions of history), public memorials in the latter half of the twentieth-century inaugurate a secular form of commemoration defined by introspective

461 Maya Lin, “Vietnam Veterans Memorial,” in *Boundaries* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), 4:10.

462 “I never looked at the memorial as a wall, an object, but as an edge to the earth, an opened side.” *Ibid.*, 4:11.

463 David Simpson, *9/11: The Culture of Commemoration* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 76.

processes of understanding. Open to the play of multiple encounters, these diverse modes of historical representation (literal, figurative, abstract, realist) elicit subjective responses (cathartic, empathetic, nostalgic, cognitive) through various rhetorical and affective strategies, forms of address, and media, without circumscribing the past or delimiting its reception. This move away from the objectivist trappings of positivist historiography is meant to strip monuments, memorials, museums, and other modes of historical preservation and representation of their hegemonic claim on the past.

Those working within the subjectivist turn in memorialization nonetheless invite their audience to consider the political effects of both the form and content of their work, that is, the public life of its transmission and reception. Works like the Vietnam Veterans Memorial significantly challenge the objectivist frame of traditional memorial architecture by provoking individual experiences of memory productive of subjective understandings of the past. By insisting on the singularity of meaning and the ineffability of experience, these sites of remembrance attempt to recover what Hannah Arendt describes as the ‘who’ of meaning from the ‘what’ of knowledge. For example, calling attention to the singularity of human life through naming reclaims the particular significance of that life from more generalizing modes of identification (martyr, hero, victim). It is in this spirit that Lin chooses to inscribe the names of U.S. military service men and women who lost their lives and remain missing from the Vietnam War.

The subjectivist turn in memorial architecture, which characterizes Lin’s Vietnam Veteran’s Memorial, among other public works discussed in this chapter, can be understood as a late-modern attempt to demystify ideologically governed processes of meaning formation

through the articulation of denaturalized pasts, spaces of encounter, narrative choice, and the play of signification. In an effort to pluralize meaning and return the labor of memory back to the thinking, feeling, and judging spectator, these works break with the politically disaffecting logic of historical causality and its corollary mode of historical understanding (the subsumptive, rule-following, operation of determinative judgment). They can be recognized by a preoccupation with authenticity (bound to a logic of recognition), a focus on redevelopment, renewal, and rebirth (motivated by commercial and ethical concerns), and a penchant for symbolism (circulating values through self-referential codes). However, if it is the case, as I argue, that such works privatize the public work of political judgment, might they not risk forfeiting the intersubjective mode of understanding that is so vital to democratic modes of association and meaning formation? Divorcing memory from the practices of storytelling, perspective taking, and representative thinking, as we shall see, might well render the ‘who’ of meaning politically insignificant.⁴⁶⁴

To venture into the public realm, writes Arendt, is to expose “oneself to the light of the public, as a person.”⁴⁶⁵ For Arendt, a person is defined by *who* they are, rather than *what* they are. The former is given in action, the latter in facts, known concepts, and categories of identity (e.g., a soldier, a victim, a hero). Who someone is cannot be known as objective fact, least of all by the person him– or herself, but can only be understood in the form of meaning. “Although any attempt to capture the ‘who’ in language always risks reducing it to a ‘what,’ the ‘who’ lives

464 As argued in Chapters 2 and 3, the critical exchange of perspective and reflective judgment cultivated through storytelling combats the latent objectivism of memorial architecture (informed by positivist historiography) by recovering the temporally disjunctive and politically enabling aspects of remembrance. Storytelling is neither objectivist (does not claim universal truth) nor subjectivist (does not relativize meaning). Rather, it is productive of intersubjective forms of meaning and understanding.

465 Hannah Arendt, “What Remains? The Language Remains” in *The Portable Hannah Arendt* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 21.

on from the stories, narratives, and other human artifacts which speak of it, and without which it would vanish without a trace.”⁴⁶⁶ Memorializing events from the perspective of the ‘what’ reduces the latter’s singularity (the spontaneous instantiation of something new into the web of human relations) to predetermined categories of thought and judgment.⁴⁶⁷ With Arendt, I argue that the unique disclosure of human action cannot be reduced to the ‘what’ of a situation. Translated into the idiom of public memorial, Arendt’s insistence on the ‘who’ demands that sites of remembrance, and the events they recall, be judged reflectively, that is, in a mode of immanent critique. Accounting for the ‘who’ rather than the ‘what’ enables an act of meaning creation internal to the practice of reflective judgment.

The first section of the chapter unfolds Arendt’s account of world disclosure, that is, the ‘who’ and the ‘what’ of one’s personal identity and their physical attributes. As noted above, who someone is can only be determined by judging one’s actions reflectively, that is, without a concept, category, or rule. The importance given by Arendt to reflective judgment informs her understanding of storytelling, which she develops against the objectifying tendencies of modern philosophies of history. Part respite and part antidote to what she describes as “the deceptive security of those ‘keys to history’ that pretend to explain everything,” Arendt’s uniquely political form of historical narration, storytelling, like that of Benjamin, is grounded in a praxis-oriented conception of memory.⁴⁶⁸ Neither wholly objective nor merely subjective, the meanings that emerge through the mutual transmission and reception of the past rely on a critical practice of

466 Linda Zerilli, *Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 13.

467 Defining a person according to their class or profession, for example, attributes a ready-made set of interests, objectives, and intentions which may or may not reflect who they are as they appear before others.

468 Hannah Arendt, “Nightmare and Flight,” *Reflections on Literature and Culture*, ed. Susannah Young-Ah Gottlieb (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 91.

perspective taking that imparts a common field of reference on reality. Out of this shared space, action attains political legibility and a place of worldly significance in memory.

Having developed an account of perspective taking, I draw upon Arendt's theory of the 'who' and the 'what' to question the practice of naming – inherited from the modern tradition of war memorial – in Lin's Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Michael Arad and Peter Walker's winning design for the National September 11 Memorial Museum, and the *New York Times* series "Portraits of Grief." Each in its own way promotes the individual recovery of a past life through a stable mnemonic referent: a name. With these commemorative works I explore the seduction of the name in our recovery from loss and recuperation from trauma.

I then turn to Arendt's notion of political space – conceived through her understanding of the Greek *polis* as a space of appearance – to question the aesthetic of absence deployed by various efforts to memorialize September 11 in lower Manhattan. Symbolizing loss through emptiness, Arad and Walker's proposal "Reflecting Absence" offers itself as a non-representational touchstone for reflective, meditative, and individual encounters with the past.

Following my reading of Arad and Walker's design, which considers various alternatives to their aesthetic of absence, I examine the symbolic investment placed by architecture and its multiple publics on authentic sites of memory. What claims are made on memory when sparked by a material trace? Does the reconstruction of place, or the preservation of sacred ground, betray an unconscious desire to forget? These questions orient my reading of Libeskind's Jewish Museum Berlin, on which I conclude and draw out the political implications of architecture's pursuit of absence.

1. Distinguishing the *What* of Knowledge from the *Who* of Meaning

Meaning can be imposed from above, generated from within, or developed through a critical exchange of opinion and perspective. Arendt's account of action in *The Human Condition* draws out the intersubjective dimension of meaning formation – which I take to be public, persuasive, and rhetorical – by answering the following question: How do the words and deeds of men reveal *who* they are, rather than *what* they are? She begins to answer this question by distinguishing personal identity (who) from physical identity (what). The latter appears without effort or intention, in the shape of the body and the sound of the voice. Physical identity, as such, makes itself felt and known involuntarily. Personal identity, on the other hand, reveals itself in both word and deed, in what we do. Like an individual's physical identity, personal identity is always unique. But, unlike what marks us physically, personal identity “can be hidden only in complete silence and perfect passivity.” Who somebody is, which is made-up from one's talents, qualities, faults, and prejudices, “is implicit in everything somebody says and does.”⁴⁶⁹

The world disclosing quality of the ‘who’ as opposed to the ‘what’ means that abstract generalizations of one's character (or an event) will always fall short when referring to what one does (or what has happened); summary accounts of one's physical attributes and the facts of their being (occupation, ethnicity, religion), are alone without meaning. “Action without a name, a ‘who’ attached to it, is meaningless.”⁴⁷⁰ Yet accounting for the ‘who’ rather than the ‘what’ is troublesome. “The moment we want to say who somebody is, our very vocabulary leads us astray into saying what he is; we get entangled in a description of qualities he necessarily shares

469 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), 179.

470 “Without the disclosure of the agent in the act, action loses its specific character [its ability to start anew] and becomes one form of achievement among others.” The revelatory quality of speech and action appears in human togetherness, that is, in the activities of everyday life. Personal identity, which discloses itself to all but those who act, is born of everyday experience. Who someone reveals himself or herself to be can never be reduced to an objective qualification of what they are. *Ibid.*, 180-181.

with others like him; we begin to describe a type or a ‘character’ in the old meaning of the word, with the result that his specific uniqueness escapes us.”⁴⁷¹ We know who someone is by reflecting on the significance of his or her action. Yet all too often we collapse the unique under the familiar, accounting for the individual through known registers, such that we are left with a type, a caricature bereft of meaning. The challenge facing public forms of commemoration is to avoid reducing the who of a person or an event to the what of a type or historical generality.

Arendt’s distinction between the who and the what of one’s character distinguishes a mode of narrative account, storytelling, from its more reductive and politically disabling variants, namely, philosophies of history embedded with teleological notions of progress. For Arendt, storytelling draws out the particular significance of human action. Who someone is, she reminds us, cannot be known as fact, but must be understood in the form of meaning. “Nobody is the author or producer of his own life story.” For this reason,

action reveals itself fully only to the storyteller, that is, to the backward glance of the historian who indeed always knows better what it was all about than the participants. ... What the storyteller narrates must necessarily be hidden from the actor himself, at least as long as he is in the act or caught in its consequences, because to him the meaningfulness of his act is not in the story that follows. Even though stories are the inevitable results of action, it is not the actor but the storyteller who perceives and ‘makes’ the story.⁴⁷²

Abstracted from lived experience, actors are incapable of determining not only the outcome of their action, but also how it is judged.⁴⁷³ Because of the inherent unpredictability of human action, “whoever begins to act must know that he has started something whose end he can never

471 Ibid., 181.

472 Ibid., 192.

473 “In any series of events that together form a story with a unique meaning we can at best isolate the agent who set the whole process into motion.” Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 185. “All stories begun and enacted by men unfold their true meaning only when they have come to their end.” Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin Books, 1991), 52.

foretell.”⁴⁷⁴ From the backward-looking perspective of the storyteller, action does not leave definitive ends, but rather what appear to be conclusions. Revisable according to historical perspective, these conclusions are constantly refigured by others still unfolding. To this effect, all ends are beginnings. Following Arendt, if sites of remembrance are to facilitate the production of meaning, architects must become aware of the fact that though their narratives have a beginning and an end, they occur “within a larger frame, history itself. And history is a story which has many beginnings but no end.”⁴⁷⁵ Only then does history become the unauthored storybook of mankind.

If history is a story of many beginnings, memorialization is an inaugurative practice that initiates something new by returning to what has been. Recalling Walter Benjamin, Arendt writes: “It is the task of the historian to detect this unexpected new with all its implications in any given period and to bring out the full power of its significance.”⁴⁷⁶ Attuned to the interruptive force of remembrance, Arendt’s storyteller, like that of Benjamin, renders the past historical without reducing it to a stock of information – names, dates, and facts. The storyteller, a spectator by virtue of his relation of distance to an event, imparts intelligibility on it by being temporally removed from action. This gap in time between spectator and spectated, actor and judge, describes the formal temporal structure of remembrance.

As we have seen in the preceding chapters, Arendt and Benjamin situate remembrance within the realm of action so to allow for a mode of historical transmission that forgoes the familiarity of archetypes and tropes, and enables meaningful relations to emerge out of lived

474 Hannah Arendt, “The Concept of History: Ancient and Modern,” in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin, 1993), 84.

475 “For whatever the historian calls an end, ... is a new beginning for those who are alive.” Hannah Arendt, “Understanding and Politics,” in *Essays in Understanding*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Harcourt, 1994), 320.

476 *Ibid.*, 320.

experience. Their complimentary notions of storytelling remind us that human life must pass through the memory of others in order to be made meaningful and resist narrative closure.

“What saves the affairs of mortal men from their inherent futility is nothing but this incessant talk about them, which in turn remains futile unless certain concepts, certain guideposts for future remembrance, and even for sheer reference, arise out of it.”⁴⁷⁷ Arendt does not mean to suggest that storytelling results in conceptual knowledge. Rather, incessant talk – the exchange of perspectives, opinions, and judgments – bears “single brief sentences and condensed aphorisms” containing fragments of lived experience.⁴⁷⁸ The anecdotal, aphoristic, and proverbial quality of such ‘guideposts’ encourages remembrance without determining it, providing a means of relaying the past without domesticating it.

With storytelling, particular pasts endure through memory, gaining a residual force by becoming part of the narrative fabric of daily life. “Without being talked about by men and without housing them, the world would not be a human artifice but a heap of unrelated things to which each isolated individual was at liberty to add one more object.”⁴⁷⁹ Events would become untethered to the common space in which public things acquire their worldly significance. This is what makes storytelling a politically mobilizing practice: it gives shape to the space in which things become public, a space rooted in human plurality, nourished by everyday conversations, the exchange of opinion and the sharing of experience. “If it is true that a thing is real within both the historical-political and the sensate world only if it can show itself and be perceived from

477 Arendt, *On Revolution*, 220.

478 Ibid., 320, n. 4. “If it is true that all thought begins with remembrance, it is also true that no remembrance remains secure unless it is condensed and distilled into a framework of conceptual notions within which it can further exercise itself.” “Experiences and even the stories which grow out of what we do and endure, of happenings and events, sink back into the futility inherent in the living word and the living deed unless they are talked about over and over again.” Ibid., 220

479 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 204.

all its sides, then there must always be a plurality of individuals or peoples and a plurality of standpoints to make reality even possible and to guarantee its continuation.”⁴⁸⁰ Worldly reality does not inhere in objects but in space, holding so long as plurality remains the condition and end of politics.

Arendt’s notion of storytelling is uniquely political. Drawing upon the Greeks, she depicts storytelling as an immortalizing act that gives the fleeting affairs of mortal beings a kind of worldly permanence. The exchange of perspective and opinion involved in storytelling extend the duration of human action beyond the time and space of its emergence, while also making durable the public realm in which it appears. “Did not Pericles think that the highest praise he could bestow upon Athens was to claim that it no longer needed ‘a Homer or others of his craft,’ but that, thanks to the *polis*, Athenians everywhere would leave ‘imperishable monuments’ behind them?”⁴⁸¹ On Arendt’s reading of Pericles, immortality in memory is a communal achievement (i.e. an intersubjective and public act), not an individual or a private one. The ‘imperishable monuments’ and ‘mighty proofs’ that testify to the ‘fact’ of Athenian power are the results of acting in common, of sharing a world of human in-betweenness.⁴⁸² Great deeds fade less we speak of them, which is to say something lasting, but also dynamic, must be made of memory. Arendt’s uniquely political space, like the *polis* of Pericles, is home to such memory

480 Hannah Arendt, “Introduction into Politics,” in *The Promise of Politics* (New York: Schocken Books, 2005), 175.

481 Arendt, “The Concept of History: Ancient and Modern,” 72.

482 On Arendt’s account, Pericles displays an antipathy toward culture, which he narrowly conceived as poetry and rhetoric. For Pericles, the *polis* adequately sustains the words and deeds of men and “was great enough for the monuments to its fame to grow directly out of action, and thus, out of the political itself.” Earthly immortality, as Pericles understood it, is best preserved through “the organization of the polis that secures the public space in which greatness may appear and may communicate, and in which a permanent presence of people who see and are seen, who speak and hear and may be heard,” give place to memory. Hannah Arendt, “The Imperialist Character (On Kipling)” in *Reflections on Culture and Literature*, ed. Susannah Young-Ah Gottlieb (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 187-189.

provided that people engage one another about that which takes place within it. Absent critical engagement, memorialization forsakes the public life of memory, throwing each individual back on his or her own private experience and subjective understanding.

“The organization of the *polis*,” writes Arendt, “physically secured by the wall surrounding the city and physiognomically guaranteed by its laws – lest the succeeding generations change its identity beyond recognition – is a kind of organized remembrance.”⁴⁸³ If remembrance plays a founding role securing the public realm, storytelling helps preserve it. “The *polis*, properly speaking, is not the city-state in its physical location; it is the organization of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together, and its true space lies between people living together for this purpose, no matter where they happen to be.” It is in the sharing of mutual space, wherever it may be, that action engenders human in-betweenness, that is, a plurality of unique individuals. This common space “assures the mortal actor that his passing existence and fleeting greatness will never lack the reality that comes from being seen, being heard, and, generally, appearing before an audience of fellow men.” From this web of human affairs and relations develops a world, which, unlike the earth or one’s private position within it, is not an existential given. The public realm is thus born of action, yet it must also survive those who bring it into being. Storytelling not only extends the duration of action, it enlarges the space “where I appear to others as others appear to me, where men exist not merely like other living or inanimate things but make their appearance explicitly.”⁴⁸⁴

Can a name or a narrative, materialized in built form, capture the uniqueness of one’s individuality or the singularity of an event, that is, what explicitly appears in the space of human

483 Arendt, “The Concept of History: Ancient and Modern,” 198-199, emphasis added.

484 Ibid., 198-199.

plurality? Arendt's account of perspective taking, as we shall see in the following section, offers insight into this question. Who someone is, like the historical event, reveals itself in the light of the public, that is, under the gaze of multiple perspectives. "The understanding of political and historical matters," writes Arendt, "have something in common with the understanding of people: who somebody essentially is."⁴⁸⁵ Understanding history and politics involves more than an accumulation of knowledge or a calculation of interest and psychological motivation. It requires critical self-reflection motivated by an active concern for worldly reality. "Reality is different from, and more than, the totality of facts and events, which, anyhow, is unascertainable. Who says what is always tells a story, and in this story the particular facts lose their contingency and acquire some humanly comprehensible meaning."⁴⁸⁶

The public realm in which life is made meaningful is composed of appearances, perceptions, and sensations. "The thing that arises between people, and in which everything that individuals carry with them innately can become visible," depends on our ability to experience and judge the world from a wide range of perspectives.⁴⁸⁷ "Only where things can be seen by many in a variety of aspects without changing their identity, so that those who are gathered around them know they see sameness in utter diversity, can worldly reality truly appear."⁴⁸⁸ The objective status of the world, and that which appears within it, is not a material condition, but a political relation. That is to say, the lived reality of an object or an event cannot be reduced to a function or an intended purpose. Independent of instrumental concerns and constraints, the

485 Arendt, "Understanding and Politics," 309.

486 Hannah Arendt, "Truth and Politics," in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin, 1993), 261-262.

487 Hannah Arendt, *Men in Dark Times* (New York: Harcourt, 1968), 10.

488 "The reality of the public realm relies on the simultaneous presence of innumerable perspectives and aspects in which the common world presents itself." Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 57.

world acquires its political significance as that which relates and separates those holding it in common.

This common space, the world, exists in a system of relationships established by action in which the words and deeds of mortal men live on in the form of shared narratives and meanings. The revelatory character of speech and action, the material from which stories and histories are produced, “form the very source from which meaningfulness springs into and illuminates human existence.”⁴⁸⁹ Informing the present through the judgment they inspire and demand, the achievements and failings of previous generations are made meaningful through acts of remembrance that look upon the world from a diversity of perspectives. When neglected by those who inherit the words and deeds of the past, the world becomes a desert,⁴⁹⁰ ‘a heap of unrelated things,’ a depoliticized space of particular interest and instrumental pursuit.

Preventing this worldless condition from spreading requires a break with the logic of means-ends thinking. This break in turn demands perspective taking, drawing similarities and distinctions among things that appear publicly. “Only in the freedom of our speaking with one another does the world, as that about which we speak, emerge in its objectivity and visibility from all sides.”⁴⁹¹ Arendt’s refiguring of objectivity as an intersubjective condition emphasizes the significance of human plurality, which is given in the relation of unique individuals to others. It is the haphazard meeting of perspectives, ideas, opinions, identities, and experiences. Plurality is not merely difference, a cross-section of groups and identities, or a numerical threshold. It is

489 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 324.

490 “The modern growth of worldlessness, the withering away of everything *between* us, can also be described as the spread of the desert.” Once the world of relationships is destroyed, “the laws of political action ... are replaced by the law of the desert, which, as a wasteland between men, unleashes devastating processes that bear within them the same lack of moderation inherent in those free human actions that establish relationships.” Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, 201, 190.

491 Arendt, “Introduction into Politics,” 128.

the condition of acting in relation to others, appearing publicly in the in-between space of difference and similarity, separation and relation, distance and proximity. Sites of remembrance account for plurality by recognizing that their narratives are one of many, providing a particular view, not a total image or a definitive account. In terms of memorial architecture, taking account of plurality means facilitating an exchange of perspective, not delimiting it. That is to say, multiple perspectives help constitute the objectivity of a thing or an event without reducing or subsuming its particularity (i.e. how it appears to us) to general categories (i.e. without objectivism).

To enable such an exchange, sites of remembrance ought to impart their visitors with questions rather than answers, leaving memory up to individuals, not institutions. The perspective taking enabled by such sites thicken the narrative fabric of the public realm while also broadening its space. As Arendt explains, the system of relationships that gives meaning to what we do and what we say “can exist only within the world produced by man, nesting there in its stones until they too speak and in speaking bear witness, even if we must first dig them out of the earth.”⁴⁹² Storytelling turns over the stones of experience, touching them – with and against each another – so to make audible, tactile, and perceptual what has been. As a participatory act, storytelling involves sifting through the past, baring its weight in memory, so that the world maintains the in-betweenness of human plurality.

For both Benjamin and Arendt, the mnemonic work of storytelling is not mere recollection, but a reciprocal exchange between past and present that initiates action without predicating experience. Like Arendt, Benjamin uses the imagery of turning over the past to describe the dynamic force of memory. On his account, language

⁴⁹² Ibid., 162.

has unmistakably made plain that memory is not an instrument for exploring the past, but rather a medium. It is the medium of that which is experienced, just as the earth is the medium in which ancient cities lie buried. He who seeks to approach his own buried past must conduct himself like a man digging. Above all, he must not be afraid to return again and again to the same matter; to scatter it as one scatters earth, to turn it over as one turns over soil.⁴⁹³

Memory is the medium of returning to experience and uncovering the past. To “assay its spade in ever-new places, and in old one’s delve to ever-deeper layers,” memory must resist the archival (i.e. objectivist) impulse to conclusively claim the past. “It is to cheat oneself of the richest prize to preserve as a record merely the inventory of one’s discoveries.”⁴⁹⁴ As Benjamin makes clear, remembrance is an unending activity that leaves open the possibility for new findings and chance encounters with experience. Our memorial practices do well to preserve a space, which may or may not be literal or material, for the unexpected of memory.

2. Naming: The Recovery of Loss

What do we expect from a name when recalling an individual, place, or event? What role does the proper name as a mnemonic marker play when drawing meaning from the past? Does a name incite active remembrance and storytelling, facilitating the production of a *who*, or does it instead promote identification, a conceptual reification of the *what*?

The function of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., as set by the competition guidelines for its design, is to “honor the service and memory of the war’s dead, its missing and its veterans – not the war itself.”⁴⁹⁵ Thus understood, the memorial is intended to provide a politically neutral site, a contemplative space for personal reflection. Yet since its

493 Walter Benjamin, “Excavation and Memory,” in *Selected Writings: Volume 2: 1927-1934*, ed. Howard Eiland, Michael W. Jennings, Gary Smith (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), 576.

494 Walter Benjamin, “A Berlin Chronicle,” in *Selected Writings: Volume 2: 1927-1934*, 611.

495 Nicholas Capasso, “Vietnam Veterans Memorial,” *The Critical Edge*, ed. Tod Marder (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985), 189-193.

selection in 1981, Maya Lin's design for the memorial has received mixed reviews from critics, service personnel, the architectural profession, and the public at large. Its departure from the iconography and representational strategies of traditional memorial architecture has polarized its audience, leading many to question the success of its declared purpose. Recent commentaries, like that of architecture theorist Terry Smith, have found "Lin's success as a communicator" to be "based in her ability to deploy Minimalist art strategies to maximal public, palpably lucid, symbolic purpose." The "connection of self-to-other, enacted privately yet out in the open, in this fold in the earth, is the experience that is at the core of the memorial. It is an act of remembrance available to everyone. It is a gesture of healing that echoes the memorial's own form: its closing a gash in the earth, a slash in the parkland."⁴⁹⁶

With or without irony, Smith's praise for the memorial borrows from the very language used to reproach Lin's design. In the wake of the selection jury's controversial decision, the "memorial was termed the 'black gash of shame and sorrow,' a 'degrading ditch,' a 'tombstone,' a 'slap in the face,' and a 'wailing wall for draft dodgers and New Lefters of the Future.'"⁴⁹⁷ Posing a direct challenge to the objectivist frame of public memorial and commemoration, Lin's V-shaped black granite wall was seen by many as a wound on what architecture theorist Karsten Harries describes as the closest thing the United States has to something like a national cathedral.⁴⁹⁸ It "adds a crypt to this church, re-presenting it in a way that questions all national

496 Terry Smith, *The Architecture of Aftermath* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 89-90.

497 As memorial scholar and cultural theorist Marita Sturken rightly identifies, a "radically coded reading of the color black as shameful was combined with a reading of a feminized earth as connoting a lack of power" in many of the commentaries on Lin's design. See Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), 51-52.

498 "Consider the monuments in Washington. If the United States has something like a national cathedral, is it not these monuments, placed on the Mall as on a gigantic town green, which represent the democratic ethos of the country in the image of Egypt, Athens, and Rome?" See Karsten Harries, *The Ethical Function of Architecture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), 302.

monuments, questions also the later addition of a flagpole and Frederick Hart's sculptural group of *Three Fighting Men*, which was intended to soften that challenge."⁴⁹⁹ Read in light of its opposition to monumentality and didacticism, and as a critical departure from objectivist renderings of the past, what kind of political space does this most self-consciously public memorial provide?

Lin's original design for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial consists of two walls of polished black granite, each seventy five meters in length, inscribed with the names of U.S. military servicemen who lost their lives during the Vietnam War and those who still remain missing. Less than a half an inch in size, the engravings are arranged in chronological order according to the date of casualty, beginning and ending at the apex where the two walls meet. Without identifying rank, unit, or decoration, the wall of names offers a variant on the democratic theme of unifying the living around the dead.⁵⁰⁰ As political theorist Thomas Hawley explains, "the named individual assumes importance as that which both constitutes the body politic and validates its claim to enduring relevance and significance."⁵⁰¹ Naming expresses the substantive unity of the collectivity, assuring it of a life that survives individual death.

499 Ibid., 302. As with Peter Eisenman's Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, Lin's modernist and abstract design was forced to concede to the representational vernacular of traditional memorial architecture. Two years after the memorial's 1982 dedication, a bronze statue of three male soldiers on patrol and an American flag were added to the site, symbolic figures heroizing the fallen and reclaiming the dead under the official banner of national sovereignty. "At the base of the flag staff are the seals of the five military services, with the following inscription: 'This flag represents the service rendered to our country by the veterans of the Vietnam War. The flag affirms the principles of freedom for which they fought and their pride in having served under difficult circumstances.'" See Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund FAQs, <http://www.vvmf.org/index.cfm?SectionID=85#faq3>

500 Like the fifth-century Athenian funeral oration, where honoring the collective renders equality over the whole, naming helps consolidate a community in mourning.

501 Thomas M. Hawley, *The Remains of War: Bodies, Politics, and the Search for American Soldiers Unaccounted For in Southeast Asia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 169.

The 58,256 names that make up the wall dematerialize it “as a form and allows visitors the chance to see themselves with the names.”⁵⁰² The result is a threshold experience, where, on the border between the world of the dead and the world of the living, a communion of past and present emerges. With one wall set in the direction of the Lincoln Memorial, and the other pointing toward the Washington Monument, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial not only establishes a continuum between past and present, it aligns itself with two of the nation’s most recognizable symbols. Yet rather than draw its symbolic energy from its neighbors, the Memorial resonates through time by inspiring visitors to reflect and remember. It functions as a fulcrum, shifting between past and future as it maintains in the present. Moving with and against death as the figure of absolute absence, the Memorial reflects the tenuous perpetuity of the event as a mnemonic force, one that is able to resist and adopt a wide range of social significations.

Lin’s design for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial grew out of a seminar on funereal architecture, where, as an undergraduate student, she explored the ways in which communities express their attitudes on death through built form. Over the course of the seminar, she became increasingly aware that the tradition of funereal architecture was composed of monuments carrying general meanings about victories, rather than vehicles provoking discussion or reflection on the meaning of death. She recognized that it was only after the First World War that the loss of individual life was given a national stage upon which to be commemorated. Lin understood this phenomenon as part of a larger effort by the modern nation state to consolidate and democratize death, which was a pragmatic outcome of the changing dynamic of war. “Partly it was a practical need to list those whose bodies could not be identified ... but I think as well the

502 Lin, “Vietnam Veterans Memorial,” 4:14.

listing of the names reflected a response by these designers to the horrors of World War I, to the immense loss of life.”⁵⁰³

While working on her design for the Memorial, Lin became increasingly affected by “the power of a name.” “The use of names,” she writes, “was a way to bring back everything someone could remember about a person.” A name, according to Lin, encompasses the totality of an individual, whereas an image captures a fragment in a frame, a piece of someone’s life abstracted from time. To enable an enduring encounter with the dead, Lin set out to design an “experiential and cathartic” memorial, one that would acknowledge the singularity of life without thematizing war or politics. “I did not want to civilize war by glorifying it or by forgetting the sacrifices involved. The price of human life in war should always be clearly remembered.”⁵⁰⁴

Prioritizing the loss of individual life, Lin’s design moved beyond the glorifying and heroizing rhetoric of traditional commemorative architecture. Neither apportioning guilt, nor claiming victory, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial affirms human mortality. Supporting this affirmation is the belief that accepting death leads to the overcoming of loss. “The pain of loss will always be there, it will always hurt, but we must acknowledge the death in order to move on.”⁵⁰⁵ By facing the names of the dead, visitors are confronted by the reality of loss, and so encouraged by the memorial to accept the fact of human mortality with reverence and resolve.

503 Ibid., 4:09. Historian Edward Linenthal describes the power of the name as follows: “Names transform numbers of dead into individuals, and clearly the increasingly popular fashion of listing names on a memorial is an act of protest against the anonymity of mass death.” See Edward Linenthal, *The Unfinished Bombing: Oklahoma City in American Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 198.

504 Ibid., 4:09.

505 Ibid., 4:10.

The proposed memorial at the World Trade Center site follows a similar logic. Designed by architects Michael Arad and Peter Walker, “Reflecting Absence” projects a space intended to resonate with the feelings of loss and absence experienced in the aftermath of September 11. The memorial consists of an eight-acre Memorial Plaza lined with an informal arrangement of oak trees, and two large voids, commonly referred to as the footprints of the former Twin Towers, 1 WTC and 2 WTC. The voids descend to a Memorial Museum, which functions as an interpretive center, a large stone repository of unidentified remains, and two recessed pools enclosed by a thin curtain of water. Surrounding the pools are the names of the six individuals who lost their lives in the attack on the World Trade Center on February 26, 1993, and the 2,973 who died in New York City, Washington DC, and Pennsylvania on September 11, 2001.

The continuous ribbon of names, like the wall of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial or the Information Center at the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe,⁵⁰⁶ brings past and present, living and dead, private and public, to meet at their respective limits. As Arad and Walker explain, the enormity of the underground space and “the multitude of names that form this endless ribbon underscore the vast scope of the destruction. Standing there at the water's edge, looking at a pool of water that is flowing away into an abyss, a visitor to the site can sense that what is beyond this curtain of water and ribbon of names is inaccessible.”⁵⁰⁷ For Arad and Walker, the pools wrapped with the names of the dead are emotive landmarks whose silence echo loss on a perceptual scale rather than on a cognitive level. The abyssal quality of loss, its

506 The curators of the Information Center at the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, Sybille Quack and Dagmar von Wilcken, view the Center as an educational space designed for the purpose of personalizing the numerical abstraction of more than six million deaths. Calling attention to the unique destiny of each victim is intended to recover the memory of an individual life cut short: faces, names, and personal histories complement architectural and numerical abstraction.

507 Michael Arad and Peter Walker, “Reflecting Absence,” <http://www.wtcsitememorial.org/fin7.html>.

sheer immeasurability, can only be experienced as a limit, that is, as beyond the reach of understanding. This meditative space, which oscillates between the finite and the infinite, is intentionally indeterminate of meaning.

With the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, “Reflecting Absence” complements the abstract qualities of its space through the display of information (facts, figures, dates) related to the events in memorial. Here, specification and designation trace what has been materially effaced. According to convention, contextualizing the dead with names enables memorials to endure as memorials.⁵⁰⁸ Arad and Walker’s design adheres to this principle, though it makes a conscious effort to avoid any consolidation of meaning. No attempt is made to impose order upon the events. “Any arrangement that tries to impose meaning through physical adjacency will cause grief and anguish to people who might be excluded from that process, furthering the sense of loss that they are already suffering.” For Arad and Walker, the ribbon of names signifies the loss of life on a collective scale without reducing the individual dimension of death to a universal category or significance (e.g., victim, hero, martyr). “For those whose deceased were never physically identified, the location of the name marks a spot that is their own.”⁵⁰⁹ The name means something for them, and this meaning is incommensurable to any false or imposed unity. Thus, Arad and Walker’s design for the WTC memorial maintains the incalculability of loss by personifying absence, that is, by giving a human face to an unnamable experience.

The power and seduction of the name is a recurring feature of contemporary memorial architecture, despite its increasing abstraction from humanist concerns. Reflecting on the

508 Simpson, *9/11: The Culture of Commemoration*, 70.

509 Arad and Walker, “Reflecting Absence,” <http://www.wtcsitememorial.org/fin7.html>.

rebuilding of the WTC, writer and critic Salman Rushdie captures architecture's ambivalent relationship with representation.

What if we did build a new 110-storey tower here, or even two towers; but what if the top 30 or 40 storeys of one or both the towers were then left empty, filled only with light, like a giant atrium or pair of atriums, and what if that were the memorial – a memorial in the very sky-space where the assaults had occurred, and which repossessed and dignified that space for ever? What if the walls of that single or twinned memorial were engraved with the names of the lost, like a negative-space version of the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington DC?⁵¹⁰

Privileging content over form, Rushdie's proposal emphasizes the message through the medium's own self-effacement. Signifying loss through absence, redemption through light, his atrium, like Arad and Walker's voids, suggests an untouchable – voided – space.

On the one hand, Rushdie articulates the demand to sacralize the ground of the WTC through emptiness, to revere and reclaim the past through absence and light, clearing it of anything that might overshadow its inviolable singularity. On the other hand, his proposal betrays the human need for identification, for recognition of the dead. In its familiarity, the name lends stability to a world upended, offering intelligibility in a moment of meaninglessness and disorder. The name, an individual unit of meaning, draws the past near, imparting wholeness on what has been disfigured. The desire for the name comes from the felt need to repair what has been broken. It expresses the need for redemption, to save the past by reclaiming it from the transience of time. Beginning with the name, commemorative spaces, like the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and "Reflecting Absence," reclaim and redeem, affirming life through the recovery of loss.

"Portraits of Grief," brief profiles of the victims of September 11 published by the *New York Times* four days after the attacks and through the end of the calendar year, sets out to fulfill

⁵¹⁰ Salman Rushdie, "Reach for the Sky," *Guardian*, July 27, 2002.

a similar task. A series of ‘impressionistic sketches,’ “Portraits of Grief” personalizes the anonymous through a relay of private memories. Catching lives as they had been lived prior to their sudden interruption, these narrow windows of memory bring the words and deeds of unique individuals into public view. Against the figure of time as irretrievable and absolute, the portraits take us beyond the name, animating the past through glimpses of lived experience.

Resembling a “quick caricature that captures a likeness,” the portraits “intimate tales that give an impression, an image of a person.”⁵¹¹ Published collectively, the individual lives recalled express familial values, work ethic, passions, talents and interests, along with character traits and personal quirks. Though written from fragmentary details based on individual testimonials, the sketches reach for an overarching representation of lives ‘as they were being actively lived.’ The historical accuracy of the portraits is less important than their cultural function, which is to bring a community together through a heightened awareness of its shared past.⁵¹²

Cumulatively, the portraits humanize death. As editors from the *Times* explain, “each profile is only a snapshot, a single still frame lifted from the uncountable complexity of a lived life.” “We recognize the archetypes that define the ways these stories are told.”⁵¹³ Part anecdote, part obituary, they provide both general sentiments and factual information. For David Simpson, “it is this abstraction, this tendency toward the universal that allows the spectacle of

511 Barbara Stewart, “Amid So Much Death, Celebrations of Life,” *Columbia Journalism Review*, January/February 2002, 66.

512 For journalist Janice Hume, the portraits mark “a rare instance when an average person can become part of collective thought, part of what Americans might believe in common about the worth of a life.” “The ‘Portraits of Grief’ reflect a community in grief and crisis; they will add to public memory of this national tragedy as, it might be argued, the first institutionalized commemorations of this historic event.” Janice Hume, “‘Portraits of grief,’ reflectors of values: The New York Times remembers victims of September 11,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 80, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 166-182.

513 See “Among the Missing,” *New York Times*, October 14, 2001.

death and burial to open up feelings of kinship and community.”⁵¹⁴ By displaying everyday people in their everyday routines they hold out a mirror reflecting a shared humanity bound by life and loss.

For journalist Janice Hume, the traditional obituary “offers a tiny picture of a life, a synopsis of what is best remembered about a person's history. It is a type of commemoration, representing an ideal, and because it is published or broadcast, that ‘ideal’ is magnified for a mass audience.”⁵¹⁵ Embodying the public memory of a nation’s citizens, “Portraits of Grief” constitutes an unconventional obituary, marking death without ever disclosing its cause. “Like a panoramic photograph,” capturing collective loss through individual frames, “the project gathered everyone it could and attempted to bring each one fleetingly into focus.”⁵¹⁶

Insofar as it renders a general equality over the dead, “Portraits of Grief” functions much like the Vietnam Veterans Memorial or the funeral oration in ancient Athens. Yet unlike the listing of names or the public eulogy, the sketches account for particulars and details, thereby enabling distinctions to emerge among the dead. An individual life acquires its unique significance through such distinction. To be sure, all forms of public commemoration frame the dead, using tropes and archetypes to contextualize and achieve coherence for events that in themselves seem meaningless. Still, there are some modes of framing that are more productive of meaning than others. The worst kind of framing, the strategic manipulation of an event for the sake of legitimating military, political, and commercial interests, is a kind of memorial abuse. In the words of historian and theorist Dominick LaCapra, such memory politics “misappropriates

514 Simpson, *9/11: The Culture of Commemoration*, 45.

515 Hume, “‘Portraits of grief,’ reflectors of values: The New York Times remembers victims of September 11,” 166-182.

516 The New York Times, *Portraits: 9/11/01: The Collected “Portraits of Grief” from the New York Times*, ed. Howell Raines (New York: Times, 2002), ix.

past experience as symbolic capital in the service of current political and social self-interest.”⁵¹⁷

A more productive mode of memorialization, as sought after by “Portraits of Grief,” attempts to move beyond general types, recalling incidents no matter how trivial or mundane, to facilitate the production of meaning and understanding.

If the logic of memory is the presencing of that which is no longer physically or mentally ‘there’ (e.g. recalling through a name), what are the limits and possibilities of generating meaning and understanding through an architecture of absence? In other words, how might architecture promote a productive experience of memory and forgetting through the presencing of absence, i.e., through the material expression of loss and displacement? Do spatial voids, which are intended to facilitate acts of remembrance without circumscribing them to ideological or instrumental functions, need to be given concrete form – can one *create* a void?⁵¹⁸ – or do they exist outside of the economy of structure and use that defines the architectural practice? More specifically, how does architecture go about articulating the loss of seven buildings, which in total exceeded eleven million square feet of space, without imposing order and form on their ruin, without disturbing the claim to authenticity made by their absence?

3. Absence and Authenticity: Lower Manhattan

Following the competition guidelines set by the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation (LMDC),⁵¹⁹ and building upon Studio Daniel Libeskind’s master site plan,

517 Dominick LaCapra, *History in Transit: Experience, Identity, Critical Theory* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 43.

518 This line of inquiry follows from Jacques Derrida’s remarks on *chôra*.

519 “The memorial competition, which attracted 5,201 submissions, was conducted apart from the other planning for Ground Zero. It was organized by the L.M.D.C., which is a government agency, but the judging was done by a jury that consisted mainly of art and architecture experts and civic leaders who had been assured that they could operate without political interference.” Paul Goldberger, “Slings and Arrows,” *The New Yorker*, February 9, 2004, http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2004/02/09/040209crsk_skyline.

“Memory Foundations,”⁵²⁰ Michael Arad and Peter Walker’s winning design for the National September 11 Memorial, “Reflecting Absence,” attempts to maintain the materiality of loss and the symbolic integrity of absence through spatial voids. For Arad and Walker, the material effects of violence provide an authentic space of memory. As Libeskind explains, the voids “are at the epicenters of where the towers stood, and much like the twin beams of light, though not exact replicas, they accurately and movingly reflect the power of absence.”⁵²¹

Measuring seventy-feet tall and three-feet thick, the concrete retaining walls, from which “Memory Foundations” takes its name, are replaced by Arad and Walker’s architectural embodiments of loss: reflecting pools recessed within the footprints of the Twin Towers, physical and emotional voids left in the wake of their destruction. Providing public access to the voids left by the Towers not only situates the memorial in the events to which it refers but also offers an experience of authenticity, akin to that of the ruin.⁵²² “The idea that a destroyed structure leaves a footprint evokes the site specific concept of memory in modernity and the concrete materiality of ruins. ... The desire to reimagine the towers as having left a footprint is,

520 The initial competition for the rebuilding of lower Manhattan resulted in six commissioned concept plans. Exhibited in July 2002, these proposals were received critically by the general public and the architectural community for their lack of distinction and their conventional approach to the rebuilding of the WTC. After receiving more than four hundred submissions for the second competition, the LMDC selected nine designs that were thought to be more innovative in their approach than those of the first competition. With the intention of making the selection process transparent and inclusive, the LMDC initiated a dialogue with victims, architects, and the public, receiving reviews and critical commentary from over thirteen thousand sources. Appealing to the overwhelming concern to preserve the footprints of the Towers, while also restoring a symbolic presence to the Manhattan skyline, Daniel Libeskind’s concept plan for the WTC site (which included the proposed Freedom Tower) was selected from the nine finalists in February 2003.

521 Cited in David Dunlap, “Memorial Pools Will Not Quite Fill Twin Footprints,” *New York Times*, December, 15, 2005, B.3.

522 “Our imaginary of ruins can be read as a palimpsest of multiple historical events and representations, and the intense concern with ruins is a subset of the current privileging of memory and trauma both inside and outside the academy.” Andreas Huyssen, “Nostalgia for Ruins,” *Grey Room* 23, (Spring 2006): 6-21.

thus, a desire to imagine that the towers left an imprint on the ground.”⁵²³ The notion of an imprint prefigures displacement, that is, the mark of passing. Absent absence, imprints would be unrecognizable, which from a symbolic standpoint, would divest memory of its locus of meaning.

The claim to authenticity made by “Reflecting Absence,” from which the historical awareness of future generations about the events of September 11 will be built, rests on the remains of destruction and violence. Making the footprints of the towers and other surviving elements of the surrounding area the focal point of the memorial helps realize this claim. Yet, as cultural theorist Marita Sturken explains, “in terms of their actual structure the towers never had actual footprints on the ground. They reached upward to the sky from the underground mall into which they were integrated.” The priority given to the footprints by the memorial “means that they will have to be created out of the hole in the ground. Created, not re-created, given that ... they never actually existed in the ground.”⁵²⁴ Sturken’s analysis of the footprints rightly recognizes the divergence of literalism and symbolism in the architectural production of spatial voids. Case in point: Arad’s pool filled voids represent the outlines of the Towers on a physically reduced scale. At 176 feet, the squares are 17 percent smaller than the 211-foot-10-inch square footprints of the Towers.⁵²⁵ Size notwithstanding, the materialization of absence performed by the voids fulfills the universal desire for maintaining a sense of historical authenticity, albeit a symbolic one.

523 Marita Sturken, “The Aesthetics of Absence: Rebuilding Ground Zero,” *American Ethnologist* 31, no. 3 (2004): 311-325.

524 Sturken, “The Aesthetics of Absence: Rebuilding Ground Zero,” 311-325.

525 “As planned, the pools will occupy a total of 1.42 acres. The towers occupied 2.06 acres.” “Future visitors will undoubtedly look across the vast expanses of those memorial pools, marveling at how large the World Trade Center towers must have been. And they will see only 69 percent of the story.” Dunlap, “Memorial Pools Will Not Quite Fill Twin Footprints.”

Architecture critic Philip Nobel's assessment of the memorial competition guidelines, which prescribed the preservation of the Towers' footprints, questions architecture's ability to respond authentically to the challenge of emptiness and absence, that is, to initiate a critical dialogue with the effects of violence.

The footprints were just the sort of trace on a site that architects find irresistible – a preexisting formal cue that spares them the terror of a blank slate, with its infinity of options, no course clear, and all possible. The footprints were a crutch, and clinging to them was a concession that architecture had reached the limits of what it could say.⁵²⁶

On Nobel's account, "Reflecting Absence" falls in line with the commemorative tradition canonized by Maya Lin (who sat on the jury for the memorial competition) of displacing the promise of politics with ethical imperatives. This intentional withdrawal from the unknown of the political renounces architecture's ability to create the world anew, to inaugurate a language capable of articulating the significance of the past in terms of the present.

The "Memorial Mission Statement" describes the ethical function of the site as follows: to remember and to honor the dead; to respect the sacred place of loss; to recognize the human capacity to endure and act courageously with compassion. It asks of memory to "strengthen our resolve to preserve freedom, and inspire an end to hatred, ignorance and intolerance."⁵²⁷ The space provided by Arad and Walker's design helps realize these ends. By bringing people down from the sound and light of the street, into the silence and darkness of the memorial, it occasions an introspective meditation on the past. This thoughtful gesture asks visitors to temper grief,

526 "The list of names, the healing waters, the sanctity of the footprints, the faith in architectural salvation – these things were well established before Arad arrived. ... ["Reflecting Absence"] wasn't a critical work, leaning toward some future understanding; it was a summary of what was known." Philip Nobel, *Sixteen Acres: Architecture and the Outrageous Struggle for the Future of Ground Zero* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2005), 252-254.

527 "The Memorial Mission Statement," Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, 2003, 18. http://www.wtcsitememorial.org/about_guidelines.html.

empathy, and nostalgic sentimentality with critical self-reflection. However, bearing witness to loss at the site in which it occurred can easily slide into pathos prohibitive of a politically minded (transformative) reclamation of the past. As previously discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, elevating empathy to the *raison d'être* of memorialization can lead to an identification with both the victim and the victor. With the former, the spectator recognizes him or herself as innocent and exceptional, wounded and immobilized. In the case of the latter, identification supports the prevailing order. Regardless of whether one identifies with the victim or victor, empathy prevents alternate narratives from welling up within public view by confusing spectator for prosthetic witness and collapsing the critical distance needed for intersubjective perspective taking and representative thinking (discussed in Chapter 5).

On this count, Michael Arad's original design for the memorial, conceived prior to the additions of Peter Walker, would have negotiated the balance between sentimentality and reflection in a more even handed manner, refiguring the brutality of the attacks through a space devoid of symbolic representation.

As in the current design, Arad's initial submission thematizes the material and emotional loss of the events of September 11 through the physical demarcation of absence. An image of "two square, open boxes in the Hudson River – the footprints of the towers as voids with water flowing past them," serves as the conceptual backdrop of the design.⁵²⁸ This image of sunken space – removed from the urban topography of the city and enclosed by the expanse of the river's water – evokes the abyssal quality of memory while also drawing out its dynamic fluidity (symbolized by the flow of water). Memory's depth, punctuated by its uncanny ability to break

528 Paul Goldberger, *Up From Zero* (New York: Random House, 2004), 234.

and unify time, defines the project's minimalist aesthetic.⁵²⁹ Open to the mnemonic force of rupture, Arad's original design leaves the memorial plaza untouched, as though it were a blank canvas waiting to be painted by the colors of memory.

But what if the memorial's subdued affect culminates in a gray in gray devoid of historical understanding? What if, following the selection jury for the memorial competition, the design is too detached to provide the necessary space for mourning and too severe to function as a space of rebirth?

While recognizing Arad's submission to be a practical and powerful response to the memorial mandate set forth by the LMDC, the jury feared that the solemn tone and austere quality of the initial submission would be "too stark for the public to accept." Consequently, Arad was asked to collaborate with a landscape architect capable of achieving his vision without interfering with the structural integrity of the voids. The idea was to soften up the hard edge cut by the memorial without adding artificial symbolism. In Walker, Arad found a partner with a reserved yet compelling aesthetic sensibility. The addition of trees, arranged in free form throughout the plaza, realizes the popular sentiment captured by memorial scholar James Young, that the site "should be a soothing green oasis in the city," "remembering life with life."⁵³⁰

Inviting visitors to pass through the depths of memory staged by the voids, Walker's revision

⁵²⁹Arad's initial proposal from November 2003 conveys the force of rupture staged by the attacks through the symbolic form of two large spatial depressions punched in a seemingly uninhabited field. Ramps leading to recessing pools add a dimension of depth and interiority as they guide visitors to an unreachable bottom. Broken by square-shaped voids, the Memorial Plaza's sterile plane destabilizes one's sense of place as familiar and domesticated space. "This large field," writes Arad in his original submission, "should be punctuated only by the footprints of the two memorial pools, while other buildings commemorating the events of September 11, such as a museum or visitor center, can be placed across the street from the open square in one of the adjacent blocks." It is Arad's insistence on a physical clearing, not the false absence performed by the voids (which are filled with emptiness), but the abstraction of form, dissolution of space, and refusal of functional order enacted at street level that gives his original design its disquieting strength.

⁵³⁰Nobel, *Sixteen Acres: Architecture and the Outrageous Struggle for the Future of Ground Zero*, 251.

follows the conceptual outline traced by Arad's initial design, while also conveying a sense of rebirth through the natural landscape of the memorial plaza. Humanizing abstraction, Arad and Walker's design realigns the frayed fabric of a community that has forgotten how to mourn without the institutional support of a museum, monument, or memorial.

Throughout the redevelopment process of the former WTC, there was a shared understanding that the memorial would maintain a physical connection to the site. Just how it would go about doing so, without overbearing its visitors with grief, without weighing down the memorial with symbolic meaning, and without privileging the loss of buildings over the loss of life, were challenges posed by the devastation in the wake of the attacks. In the words of architecture critic Herbert Muschamp, "Sept. 11 was a dismemberment: a violent separation. The poetic function is needed to create new connective tissue. That is a just function for architecture in the public sphere."⁵³¹

"Reflecting Absence" attempts to fulfill this function. Situated within the material effects of violence, Arad and Walker's design figures remembrance as a punctuated act (exceptional in its effects, not in its reach) that rejoins past and present at the site of physical destruction and temporal rupture. Standing at the center of history, visitors are placed within a continuous temporal relay between what is and what has been (between the living and the dead), one that projects authenticity as an objective fact realized through a visceral and tactile engagement. Experiencing history as such promotes an affective relation with the past, but leaves its objectivity unquestioned. This is a problem, for it releases visitors from the responsibility of understanding the past in the form of meaning.

531 Herbert Muschamp, "The Memorial Would Live in the Architecture," *New York Times*, December 22, 2002, A1

Though stylistically captivating and conceptually compelling, the architectural pursuit of absence at the World Trade Center is ultimately counterproductive to the political work of reflective judgment. Libeskind's overdetermined significations, evinced by his plan to leave portions of the WTC foundation's slurry walls exposed as "a symbol of strength and endurance of American democracy," to name just one example, impede the creative and spontaneous work of memory required by judgment if it is to effect a critical relation to the past.

Doing away with Libeskind's paternalism, Arad and Walker construct a civic space that merits praise for its minimalist approach. Without imposing meaning, to paraphrase the selection jury, it allows absence to speak for itself. This anti-didactic move notwithstanding, "Reflecting Absence" depoliticizes memory insofar as it occasions a subjective experience with the past. If memorial architecture is to manifest understandings that are not only open but also politically significant – engendering *who's* as opposed to *what's* – it must provoke an independence of thought generative of publicly contestable meanings.

Fabricating absence in the form of voided space successfully subverts the didactic order of objectivism, yet fails to provoke an intersubjective mode of reception that would enable the formation of a critical and public understanding of the past. Having raised the specter of subjectivism, the WTC memorial retreats to a familiar form of information giving characteristic of objectivist strategies. The addition of an underground interpretive center signals this retreat, providing a chronological account of the events and a comprehensive archive of stories, oral histories, photographs, videos, and other evidentiary materials, such as those related to the recovery effort (police cars, fire trucks, uniforms), and relics reflecting the former lives of the buildings and their inhabitants (steel columns, documents, found artifacts). Like the Information

Center at the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe (see Chapter 3), the interpretive center at the National September 11 Memorial Museum complements the viewer's subjective understanding with factual knowledge, thereby fulfilling the need for objectivity demanded by the very form of memorializing these architects otherwise reject. It remains to be seen whether or not information will be passed on at the Memorial Museum without reducing one's experience of the site or the memory of the events to an objectivist mode of reflection.

From the beginning, the construction of a memorial museum was without question.⁵³² Together, the voids and the museum would realize the memorial and educational mandate entrusted to the complex as a whole. The competition guidelines maintains: "we need a Museum at the epicenter of Ground Zero, a museum of the event, of memory and hope. The Museum becomes one of the entrances into Ground Zero, always accessible, leading us down into a space of reflection, of meditation, a space for the Memorial itself."⁵³³

Thirty-five feet below street level, the sunken pools of cascading waterfalls sit adjacent to the memorial museum, which rests at the bedrock of the site, approximately seventy feet underground. Arad and Walker explain:

Bordering each pool is a pair of ramps that lead down to the memorial spaces. Descending into the memorial, visitors are removed from the sites and sounds of the city and immersed in a cool darkness. As they proceed, the sound of water falling grows louder, and more daylight filters in from below. At the bottom of their descent, they find themselves behind a thin curtain of water, staring out at an enormous pool.⁵³⁴

532 As Philip Nobel reports, "during the cleanup of the site, the Port Authority had deputized a local architect to scan outgoing trucks for exceptional pieces of debris, and it had also collected an assortment of destroyed vehicles and large sections of the Twin Towers' façades, labeled for reassembly." Nobel, *Sixteen Acres: Architecture and the Outrageous Struggle for the Future of Ground Zero*, 251.

533 *World Trade Center Site Memorial Competition Guidelines*, Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, 2003, 11, http://www.wtcsitememorial.org/about_guidelines.html.

534 Arad and Walker, "Reflecting Absence," <http://www.wtcsitememorial.org/fin7.html>.

Judging by the architects' estimation and the jury statement for the memorial competition, "Reflecting Absence" realizes the guiding principles⁵³⁵ of the memorial mandate through an affect of depth that moves spectators to interiors that are both literal and metaphoric. "In our descent to the level below the street, down into the outlines left by the lost towers, we find that absence is made palpable."⁵³⁶ As with Peter Eisenman's Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, situating the World Trade Center memorial underground suggests a private movement toward depth, to an introspective realm of feeling, as opposed to the contemplative heights of thought and reason.⁵³⁷ "I didn't want to design a drive-by memorial," writes Arad. Rather, his intention was to interrupt the flow of daily life, by prompting visitors to go underground and initiate a subjective experience with absence and loss.⁵³⁸ Resisting visual appropriation, the WTC memorial demands time.⁵³⁹

Certainly, it will be a well trafficked site; not only will it serve as the final resting place of nearly three thousand people, whose families and friends will view it as sacred ground, a place for mourning and remembrance, it will also be an international place of pilgrimage, bringing in countless tourist-filled busses. In spite of the inevitable crowds that will emerge, "Reflecting

535 The following enumerates the guiding principles of the memorial, as prescribed by the *World Trade Center Site Memorial Competition Guideline*: "The memorial is to: embody the goals and spirit of the mission statement; convey the magnitude of personal and physical loss at this location; acknowledge all those who aided in rescue, recovery and healing; respect and enhance the sacred quality of the overall site and the space designated for the memorial; encourage reflection and contemplation; evoke the historical significance and worldwide impact of September 11, 2001; create an original and powerful statement of enduring and universal symbolism; inspire and engage people to learn more about the events and impact of September 11, 2001 and February 26, 1993; and evolve over time."

536 World Trade Center Memorial Competition, *WTC Memorial Jury Statement for Winning Design*, January 13, 2004, http://www.wtcsitememorial.org/about_jury_txt.html

537 The inner movement toward depth and subjective understanding is complicated at both memorials by the objectivist stance taken by their respective information/interpretive centers. As previously mentioned, both sites are pulled by the cognitive demand for knowledge, that is, by the need to inform and educate their visitors about the events being memorialized, lest they be left to interpret the significance of the events for themselves.

538 Cited in Goldberger, "Slings and Arrows."

539 "The sharpest and the least sentimental of the eight designs that got into the final segment of the competition," "Reflecting Absence," uses "sunken austerity to evoke emptiness and loss." Ibid.

Absence” provides a somber and plaintive space, inviting visitors to drift into the depths of memory so to affirm the fact of loss through an experience of materialized absence.⁵⁴⁰

3.1

What does this manufacturing of voids, this hollowing out of lived space for abstract space, reveal about the architectural pursuit of absence? What does it say about our present culture of commemoration? Like the other eight finalists for the memorial competition, Arad and Walker excluded the steel remains of the Twin Towers that were once the face of the World Trade Center complex. Their removal is a problem, as architecture critic Paul Goldberger points out, for “an eighty-foot-tall section of steel will never fit in an underground museum, and that large piece is the single most powerful, haunting object that remains from the Trade Center.”⁵⁴¹

Could it be that the immediate displacement of burned steel, broken glass, rubble and dust, that followed the events of September 11, betrays a pathological clearing of political responsibility, that is, a collective aversion to confronting the material effects of violence? How might the physical evacuation of destruction evince political withdrawal?⁵⁴² Clearing the signs of violence ostensibly distances the present from the violent act, yet it also removes from view

540 As a marker of authenticity, absence materializes the temporal disjunctions of physical destruction. Symbolizing loss through emptiness, absence gives presence to the past by evoking personal memories in the subjective realm of introspective reflection. Abstract and ineffable, absence speaks the language of silence. For example, the Field of Empty Chairs at the Oklahoma City National Memorial represents a “powerful and original symbol of loss, the presence of absence.” The chairs are arranged in nine rows, each row representing a floor of the former Murrah Federal Building, at what is now the footprint of the building. “Like an empty chair at a dinner table, we are always aware of the presence of a loved one’s absence.” The above citations are from Hans Butzer, designer of the Oklahoma City National Memorial (along with Torrey Butzer and Sven Berg). See Edward Linenthal, *The Unfinished Bombing: Oklahoma City in American Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 218-220.

541 Ibid. “The remnants of steel had always seemed like the ideal focus of a memorial since they are both startlingly graphic and utterly specific, but it seemed as if they were too painful and too much of this place alone.” Goldberger, *Up From Zero*, 226.

542 “Immediate discussion of a memorial allowed people to begin to construct narratives of redemption and to feel as if the horrid event itself was over – containable, already a memory.” Sturken, “The Aesthetics of Absence: Rebuilding Ground Zero,” 311-325.

that which the present is supposed to judge. Perhaps it is in the nature of traumatic events to fade into memory before they are fully experienced or measured as reality? If so, what are the possibilities of having the experiential intensity of such events, once sublimated into various forms of media, effect traces productive of the kind of remembrance that is essential to democratic practice – critical, reflective, heterogeneous?

Judging by the current design for the World Trade Center memorial, the dual rhythm of memory and forgetting, tampered by contemporary memorial conventions – minimal abstraction married to museal pedagogy – will have to be negotiated privately. Absent the organic decay of natural history,⁵⁴³ the experience of September 11 could very well recede without memory, effacing both the physical wounds and the emotional scars of its violence.

“Architecture,” writes architect and critic Mark Wigley, “is always driven by the need to bury trauma.” Architects “are devoted to the mythology of psychological closure.”⁵⁴⁴ Even those privileging absence and loss connote presence and redemption through the domestication of space. Furthermore, the representation of emptiness in built form prefigures the void with which it is filled. As “open and visible reminders of absence,” the voids left by the Towers’ footprints connect the present to the past, relating the space of historical authenticity to that of the sacred (which in modern times is one of worship and contemplation removed from the affairs of daily life).⁵⁴⁵ “We need to journey down,” exclaims Daniel Libeskind, “some 30 feet into the Ground Zero Memorial site, past the slurry wall, a procession with deliberation. The Memorial

543 “No quarter was given to the possibility of a ruin emerging. ... This destruction was to have no natural history, only that of the heritage industry.” Smith, *The Architecture of Aftermath*, 183.

544 Mark Wigley, “Insecurity by Design,” in *After the World Trade Center*, eds. Michael Sorkin and Sharon Zukin (New York: Routledge, 2002), 85.

545 World Trade Center Memorial Competition, *WTC Memorial Jury Statement for Winning Design*, January 13, 2004, http://www.wtcsitememorial.org/about_jury_txt.html

site remains protected from the dynamic activities of a revitalized new neighborhood.”⁵⁴⁶

Revitalized as a center for retail, capital, and commerce; protected, that is, secured from the transformative power of speech and action.

At once sacred and secular, “Reflecting Absence” imagines a reconciliation with the past that sanitizes history of critique while containing the excesses of mourning that might otherwise interfere with the triumphal narrative of progress envisioned by those whose interests in protecting the free flow of capital and a paternalistic political order trump those that are more civically engaged and democratically informed. To recall Benjamin, it is in the worn pockets of our everyday activities that memory must surface, not in prescribed moments of premeditated thought. Without the critical distance afforded by a spontaneous upwelling of memory, traces of the past lose their ability to affect, inspire, and awaken a depressed historical and political sensibility.

Not all proposals for the rebuilding of lower Manhattan and the memorial at the World Trade Center privilege an architecture of loss and absence. James Young’s vision for a ‘New World Trade Center’ aims at both remembrance and reconstruction, offering a place for memory and regeneration through the figure of life. Striking a Nietzschean chord, Young argues for “an integrative design, a complex that meshes memory with life, embeds memory in life, and balances our need for memory with the present needs of the living.”⁵⁴⁷ To realize this vision of remembering lives lived rather than those lost, communities must make themselves “responsible

546 Daniel Libeskind, “Memory Foundations: Statement from Daniel Libeskind for the World Trade Center Site Plan,” in *World Trade Center Site Memorial Competition Guidelines*, Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, 2003, 11, http://www.wtcsitememorial.org/about_guidelines.html.

547 “Our commemorations must not be allowed to disable life or to take its place; rather, they must inspire life, regenerate it, and provide for it.” James Young, “Remember Life with Life: The New World Trade Center,” in *Trauma at Home: After 9/11*, ed., Judith Greenberg (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 217.

for nurturing and sustaining” the memory of life – the faces, the names, the smells, and the sounds of those with whom we once shared our own lives. “We remind ourselves that, without the deliberate attempt to remember, memory itself is lost, that like life itself, memory needs to be cultivated and attended to.”⁵⁴⁸ Memorialization must be composed of a plurality of perspectives that converge on the lives of victims and survivors. If, following Young, “all memorial processes are exercises in disunity, even as they strive to unify memory,” then the WTC memorial needs to allow for “competing, even conflicting agendas.”⁵⁴⁹ As an unfinished process and a perpetually unfolding work, the memorial must accommodate a surplus of memory, the remainders of remembrance marked by the fragments of ruin. Choosing absence as a marker of the past rightly refuses the imposition of a master narrative, yet it problematically frames the representation of absence around a subjectivist understanding of the past. Circumscribing the memory of public events to private meanings strips them of political significance.

Young insists that “memory at ground zero is not zero-sum.” Still, he projects an unconditional notion of what it means to remember. To make a ruin out of the World Trade Center by either preserving pieces of the Towers’ façade or leaving untouched the voids created by their absence would be a mistake, “for by itself, such a remnant (no matter how aesthetically pleasing) would recall – and thereby reduce – all this rich life to the terrible moment of destruction.”⁵⁵⁰ For Young (and Libeskind), the stakes are clear: “defeat the culture of death with emblems of life,” “humanize the icons of our capitalist culture,” or have the attackers define the terms through which we remember.⁵⁵¹ “It is they, not we, who created this void in our

548 Ibid., 217.

549 Ibid., 220.

550 Ibid., 217.

551 Ibid., 221-222.

city and in our lives: to preserve it would be to extend the deed itself for perpetuity.” Young insists that an architecture of absence remains bound to an economy of violence. However, his affirmation of an us and them distinction (friend/enemy, insider/outsider, self/other) is misguided, insofar as it succumbs to the binary logic that motivated the attacks (west/east, modern/undeveloped, secular/fundamentalist).

New York based architects Elisabeth Diller and Ricardo Scofidio imagine an alternate future for the World Trade Center. Theirs is also an architecture of absence, but unlike that of Arad and Walker, or Libeskind for that matter, it does not build on the ground of destruction, but rather maintains the space left in the wake of violence empty and unkempt.

The words used by Diller and Scofidio to describe their vision are few, but striking: “What’s most poignant now [one year after September 11] is that the identity of the skyline has been lost. We would say, Let’s not build something that would mend the skyline, it is more powerful to leave it void. We believe it would be tragic to erase the erasure.”⁵⁵² Diller and Scofidio’s intuition on how to go about rebuilding the World Trade Center, or rather, keeping it unbuilt, is that there is something to be learned from the violence, and this something communicates itself silently through the literal effacement of the Towers, their vanishing from public view. In the words of architecture critic Ada Louise Huxtable, “ruins are the repositories of memory; construction erases them.”⁵⁵³

Salman Rushdie echoes this sentiment. There is a palpable force, Rushdie explains, left by the Towers' absence from the urban landscape. “The eye seeks them out where once it found

552 “To Rebuild or Not,” *New York Times Magazine*, September 23, 2001, 81.

553 Ada Louise Huxtable, “‘The New York Process’ – Don’t Expect Anything Uplifting From the Poles and Realtors Now Pondering the WTC Site” *Wall Street Journal*, September 17, 2001, A.20

them, and can't believe what it doesn't see. The absence has become a presence.”⁵⁵⁴ For Rushdie, and Diller and Scofidio as well, the most appropriate architectural response to the events of September 11 is the preservation of absence. This may be fitting for those who knew the Towers as they once stood, but what about future generations whose knowledge of the site has no relation to experience?

Preservationists of absence fail to take this question into account. From their perspective, our relationship to the memory of the site and of the lives lost should be like that of a wound that never heals. To recall Nietzsche, “pain is the most powerful aid to mnemonics.”

Memorialization is a practice of making this pain stick, of keeping the feeling of loss near. “If something is to stay in the memory it must be burned in: only that which never ceases to *hurt* stays in the memory.”⁵⁵⁵ But what if, following Nietzsche, there is too much memory? What if, having survived a collective trauma, the public is overwrought by the pains of memory to the point of inaction and political disaffection? Might the human capacity to act meaningfully lie in its ability to forget without denying the past? If so, how should a community balance the need for memory with the desire to forget?

Nietzsche proposes active forgetting, an intentional act of letting go that affirms the past without binding it to the present. Such forgetting, what he describes as the capacity to feel unhistorically, is, on his account, a source of happiness. “To close the doors and windows of consciousness for a time,” Nietzsche claims, “that is the purpose of active forgetfulness, which is like a doorkeeper, a preserver of psychic order, repose, and etiquette: so that it will be

⁵⁵⁴ Rushdie, “Reach for the Sky.”

⁵⁵⁵ The relays constructed between absence and wound, feeling and memory, exemplify the subjectivist concern with privacy, which depoliticizes memory for the sake of preserving singularity. Friedrich Nietzsche, “On the Genealogy of Morals,” in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, trans., Walter Kaufmann (New York: The Modern Library, 1968), 497.

immediately obvious how there could be no happiness, no cheerfulness, no hope, no pride, no *present*, without forgetfulness.”⁵⁵⁶ Holding onto the past not only interferes with happiness, by constantly unsettling emotions and interrupting goal-directed thought processes, it also impedes action, understood in the Arendtian sense as an act of beginning. To begin means to initiate a break with the past, to dissociate one’s action from those preceding it. Active forgetting breaks with the past by remembering things selectively (and constantly revising what is being remembered), that is, by distinguishing that which is productive for life from that which inhibits it, thereby enabling individuals to act with and against, inside and outside, their particular pasts.⁵⁵⁷

Exhuming history’s living spirit, Nietzsche’s unhistorical sensibility speaks to a politically enabling practice of memorialization. Like Benjamin’s notion of remembrance, Nietzsche’s active forgetting refigures history as that which returns possibility to the past in a mindful (active and passive, giving and receiving) present. For both thinkers, meaningful action is the result of adapting to and learning from experience.

Life, which for Nietzsche refers to the renewal of creative possibilities, requires the service of history. But an excess of history is also harmful to life. To think, feel, and act unhistorically is to open oneself to experiences that are not bound to a horizon of meaning. Memorial architecture facilitates these experiences by charging its space with both a historical (commemorative) and an unhistorical (critical) sensibility. In other words, building active

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid., 493-494.

⁵⁵⁷ Active forgetting is less a type of forgetting than a suspension of memory, to paraphrase political theorist Philip Brendese. “Suspended memories are not erased memories. They represent once-dominant modes of remembering that are displaced by active forgetting. These practices surrender the grounding and authority that allowed them to function as the default templates framing how the past is narrated.” Memories suspension, thus understood, shifts dominant modes of evaluating, recording, and interpreting the past. “Suspending remembrance pluralizes modes of remembering in a formative step toward intervening in their practices.” See Brendese, Philip J. “The Politics of the Impossible: Memory and Democratic Practice” (PhD diss., Duke University, 2005), 62-63.

forgetting into sites of memorial balances the need for memory with the desire to forget by affirming, without denying, the facticity of the past.

4. Fractured Space: Jewish Museum Berlin

Mark Wigley cautions against the inevitable commodification and sublimation of September 11 at the World Trade Center. “The question of how to replace nine million square feet of office space is irrelevant. If anything, the issue is how to replace the more than two million square feet of façade – those vast, uncannily duplicated screens.”⁵⁵⁸ With Ada Louise Huxtable, who finds “nothing compelling about replacing [the Twin Towers] for their architectural distinction,” Wigley locates the symbolic import of the buildings not in their design, but in their ability to function as virtual reflections of late modern capitalist culture.⁵⁵⁹ Lacking the dimension of depth found in a skyline as distinctive as New York, the Towers were pure façade, “a filing cabinet in which anything could be placed.”⁵⁶⁰

It comes as no surprise that even in their absence the Towers inhabit a spectacular realm, providing a universal image of late-capitalist liberal moralism. “When architecture rises again,” Wigley concludes, “it will likely rebury what was exposed. Another defensive screen will be placed between us and our fears,” keeping the reality of the events at safe distance. “We will act as if memory itself has not been thoroughly industrialized, that a certain kind of light gift-wrapped remembering is big business today because it dissimulates the ongoing heavy

558 Wigley, “Insecurity by Design,” 82-84.

559 Huxtable, “‘The New York Process’ – Don’t Expect Anything Uplifting From the Poles and Realtors Now Pondering the WTC Site.”

560 Wigley, “Insecurity by Design,” 82-84. Bland and featureless, to the eyes of architecture theorist Terry Smith, the Towers were “so basic in shape that they could be any other equally basic shape, so generic in form that they could occur within them, they could serve any function, all functions being equally abstracted, removed from the life-flows around them.” See Smith, *The Architecture of Aftermath*, 139.

forgetting.”⁵⁶¹ As evinced by various strategies of memorializing September 11, institutional mechanisms attempting to inhibit forgetting also impede remembrance, feigning lived experience while imposing an authoritative meaning on how memory is understood. Contemporary memorial architecture must approach this commodified culture of commemoration with reserve, providing alternatives to the entertainment and tourist driven architecture that has become increasingly popular over the last half century.

Perhaps the commodifying effects of our current culture of commemoration can be offset by way of geographical displacement? What if we build away from the symbolically invested site of lower Manhattan, the epicenter of the attacks commonly referred to as Ground Zero?

With this view in mind, the winning design for the Flight 93 National Memorial in Somerset County, Pennsylvania offers a sober and subdued space commemorating the passengers and crew of United Airlines Flight 93. Set at the crash site, the Memorial designed by Paul Murdoch Architects is comprised of a semi-circular field cut into the wooded landscape of the Pennsylvania laurel highlands. The Bowl, or Field of Honor, is framed by forty groves of forty red and sugar maple trees, which are intended to represent the forty passengers and crewmembers who died at the site on the morning of September 11. The open space preserved by the Memorial, an authentic trace of the day’s events, descends to Sacred Ground, a field of

561 Wigley, “Insecurity by Design,” 82-84. Wigley’s reproach parallels that of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, who similarly mark the enervating effects of entertainment on memory. To be entertained, they conclude, “the spectator must need no thoughts of his own: the product prescribes each reaction, not through any actual coherence – which collapses once exposed to thought – but through signals.” “Amusement always means putting things out of mind, forgetting suffering, even when it is on display. At its root is powerlessness. It is indeed escape, but not, as it claims, from bad reality but from the last thought of resisting reality.” Intent on entertaining their viewers, rather than provoking a critically reflective experience, many memorial museums have a parasitic effect on the awareness they attempt to inspire. See Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944), ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), xvii.

wildflowers symbolizing loss through an affect of absence, and renewal through the imagery of seasonal rebirth.

Located at the northwest edge of the Bowl, the Memorial's entrance opens from a clearing of trees on a black slate plaza marking the axis of the flight path. Here, visitors find a band of forty names inscribed into polished white marble. Once inside the Memorial, the sound of forty wind chimes, a living memorial to the dead, become increasingly audible. To complement this affective experience with the past, an interpretive center orients visitors with information about the flight, its passengers and crew.

Though it stands on the periphery of Washington D.C.'s monumental memorials and New York's iconic skyline, the Flight 93 National Memorial still conforms to subjectivist norms of commemoration. An authentic site, a privileged place, marks the sacred ground to which the living must descend and pay tribute (we find the same element of depth in the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and "Reflecting Absence" at the World Trade Center). An aesthetic of absence, a void of one form or another, is offset by an interpretive center, marrying the affective to the cognitive as feelings of loss are mediated by an unwavering faith in knowledge. The memorial reminds us that the passengers and flight crew died for freedom, sacrificing themselves to prevent an attack on the nation's capital. A list of names, a chronological account, so that we never forget. In effect, the Flight 93 National Memorial domesticates memory, projecting a universal narrative of triumph over catastrophe, of life affirmed in the face of death.

Similarly, the architecture of Daniel Libeskind follows the dominant tendency within contemporary architectural theory and practice to refer to the built environment as open and democratic, organic and alive. "Buildings are flesh," Libeskind claims. "They are

transformations of inert materials – stone, concrete, glass – into something living. And in that sense, they speak a language, both communicative and silent.”⁵⁶²

To be sure, buildings are in dialogue with other buildings, structures, forms of media, modes of transportation, and people. But what a building says can be so loud that it drowns out these other voices. Libeskind is aware of this. Through one of his countless metaphors to describe the discipline, he claims, “architecture can be like an instrument, but like all instruments it needs to be played and heard by the people.”⁵⁶³ What a building says, how it resonates, and the quality of its sound, depends on how it is received by others, on the movement, participation, and interactions of those who inhabit its space. Reflexivity, as such, is a fundamental feature of architecture. With its inherent ability to give and receive form, architecture is entrusted with a progressive role in today’s culture of commemoration.

Against the ‘neutralized container experience’ of memorial architecture (i.e. objectivist), Libeskind proposes a dynamic, fluid, and individual experience of memory (i.e. subjectivist). Commemorative spaces, he argues, must “not suggest what you should remember, nor how your memory of that event should be shaped, nor what feelings should be attached to your recollection.”⁵⁶⁴ This is right. But how can a public space be built without compromising the integrity of individual judgments? Events have no political shape or social significance outside of such judgments, only that which is given by how they are measured in particular times and particular places. Meanings shift through a kaleidoscope of hues, varying with each and every perspective.

562 “Space is not just a universal continuum projected by an abstract mind, but is actually something more like a person, a physiognomy, a soul, a spiritual entity given in a particular locale.” Daniel Libeskind, Leon Wieseltier, Sherwin Nulan, *Monument and Memory*, (New York: The Columbia Seminar on Art and Society, 2002), 11.

563 Daniel Libeskind, *Monument and Memory*, 24.

564 Richard Brilliant, *Monument and Memory*, 8.

Epitomizing the subjectivist risk of missing the public life of memory, Libeskind fails to take these perspectives into account. Rather than give space to the production of meaning, his projects converge on a singular view of what it means to remember. Libeskind's Jewish Museum Berlin (the Museum hereafter) is a prime example of the 'thoroughly industrialized,' 'light gift-wrapped remembering' that Wigley identifies as 'big business today.' The Museum is profoundly symptomatic of the failure of subjectivist modes of memorialization to develop a form of objectivity that is at once critical, perspectival, and public.

Though Libeskind explicitly rejects imposing meaning through space, form, and order, his work ultimately betrays the mode of memorialization he refuses. The Museum gets entangled by the cognitivist demand for fixed points of meaning and objectivist norms of reception calling for symbolic representation, thereby diminishing the intersubjective horizon of meaning and understanding essential to democratic political life. Converging around a totalizing image of the past not only leaves little room for future possibilities of remembrance, it displays a certain anxiety in leaving sites of remembrance without objective referents of meaning. Libeskind's design, which is representative of the subjectivist turn in memorial architecture, fails to constitute political objectivity. Its inability to awaken lived experience challenges future sites of remembrance to build an evolving memorial landscape that retains a strong sense of history and purpose without determining the paths of memory.

4.1

According to Libeskind, the latent 'universal hope' offered by the Jewish Museum Berlin is not at odds with, following Benjamin and Adorno, the barbarism of history. This view is supported by architecture theorist Alberto Pérez-Gómez, who argues that the Museum

successfully represents “the inconceivable destruction of Jews in Europe during the Second World War,” while also providing “an experience of hope and possibility for all, transcending ethnic specificity and resentment.” Though Libeskind’s design rejects the expectations of inhabited space and dwelling, the Museum is “profoundly spiritual in the rewards it offers those who see *through* the anger and brutality of its fragmentation.”⁵⁶⁵ Yet because of its symbolic logic and its predication of experience, Libeskind's Jewish Museum Berlin amounts to an overdetermined work that denies such perspective.

Accepting the task of representing what has been uncritically accepted both within and outside of the academy as unrepresentable, “Libeskind sets out to create a post-Auschwitz architecture, and to do so poetically.” If he succeeds, argues Terry Smith, “if his solution fails in a negatively dialectical way,” if it enables “the world to be present to itself in perhaps the most extreme forms of impossibility – the Jewish Museum would not only be a solution to the problem of making architecture after Auschwitz, it would inspire an Aftermath kind of art.”⁵⁶⁶ This is a big if. Following Adorno, but not for the sake of claiming the Museum’s successful appropriation of negative dialectics, I argue that the Jewish Museum Berlin contributes to the objectification of culture through a reification of architectural tropes. The category *aftermath art* – what Smith describes as an art of hope that refuses liberal sympathizing – may prove useful when thinking about the ethical implications and political possibilities of architecture. However, it is without place in Libeskind’s theoretical and material responses to the human catastrophes of the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries.

565 Alberto Pérez-Gómez, *Built Upon Love: Architectural Longing after Ethics and Aesthetics* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 106.

566 Terry Smith, “Daniel Among the Philosophers: The Jewish Museum, Berlin, and Architecture after Auschwitz,” *Architectural Theory Review* 10, no. 1 2005, 110.

Libeskind's extension of the Berlin Museum, from the former Baroque courthouse [*das Kollegienhaus*] to a new building dedicated to the social, political, and religious history of Germany's Jewish community, was conceived as an attempt to reform the broken relation between German and Jewish culture. Renamed by Libeskind "Between the Lines," the extension gives architectural expression to these interconnected histories. Built south of the city center in Berlin's Kreuzberg district, the design offers "a new understanding of museums, and a new sense of the relationship between program and architectural space."⁵⁶⁷ Rather than provide a neutral container from which to view a picture-book history, the Museum generates a participatory experience through a fragmentary and continuous historical narrative. As Libeskind explains, the project is about "two lines of thinking and organization, and about relationship. One is a straight line, but broken into many fragments; the other is a tortuous line but continuing indefinitely."⁵⁶⁸ Together, these two lines converge on a historical sensibility that acknowledges the cultural contribution of Germany's Jewish residents, while also recognizing the reality of their destruction. And it attempts to do so without collapsing the present into the past.

Libeskind insists: "one cannot turn the entire nation of Germany into a monument of memory. One cannot dispense with the entire future of a nation." What is particularly striking about this claim is Libeskind's paternalism. On his account, the Jewish Museum Berlin is not a museum, monument, or memorial to the annihilation of Jewish life and culture during the Second World War. "If the Museum was not to become stuck in an eternal return to this moment, it had

567 Daniel Libeskind, "Between the Lines," <http://www.daniel-libeskind.com/projects/show-all/jewish-museum-berlin>.

568 Ibid. "I wanted to engage visitors in this history, to impress upon them its uniqueness--not as something abstract and theoretical, or kept under glass, but as something living and enduring, part of the heart and soul. And that's what it has become. The decision of the city to publicly fund and build the museum was in itself a profound expression of faith in this vision, and its importance, not least because it coincided with the fall of the Wall and subsequent unification. This was not the easiest time to undertake a major cultural project."

to avoid being a Holocaust museum *per se*. Thus the necessity of building open-endedness, a state of permanent incompleteness, of always becoming.”⁵⁶⁹

While disavowing claims of being a Holocaust museum, functionally and legibly, the Jewish Museum Berlin is saturated with the *gestalt* of the Shoah. As will be shown below, the theoretical principles guiding its construction, and the geometric configurations it deploys, make repeated and explicit references to the Shoah. The arc traced by its space attempts to move beyond death and destruction in the hope of architecturally realizing a spirit of rebirth and redemption. Yet the Museum never achieves a critical distance from the history of the Shoah. To take but one example: the 1,005 irregularly shaped windows, narrow slits cut into the reinforced concrete and zinc façade, are meant to symbolize the density and diversity of Berlin’s Jewish population prior to the mass deportations of 1941 – 1943.⁵⁷⁰

Perhaps this ambivalent relationship to the Shoah results in what historian Ewa Domanska calls a ‘monumental counter-history,’ a marginalized, suppressed, and untold historical narrative. Told from the perspective of the victims, a monumental counter-history reveals the received past (text-book history) to be a strategically manipulated and distorted triumphalist record. A counter history “requires different terms of inquiry, hence frequent use of such terms as emptiness, silence, absence, invisibility, inexpressibility, repression, or trauma.”⁵⁷¹

It is important to note that each of these terms recur throughout Libeskind’s account of his work.

569 Smith, “Daniel Among the Philosophers: The Jewish Museum, Berlin, and Architecture after Auschwitz,” 110.

570 As Ewa Domanska recognizes, the windows evoke a “kind of address book of absent Berliners,” while also resembling a tattoo on the body of the building, suggesting the “irremovable memory of murdered Jews.” See Ewa Domanska, “‘Let the Dead Bury the Living’: Daniel Libeskind’s Monumental Counter-History,” in *History of Historiography Reconsidered*, eds. Edward Wang and Franz Fillafer (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), 439.

571 Domanska, “‘Let the Dead Bury the Living’: Daniel Libeskind’s Monumental Counter-History,” 447. Today, local counter-histories, based largely on identity politics, compete with positivist historiographies. However, these are equally problematic, insofar as they monumentalize an official textbook history representing a particular group interest. As Arendt makes clear, the political import of memory does not lie in the particular interests of a group, class, or identity, but in its affects on human plurality.

“This is not a Kaiser’s collection,” he claims, “but rather a museum which presents the collections of ordinary citizens.”⁵⁷² True enough. However, determining the significance of every architectural feature and technique used in the construction of the Museum leaves little room for visitors to reach their own conclusions, through reflective acts of judgment, about the meaning and legacy of Jewish life in Berlin.

The two lines of thinking and organization animating Libeskind’s design are materialized by the Museum in the form of three axes, each of which leads visitors to various encounters with spatial voids. The intersecting axes are meant to symbolize the connection between ‘the three realities of Jewish life’ – Holocaust, exile, continuity. Libeskind describes the passageways as follows: “Underground, one road goes to the dead end – The Holocaust Tower; one road leads to exile, the emigrants to America, the displaced – The Garden of Exile; and one road leads to the Staircase of Continuity back into the museum.”⁵⁷³ The symbolically laden names designating the Museum’s three entrances (two of which are false), do more than merely suggest a thought or evoke a feeling; rather, they determine the emotive register of the space as a whole. A brief reading of one of the axes is particularly illustrative of Libeskind’s overdetermination of space.

The Axis of Emigration leads to the Garden of Exile – forty-nine columns, each standing six meters tall, arranged in a narrow grid of seven rows and seven columns, forty-eight of which

572 Walking through the exhibition halls of the Jewish Museum Berlin one does get the sense that stories from the daily life of German-Jews are being told through their artistic achievements and commonplace objects. However, as Adorno is quick to point out, “attention to the great achievements of Jews in the past, however true they may be, are hardly of use and smack of propaganda. . . . Those who resist totalitarians should not imitate them in a way that would only do themselves a disservice. Panegyrics to the Jews that isolate them as a group already give anti-Semitism a running start.” To provoke empathy with the victims, in this case the murdered Jews of Europe, assumes that anti-Semitism can “be countered through concrete experiences with Jews,” that its source lies with the Jews. On Adorno’s account, unresponsiveness – a failure of acknowledgment – is an integral feature of anti-Semitism, not misunderstandings to be explained away with facts or knowledge. Daniel Libeskind, H el ene Binet, *The Jewish Museum Berlin* (Rucksaldruck, Germany: G + B Arts International, 1999), 31. See Theodor Adorno, “The Meaning of Working through the Past,” (1960) in *Can One Live after Auschwitz?*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 16.

573 Libeskind, *Monument and Memory*, 29.

symbolize the year of Israel's founding (1948), with the lone remaining column standing for Berlin. The Garden's purpose is to disorient the sense perception of its visitors: the dense field blocks any line of sight to the horizon, while the columns, set at a forty-nine degree incline, disturb one's sense of balance. An informational plaque hangs near the Exile Garden's entrance:

Here, architect Daniel Libeskind asks us to think about the disorientation that exile brings. The 49 columns are filled with earth in which willow oak grows. Forty-eight of the columns contain earth of Berlin and stand for 1948 and the formation of the state of Israel. The central and forty-ninth pillar is filled with earth from Jerusalem and stands for Berlin itself.

Following philosopher John Rosenthal, "the convoluted symbolism of Libeskind's 'Garden of Exile' ... seems to suggest finally that the Nazi persecution of the Jews served some sort of higher redemptive purpose, since without it, after all, Israel might never have been created."⁵⁷⁴

In a more forgiving, yet also critical reading of the Libeskind's design, theorist Andreas Huyssen claims that the Museum's architecture forecloses the view "that sees the Holocaust as the inevitable telos of German history." For Huyssen, "Jewish life in Germany has been fundamentally altered by the Holocaust, but it has not stopped."⁵⁷⁵ Hence the need for a space that materializes both rupture and repair.

Connecting the Jewish Museum Berlin to the former Berlin Museum of the *Kollegienhaus*,⁵⁷⁶ which today offers the only entrance to the Jewish Museum, Libeskind's Axis of Continuity joins old and new, linking past and present. "The existing building is tied to the

574 John Rosenthal, "The Future of Ground Zero," *Policy Review* (June/July 2004), <http://www.hoover.org/publications/policyreview/3437796.html>.

575 Andreas Huyssen, "The Voids of Berlin" in *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 69.

576 In September 2007, a Glass Courtyard designed by Studio Daniel Libeskind was added to the rear of architect Johann Philip Gerlach's 1734-1735 Baroque courthouse. Stylistically linking the *Kollegienhaus* to the Jewish Museum Berlin, the Glass Courtyard offers a light filled space, complementing the dimension of depth and interiority of the Museum with openness, clarity, and transparency. The courtyard (in likeness to a *sukkah*) is comprised of four white, asymmetrical, load-bearing, steel columns which support the structure. Extending to the glass roof, the tree-like columns mirror the natural landscape of the Museum garden.

extension underground, preserving the contradictory autonomy of both the old building and the new building on the surface, while binding the two together in depth of time and space.”⁵⁷⁷ The Museum’s underground passageway, a black shale staircase which cannot be seen from outside, gestures to the ‘topography of an invisible city.’ As visitors begin their descent down into the underground axes, the Museum initiates the architectural narrative of voided space enacted by Libeskind’s design.

Against convention, the Museum disrupts the narrative flow of historical chronology. Not only does its collection not follow a chronological order, the space in which it is displayed breaks one’s perceptual orientation. For Libeskind, “there is no bridge to be seen between what happened in Berlin’s past and what is happening today. No bridge can get you there, only the underground ten meters down through the entrance void of the Baroque building.”⁵⁷⁸ Functionally, the Axis of Continuity leads to the exhibition floors; symbolically, it continues the history of Jewish culture in Berlin. On both registers, the entrance corridor impresses a dimension of depth and interiority, effecting the kind of continuity that might enable a reflective, albeit private, experience with the past. With Arad and Walker’s “Reflecting Absence,” and Eisenman’s Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, the Jewish Museum grounds itself in the silent and introspective realm of subjectivity. As such, it is far less adept than the other two in providing a public place for memory. Not only does it fail politically on account of its aesthetic of absence, imparting a subjective experience with the past through voided space, it reverts to an objectivist notion of memory by imposing meaning on the space it intends for individual reflection.

⁵⁷⁷ Libeskind, “Between the Lines.”

⁵⁷⁸ Libeskind, *Monument and Memory*, 29.

4.2

This may seem like a strange conclusion to draw from a work premised on an affect of openness and indeterminacy. “History cannot be selective or formalistic,” argues Libeskind. “Rather, it is directed towards experience.”⁵⁷⁹ At first glance, the Museum invites participation, promoting an unconditioned response. Calling on its visitors to experience a space that represents the empty silence left by the air of a culture whose ability to think was choked from life, the Museum attempts to inspire hope by leaving the work of memory undetermined, by keeping one’s relation to the Shoah unresolved.

To fulfill this objective, the Museum architecturally represents German-Jewish history through the image of fractured continuity and an affect of absence. Visitors are asked to interpret the history of Jewish life in Germany through a series of spatial voids, dispersed throughout the Museum, intended to materialize absence.

If emptiness betrays its own kind of fullness, then in order to recognize absence, other spaces must be seen as full. For example, the silence of the Museum’s voided spaces does not, as Libeskind intends, relay a heterogeneous and vulnerable memory, but one that is univocal and unambiguous. Drawing on the writing of Jacques Derrida, Ewa Domanska argues that works claiming a neutral or objective position (such as those dealing with limit cases), are not only communicative, they can become the source of an authoritative discourse. “The greatest logocentric power,” writes Derrida, “resides in a work’s silence.”⁵⁸⁰

579 Alois Martin Müller, *Radix-Matrix: Works and Writings of Daniel Libeskind* (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 1997), 160.

580 Jacques Derrida, “The Spatial Arts: An Interview with Jacques Derrida,” in *Deconstruction and the Visual Arts: Art, Media, Architecture*, eds. Peter Brunette and David Wills (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 13.

It is no surprise that silence and absence are the twin pillars of the Jewish Museum. It “is a museum that has nothing to show, in which everything has already been shown.” All that can be done now is “integrate the German and Jewish histories of Berlin.”⁵⁸¹ To bring these torn histories into dialogue, Libeskind breathes an air of silence into the Museum through the figure of the void.

I invented a structure that has never before been inserted into a building, a museum space that is within the building, but is not a museum. It is a space that remains cold, that is immunized from all the activities of society, ... and will always be aligned to the topography that runs throughout the eternal void of the city.⁵⁸²

By materializing the void, the Museum attempts to “perform the impossible task of making the boundary of that which can be portrayed function as a healing boundary.”⁵⁸³ The challenge is to give form to an empty space, to build absence without limiting its reception.

“Cutting through the form of the Jewish Museum is a Void, a straight line whose impenetrability forms the central focus around which the exhibitions are organized. In order to cross from one museum-space to the other, the visitors traverse sixty bridges opening into the Void-space: the embodiment of absence.”⁵⁸⁴ Materializing loss, symbolizing emptiness, evoking silence, Libeskind’s void is the Museum’s center of gravity. Rather than show, it acts, and by acting, it calls on others to perform the labor of memory in its place. Architecture theorist Anthony Vidler, for whom Libeskind’s works are understood as counterspatial, reads the mutual performativity enacted by the Museum as a radical departure from the “normalizing tendencies

581 Libeskind and Derrida, “Discussion” from *Radix-Matrix*, 113.

582 Libeskind, *Monument and Memory*, 28.

583 Kurt Forster, “Mildew Green is the House of Forgetting,” in *Radix-Matrix*, 7.

584 Libeskind, “Between the Lines.”

of modernist, universal, hygienic space.” The Museum “is almost literally built out of space.”⁵⁸⁵

In practical terms, Libeskind’s void is the only aspect of the Museum that “has not been technically designed.” “Constituted by the intersection of everything that is known and appears in the central arena of the building,” the void maintains its symbolic integrity as an architectural embodiment of absence by remaining inaccessible, ineluctable, and invisible. “What one has to do as an architect,” Libeskind concludes, “is to prevent the void from filling up.”⁵⁸⁶

In an exchange with Libeskind on the relationship of architecture and absence, Jacques Derrida questions the ontological status of the void. Specifically, he asks if the materialization of Libeskind’s fractured design does not detract from the multiple and heterogeneous character of the non-place that is *chôra*. “A place that is neither divine nor human, neither intelligible nor sensible, a place that precedes history and the inscription of Forms,” *chôra*, challenging “every dialectic between what is and what is not, between what is sensible and what is becoming,” is for Derrida, precisely not a void.⁵⁸⁷ Informed by Plato’s account of *chôra* in the *Timaeus*, Derrida reads Libeskind’s void as being full of history, meaning, and experience. Once the Museum’s voids are figured, they are no longer capable of being defined as purely receptive and generative. As “the indecision of place,”⁵⁸⁸ Libeskind’s voids would be “anything but a support or a subject which would *give* place by receiving or by conceiving.”⁵⁸⁹ On Derrida’s account, with which this argument is in agreement, architecture is incapable of giving place to *chôra*.⁵⁹⁰

585 Anthony Vidler, *Warped Space: Art, Architecture, and Anxiety in Modern Culture* (Cambridge: MIT University Press, 2001), 237-238.

586 Libeskind, “Response to Daniel Libeskind: Discussion,” in *Radix-Matrix*, 115.

587 Derrida, “Response to Daniel Libeskind,” in *Radix-Matrix*, 111.

588 Samuel Weber, “The Parallax View,” *Assemblage* 20, (April 1993): 88-89.

589 Jacques Derrida, “Khora,” in *On the Name* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 95.

590 For Derrida, *chôra* is the name for place and spacing that is without history. “Chôra remains absolutely impassible and heterogeneous to all the processes of historical revelation or of anthropo-theological experience, which at the very least suppose its abstraction. It will never have entered religion and will never permit itself to be

Space cannot exist without that which fills it, without conforming to the needs of inhabiting and adapting to the demands of dwelling, that is, without fitting subjects and objects into a physical world. Historically determined, theoretically circumscribed, and architecturally materialized, the voids of the Jewish Museum are “determinedly sealed space[s] which nobody can experience or enter into.”⁵⁹¹

Libeskind emphatically resists this reading, claiming that the Museum “impresses upon the participants the notion that you cannot avoid the apocalypse, impresses upon them the impossibility of saying ‘I’ve already been there, I’ve already seen it.’” In his view, it is a confrontational work, challenging the limits of experience through architecture. “There is no space in the building to get away to, no chance for a synoptic or panoptic view.”⁵⁹² The building, and the thoughts and images it occasions, evade the totalizing gaze of a sovereign (autonomous) subject.

Unlike traditional memorial monuments and museums, the Jewish Museum Berlin disrupts the linear flow of space, both literally and metaphorically. Architecture theorist Hilde Heynen explains: “The Holocaust is a black hole in history, a hole that swallows up all rhetoric of progress, but which is invisible to the naked eye. This invisibility is transformed here into an experience that is incomprehensible and yet ineluctable.”⁵⁹³ Supporting this reading, Andreas Huyssen argues that Libeskind’s design articulates architecture’s relation to memory as an

sacralized, sanctified, humanized, theologized, cultivated, historicized.” “Khôra would make or give *place*; it would give rise – without ever *giving* anything – to what is called the coming of the event. Khôra receives rather than gives. ... Even if it comes before ‘everything,’ it does not exist for itself.” See Jacques Derrida’s, “Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of ‘Religion’ and the Limits of Reason Alone,” in *Religion*, ed. Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 58, and *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), xiv.

591 Derrida, “Response to Daniel Libeskind: Discussion” in *Radix-Matrix*, 115.

592 Libeskind and Derrida, “Discussion” from *Radix-Matrix*, 113. By breaking up the horizon, the Museum’s slanting windows deny visitors a stable point of reference.

593 Hilde Heynen, *Architecture and Modernity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), 207.

“epistemological negativity [that] cannot be absorbed into the narratives that will be told by the objects and installations in the showrooms and the museum.”⁵⁹⁴ So long as a plurality of meanings resound, the Museum avoids monumentalizing the Shoah.⁵⁹⁵

For these two critics, the Museum fulfills the task of preserving an indeterminate space for individual judgment and the production of meaning. According to Heynen, by no means can one’s experience of the Museum be called unambiguous. “The effect of the light, the abundance of different forms of space, the physical impression created by the sloping floor, and the zigzag trajectory of the building are not subject to a single interpretation.”⁵⁹⁶ These techniques, which collapse and reform space, ostensibly open the Museum to a multiplicity of perspectives. By challenging each viewer to bridge the void through individual acts of remembrance, the absence affect mitigates any eclipse of memory brought on by a nostalgic and sentimental forgetting. The Axis of the Holocaust, for example, denies the narrative function of traditional memorial architecture. Leading visitors to the Holocaust Tower – a tall, dark, and empty twenty-four meter concrete room – the axis provokes a tactile awareness of perceptual disorder and isolation. The only light capable of penetrating the inside of the unheated and uninsulated tower filters through a micro slit set high in its corner. Street noise is audible, but muted. Cold concrete gives the vacuous space a sense of purpose – to not only embody absence, but to allow it to be sensed without sight. The unfinished appearance of the tower’s interior opposes functional and

594 Andreas Huyssen, “The Voids of Berlin” in *Present Pasts*, 69. This view is also supported by architecture theorists Kay Edge and Frank Weiner, for whom the Museum’s voids “refer to the muteness of the historical artifact [sic] and the architectural object, pointing instead to the architectural element of space or absence of material as the only answer to such an event as the Holocaust.” See Kay Edge and Frank Weiner, “Collective Memory and the Museum,” in *Images, Representations and Heritage*, ed., Ian Russell (New York: Springer, 2006), 240.

595 “A work has to be left beyond your life, left exposed to manipulation and reinterpretation. That is why you build. The fragility itself is part of the possibility of the work.” Derrida, “Response to Daniel Libeskind: Discussion” in *Radix-Matrix*, 118-119.

596 Heynen, *Architecture and Modernity*, 208.

formalist imperatives, leaving the space of memory denaturalized. To Libeskind's credit, the jagged and jutting structures that juxtapose the Museum's voided spaces renounce the conciliatory and integrative functions of traditional commemorative works.

“Possibly, despite its goal to protect the memory of the dead, the building participates in the destruction of the past; owing to its persuasive symbolism, it tears the incomprehensible out of the context of non-representable trauma and tames death, absence, and even the uncanny by domesticating them.”⁵⁹⁷ Ewa Domanska's critical assessment of Libeskind's design figures the Museum as a place where the dead bury the living, a diagnosis akin to that of Nietzsche's monumental history.⁵⁹⁸ Though Libeskind and his proponents defend the Museum as a critical work contesting the dominant discourses of modernist architecture, historicism, and conventional modes of representation and reception, it remains a heavy-handed, powerfully didactic, symbolic work that superficially subverts norms and conventions only to result in a post-modern monumentalism. In the end, Libeskind's Jewish Museum Berlin forsakes the ‘who’ of meaning for the ‘what’ of knowledge.

4.3

Against a steady stream of praise for Libeskind's architectural pursuits of living memory, architecture theorists Brian Hanson and Nikos Salingaros offer a critical evaluation of the Jewish

597 Domanska, “‘Let the Dead Bury the Living’: Daniel Libeskind's Monumental Counter-History,” 450.

598 Nietzsche characterizes monumental history in his *Untimely Meditations* [*Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen*] as a historical record composed of “human mountain peaks,” where uniformly great deeds are linked in an unending chain of human development and progress. Deceiving by analogies, “making what is dissimilar look similar,” monumental history does harm not only to the past, of which entire segments are forgotten, it weakens the present, burying the living with the dead. See Friedrich Nietzsche, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life” (1874), *Untimely Meditations*, ed., Daniel Breazeale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 68-72. For Domanska, “Libeskind's building reveals, beneath a very suggestive, unconventional representation, the features typical of monumental history: essentiality (the trauma of the Jewish people is essentialized); universality (the building is intended to express Jewish history in general); the presence of a telos (the Holocaust as the doom of Western history and the return to the “lost land” as a solution); a certain linearity broken by the kairos, a catastrophic event which breaks up history (the Holocaust).” See Domanska, “‘Let the Dead Bury the Living’: Daniel Libeskind's Monumental Counter-History,” 451.

Museum Berlin. They identify two distinct theoretical strands coursing throughout Libeskind's work:

On the one hand, his buildings (like Berlin [1988-99], and Osnabrück [1995-98]) view history and tradition in general, and civic culture in particular, as marked for all time by the awful fissure of the Holocaust, the Shoah. On the other, in a group of ongoing designs (the Jewish Museum in San Francisco [1996-2004], the Art Museum in Denver [2000-05], and the extension for the Victoria and Albert Museum in London [1996-?]), Libeskind says he wants to reunite the frayed ends of a city's history and culture. The first strand of work is desperately pessimistic, whereas the second is brimming with optimism.⁵⁹⁹

Can, and moreover should, these two strands – of destruction and discontinuity, of regeneration and hope – be reconciled in built form? Is architecture capable of reconciling the moral and political perversions that have come to define the twentieth-century as one of catastrophe?

At first glance, Libeskind's design for the redevelopment of the World Trade Center, "Memory Foundations," continues the second strand (initiated by the Jewish Museum Berlin), responding to violence with an ethic of rebirth through reconstruction. Affirming life through an iconography of hope, "Memory Foundations" infuses lower Manhattan with the kind of vitality consonant with the spirit of democracy. Nonetheless, the architectural means used to do so are circumscribed by the first strand of Libeskind's work, which is defined by an aesthetic of trauma and humanity disfigured.

Consider Libeskind's design for the Freedom Tower, which mirrors the organizational principles of the Jewish Museum Berlin, the Felix Nussbaum Haus, and the recently completed Denver Art Museum and Royal Ontario Museum. Asymmetrical forms and disconnected spaces, combined with jutting angular protrusions, effect a dysfunctional relationship between the built environment and its inhabitant. Sharp metallic shards converge with sheets of concrete and

⁵⁹⁹ Brian Hanson and Nikos Salingeros, "Death, Life, and Libeskind," *In the Cause of Architecture*, online journal from the *Architectural Record*, <http://archrecord.construction.com/inTheCause/0203Libeskind/libeskind-2.asp>.

slivers of glass to comprise an aggressive and agitating style. Prohibiting contingent and spontaneous experiences, Libeskind's buildings defuse life of its vitality by subjecting visitors to an unpredictable matrix of structural projections and spatial disarticulations that stutter their way across a receding gravitational plane.⁶⁰⁰ The restless decomposition and recomposition of space that follows denies viewers a stable field of reference. "Stairs that lead to nowhere; corridors that are arbitrarily cut; entrance or exists that are impossible to find; and, most of all, a deliberate circulation constrained by built structures that force us to walk in a direction different to what seems natural to us."⁶⁰¹ Hanson and Salingaros's remarks on the Jewish Museum Berlin capture Libeskind's theoretical and ethical concerns when it comes to building civic projects.⁶⁰² The Museum generates feelings of anxiety, tension, uncertainty, and discomfort through various manipulations of form, dislocations of space, and surface aesthetics. Deprived of its bearings, Libeskind's hypersensitized subject is rendered neutral and passive, inert and opaque to the space it inhabits.

600 Hanson and Salingaros list the following techniques as features that recur throughout Libeskind's *oeuvre*: "(i) *Dehumanizing structures and spaces*--either too small or too large for a human being to relate to, built deliberately without a connective scaling hierarchy. (ii) *Shapes that stand out from nature* by lacking connective symmetries and attachment to the gravitational axis. (iii) *Random, geometrically disconnected units* that have no obvious means of support. (iv) *Corners and sharp edges* projecting toward us. (v) *Sheer, empty surfaces* without internal differentiations, which shift our perceptual attention to their edge--surfaces unresponsive or intentionally repulsive to our visual and tactile senses, and which can be drab and colorless, smooth or rough, or made of sleek materials such a shiny metal and glass." (emphasis added).

601 For Hanson and Salingaros, these structures purposefully "reduce our physical experience of the world by providing insufficient information to understand our environment. The method of achieving this is to create spaces and surfaces that frustrate our sensory embedding within our surroundings."

602 Libeskind's Danish Jewish Museum (inaugurated in 2004 in Copenhagen, Denmark) is a notable exception. While featuring several of the formal characteristics of his other works (slanted walls, irregularly shaped windows, zigzagging corridors), the museum provides an intimate and manageable space. The slightly undulating wood-plank floor, juxtaposed by a vaulted brick ceiling, choreographs the reception of material documenting Jewish life in Denmark. The collection is displayed through glass windows cut into a leaning interior that is lit by slits of artificial lighting built into walls of soft-colored birch plywood. With a welcoming air, though no less laden with symbolism, the Danish Jewish Museum is a respite to the stilted voice of the Jewish Museum Berlin.

“It is a paradox of Libeskind’s work that an architect who claims to be so in thrall to the chaotic, the complex, the open-ended, and the democratic, should produce buildings so deterministic, and which leave so little chance and personal choice.”⁶⁰³ The overdetermined features of his work produce effects that are as unyielding as they are deliberate. These spaces do not ask to be judged, nor do they invite thought. Rather than inspire reflection, they demand acceptance, a complicity less informed by what they reveal than by already formed opinions.

Libeskind’s design for the World Trade Center incorporates the foundation of the former Twin Towers (the bathtub), including the slurry walls, to give ground to a sacred and authentic memorial space. As in Berlin, the void supplies “Memory Foundations” with an organizing principle: absence is a repository of memory.⁶⁰⁴ Recalling “Libeskind’s use of voids for expressive purposes at the Jewish Museum in Berlin, where empty towers of space ... mark the absences and ruptures in German history. Libeskind’s bathtub at Ground Zero has a different formal character: it is vast and open and resonantly empty.”⁶⁰⁵ A different formal character notwithstanding, the bathtub void, like those of the Jewish Museum, represents death through the figure of absence. For Hanson and Salingaros, this amounts to an architecture that “reverses the properties of living structure while at the same time suppressing the mechanisms by which human beings connect to the world.”⁶⁰⁶ Abstracted from lived experience, Libeskind’s non-

603 Hanson and Salingaros, “Death, Life, and Libeskind.”

604 Like Libeskind’s bathtub, the footprints are appealing for their ability to “provide a visual field with defined boundaries for containing memories of a tragic event that cannot easily be grasped.” See Stuart Kaplan, “Visualizing Absence: The Function of Visual Metaphors in the Effort to Make a Fitting Response to 9/11,” in *Readings in Propaganda and Persuasion*, eds., Garth Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2005), 253.

605 Daniel Libeskind, Leon Wieseltier, Sherwin Nulan, *Monument and Memory*, 7.

606 “Libeskind’s buildings are deterministic rather than adaptive, and it is well known that adaptive natural structure is the source of life, non-adaptation leading only to death.” What would a geometry of life look like? Would it be regenerative or conciliatory, forgetful or nostalgic? Adopting the language of natural science, Hanson and Salingaros describe what they view as a geometry of life: connective, rather than disintegrative; balanced with rule

synchronic forms reduce one's experience of the world to a state of confusion, tension, and anxiety. In the end, his buildings forfeit the creative and dynamic multiplicity characteristic of a thriving democratic culture.

“There is an important need in every society,” Libeskind claims, “to identify the icons that constitute a particular area, the structures that form the texture of living memory.”⁶⁰⁷ The Freedom Tower addresses this need by reclaiming the skyline of New York City and providing it with a civic icon that extends beyond its geographic locale. Several of the building's features reference figures related to both local and national history. At 200-feet-by-200-feet, the base of the tower is the same size as the footprints of the Twin Towers, whose heights of 1,362 and 1,368 feet are marked on the new building by a metal and glass parapet. Atop the parapet stands a mast containing an antenna mirroring the Statue of Liberty's torch. Metaphorically, this feature places the building within a historical narrative of self-determination and freedom, confirmed by the building's height of 1,776 feet, which numerically corresponds to the year of American Independence. Saturated with symbolic effects, the Freedom Tower opposes the featureless aesthetic and imposing scale of its predecessors with a welcoming presence: “reasserting the pre-eminence of freedom and beauty, restoring the spiritual peak to the city, creating a building that speaks of our vitality in the face of danger and our optimism in the aftermath of tragedy.”⁶⁰⁸

and contingency, order and spontaneity, rational and emotive; evolutionary and adaptive; complex yet ordered. Hanson and Salingaros, “Death, Life, and Libeskind.”

607 Daniel Libeskind, Aaron Betsky, Jeffrey Kipnis, “Traces of the Unborn,” in *Daniel Libeskind: The Space of Encounter* (New York: Universe Publishing, 2001), 196.

608 Daniel Libeskind, “Memory Foundations,” <http://www.daniel-libeskind.com/projects/show-all/memory-foundations>.

As a *de facto* public memorial, Libeskind's "Memory Foundations" makes claims on individuals to remember for the purpose of rehabilitating a common moral awareness and ethical sensibility. Through a combination of structure, image, and inscription, it looks to provide an ongoing reminder of the past, while also accommodating the commercial, residential, and cultural needs of the present. Yet Libeskind's design fails to constitute a political sense of community. As with objectivist representations of history, the authoritative claim his work makes on the past nurtures a communal ethic to the extent that such an ethic can be defined in universal terms. It maintains its social significance over time by falling back upon determinative judgments. Submitting to the cognitivist demand for objectivity, Libeskind's architecture, like others within the subjectivist turn, impedes the reflective work of political judgment – storytelling, perspective taking, representative thinking – that is necessary for the constitution and reconstitution of democratic community.

Whatever structures are built in lower Manhattan will have to confront the challenge of perpetuating and justifying memories that will one day be foreign to one's historical experience. "What is important is that the Memorial constitutes a horizon of openness, thinking, and the visible." Though Libeskind's comment refers to the Jewish Museum Berlin, it no less applies to his design for the World Trade Center. "Every memorial contains and reflects the intentions of the architects or the artists, yet I do not think that the memorial is about education." Forgoing the pedagogical task often attributed to memorials, Libeskind redefines architecture's relationship to memory as one that preserves without dictating, encouraging without prescribing. "I do not think it is good to try to make the Memorial into a set of signs which have to be

deciphered, looked up, and then disposed of.”⁶⁰⁹ He continues: “memory cannot be added to architecture like a label as many postmodern architects think. One cannot simply inscribe memory like a logo onto a building as a kind of code.”⁶¹⁰ This is quite surprising, coming from an architect who names features of his work as though they were products of a larger brand, investing spaces with symbolic attributes that coalesce around a universally recognizable logo. If, as Libeskind claims, memory is nothing without spiritual carriers, then his architecture should be seen as an attempt to define the content of these carriers to the point of naturalizing their meaning.

To the extent that Libeskind’s buildings wear memory like a badge, they undermine efforts to think critically about the pasts to which they refer. In effect, Libeskind’s self-referentiality is parasitic not only on his own creativity, but also on the understanding of those who encounter his work. “The symbolic meaning tediously repeated throughout every nook and cranny of the WTC design really empties the site of urban meaning,” that is, the kind of contestable meaning expected of democratic societies (i.e. the *who* of meaning). In other words, the sites paternalism is born at the expense of the pragmatic need for social interaction and political engagement. As theorist Adrian Parr explains, Libeskind’s “symbolic vocabulary fortifies the building and site from alternative meanings spilling forth.”⁶¹¹ Insulated from a reflective practice of judgment, the new World Trade Center becomes a fulcrum of values that are fixed rather than provisional, effectively anesthetizing opinions from experience.

609 Libeskind and Binet, *The Jewish Museum Berlin*, 32-33.

610 Libeskind, *Monument and Memory*, 11.

611 Adrian Parr, “One Nation Under Surveillance: Turning Striated Space Inside Out,” *Angelaki* 2, no.1 (April 2006): 99-107.

“What happens when an ‘architect’ (individual or collective) *tells* us what a building means and tries to short-circuit any discussion of ‘the absolutely problematical character’ of the project?”⁶¹² This question, raised by David Simpson to Libeskind’s plan for the World Trade Center, alerts us to the manipulation of meaning at work in his designs, meanings that are constantly deployed in any account of Libeskind’s architectural practice and theory.

This conclusion does not so much challenge Libeskind’s estimation of his work, as it questions his ability to follow through on what is demanded of it. Indeed, Libeskind is right to suggest that “everyday life is part of the coherence of memory, and the integration of that memory is essential to space.”⁶¹³ He correctly identifies architecture’s inseparability from experience, and furthermore, locates its functional and aesthetic attributes on a discursive register. In Libeskind’s words, architecture “is fundamentally a communicative art that should tell a story.” “Many of the buildings one sees built today tell a story of an autistic kind, a story of their own making, an internal solipsistic way of thinking. But I beg to differ, because I think buildings should tell other stories about something completely different, outside of their own making, with multiple narrations.”⁶¹⁴ Libeskind’s defense of architectural ambiguity is well intentioned, yet fails to find adequate expression in his own work, which resists being interpreted by perspectives diverging from the norms of reception it demands. This failure results in self-referential works that are ultimately insulated from any kind of redemptive criticism that could be understood as democratic.

612 Though the WTC site “has been and remains under pressure to embody both commemoration and rehabilitation,” it also calls for “triumphalism, for an economic and patriotic display of national and local energy that can pass muster as embodying the spirit of America and, inevitably, of capitalist democracy itself.” Simpson, *9/11: The Culture of Commemoration*, 61.

613 Libeskind, *Monument and Memory*, 10.

614 *Ibid.*, 11.

On my reading, Studio Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum Berlin (1999) and its concept plan for the World Trade Center (Memory Foundations, 2013) instantiate the dangers of subjectivism that haunt contemporary memorial architecture by forsaking political meaning in the name of open and heterogeneous experiences with the past. Devoid of storytelling, neither allows for meanings to emerge outside of the boundary of signification set by their designer. Put simply, Libeskind's architecture impedes the production of a plurality of perspectives on the events it sets to memory. The result is a totalizing view that predicates experiences within spaces that might otherwise inspire independent thinking and reflective judgment. The internal logic of Libeskind's work, evinced by perpetually recurring tropes that define the expectations governing its reception, manifest a self-fulfilling prophecy that rejects the political demand of intersubjectivity and the social need for dynamic civic space.

The refusal of objectivism that leads architects like Libeskind to seek out spaces of interior meaning and reflection is valuable, but it results in a privation of meaning, and ultimately ends up giving hostage to the objectivism they otherwise refuse. Upsetting the relation between factual truth and our shared sense of reality, the subjectivist tendencies of these artists leads to an ethically impoverished solipsism and a politically vacuous rationalization of thought. Thus, enabling a multiplicity of perspectives to emerge (i.e. intersubjectivity) ought to be a fundamental charge of memorial architecture.

**Chapter 5: Thinking Redemption Without End:
Reconciliation, Responsibility, and the Limits of Forgiveness**

Acting and speaking men need the help of the artist, of poets and historiographers, of monument-builders or writers, because without them the only product of their activity, the story they enact and tell, would not survive at all.⁶¹⁵

-- Hannah Arendt, "The Permanence of the World and the Work of Art"

What does it mean to reconcile oneself to the finality of things past and the uncertainty of those to come? As I argue below, reconciliation is a political responsibility and a form of understanding engendered by thought in memory. Understanding, I argue, is not an empathetic disposition, but a reconciliation in remembrance, that is, an affective relation with time that is unending in its capacity to reorient perspectives productive of meaning. Redeemed from a notion of reconciliation as resolution (i.e. terminal closure), understanding enables individuals to act in thoughtful and imaginative ways that affirm the past without being determined by its finality.

In order to bring these points into close analysis, I evaluate the relation of reconciliation to forgiveness. Thought here in terms of opening and possibility, forgiveness releases the present from resentment over the past. Marking a beginning rather than an end, forgiveness – like understanding – involves coming to terms with the past in the now [*Jetztzeit*] of the present. Though both attempt to reconfigure one's relationship to the past, understanding is neither the initial step nor the eventual outcome of forgiveness.⁶¹⁶ With this idea of forgiveness in mind, I

615 Hannah Arendt, "The Permanence of the World and the Work of Art," *Reflections on Literature and Culture*, ed. Susannah Young-Ah Gottlieb (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 177-178.

616 Distinguishing forgiveness from understanding, Arendt writes: "Forgiving has so little to do with understanding that it is neither its condition nor its consequence. Forgiving (certainly one of the greatest human capacities and perhaps the boldest of human actions insofar as it tries the seemingly impossible, to undo what has been done, and succeeds in making a new beginning where everything seemed to have come to an end) is a single action and culminates in a single act. Understanding is unending and therefore cannot produce final results." With Arendt, I

inquire into the limits and possibilities of understanding and forgiving as they relate to the ethical and political demands of responsibility in the work of Hannah Arendt and Theodor Adorno.

Having traced these demands as they pass to and from moments of reconciliation and acts of forgiveness, the concluding chapter of the dissertation explores the pragmatic implications of their instantiation in the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Looking at the development and repercussions of this institutional body, a discursive rather than material form of memorialization, I ask: are certain actions and events unforgivable? What role does truth, as a proxy for meaning and understanding, play in acts of forgiveness? Is reconciliation a political value, and if so, what norms and expectations follow?

In view of the responsibility inherent in reconciliation, I begin to answer these and other related questions through a reading of Arendt's polemic on truth and politics. Distinguishing factual from fabricated truth, I draw upon Arendt's identification of the perverse way in which modern political lies obscure human reality, confusing the relation of opinion to fact as one of knowledge to truth (i.e. opinion formation as a process of rational argumentation and logical proof). Following Arendt, I suggest that facts inform opinions, and disagreement among opinions in no way invalidates their articulation as political claims. Opinions are not only a matter of preference or personal inclination, but the basis of objective reality insofar as that reality is both factual and common to all. To preserve a shared space in which factual truths are publicly known and acknowledged, it is important that individuals challenge what Adorno describes as identity thinking, that is, the reduction of thought to a closed field of conceptual knowledge and deterministic judgment. As we shall see, the stability of objective reality relies

inquire into the political effects of forgiveness that are often neglected by ethical and religious accounts. Hannah Arendt, "Understanding and Politics," in *Essays in Understanding, 1930-1954*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1994), 308.

upon the taking and contesting of multiple perspectives on the world. This means considering whatever may come to pass in light of the plurality of opinions that draws out its truth. Against the one-dimensional arche-teleology of identity thinking that has become so prevalent inside and outside of the academy when it comes to politics, I argue that thinking and reflective judgment save the fleeting events of human life – the traumatic and the mundane – from becoming mere appendages of instrumental reason.

Arendt: Reconciliation with Reality

The habit of examining whatever happens to come to pass or to attract attention, regardless of results and specific content, could this activity be among the conditions that make men abstain from evil-doing or even actually ‘condition’ them against it?⁶¹⁷

-- Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*

1.

Arendt’s account of the interdependence of truth and politics exposes the fragility of factual truth, and by implication, the fragility of worldly reality. Her essay “Truth and Politics” asserts the political import of factual truth, which, she argues, “is always related to other people,” existing “only to the extent that it is spoken about.” However, by making factual truth dependent on the recognition of others, Arendt raises the question of how to distinguish fact from opinion. As Arendt rightly recognizes, when factual truth is publicly disputed, it is often treated as though it were a matter of opinion, something merely subjective. The political nature of factual truth, so it seems, is both its greatest danger and its inherent promise.⁶¹⁸

617 Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, vol. 1, Thinking (New York: Harcourt, Inc, 1971), 5.

618 Facts, writes Arendt, “are publicly known, and yet the same public that knows them can successfully, and often spontaneously, taboo their public discussion.” She continues: “factual truth, if it happens to oppose a given group’s profit or pleasure, is greeted today with greater hostility than ever before.” Hannah Arendt, “Truth and Politics,” in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin, 1993), 236-238.

Facts are not antagonistic to opinions, writes Arendt. Rather, they “inform opinions, and opinions, inspired by different interests and passions, can differ widely and still be legitimate as long as they respect factual truth.” What does such respect entail for historical inquiry in general, and public memorial in particular? “Even if we admit that every generation has the right to write its own history, we admit no more than that it has the right to rearrange the facts in accordance with its own perspective; we don’t admit the right to touch the factual matter itself.” How facts are understood varies according to time and place, which affects how individuals relate to the past. Like Walter Benjamin’s materialist historiography, Arendt’s approach to the past rehabilitates what has been, without exhausting it of future possibility or strategically distorting its claim to factual truth. To be sure, writing history, or giving it architectural expression, inevitably involves organizing and arranging facts from a particular point of view; what is or is not historically relevant changes according to perspective. Still, there should be no argument “against the existence of factual matter,” in Arendt’s view.⁶¹⁹

With this principle in mind, Arendt alerts us to the inherent vulnerability of facts concerning human events, which are infinitely more fragile than the scientific discoveries or rational truths produced by the human mind. Whereas the latter (mathematical, scientific, and philosophical truths) can always be rediscovered, once factual truths are lost (truths which deal with “the invariable outcome of men living and acting together”), “no rational effort will ever bring them back.” Once facts are removed from our inventory of knowledge, they fall into what Arendt characterizes as holes of oblivion, unified fields of irrefutable fact in which all deeds,

619 Ibid., 238-240. Truths, unlike opinions (which can be debated and argued), have an element of coercion and compulsion in how they assert their validity, meaning they are “beyond agreement, dispute, opinion, or consent.”

good and evil, disappear. Factual truth is thus politically important because “it is always in danger of being maneuvered out of the world not only for a time but, potentially, forever.”⁶²⁰

1.1

Political lies, which deal with things that practically everybody knows, threaten the objective reality of the common world.⁶²¹ Unlike traditional political lies, which distort, disfigure, and hide truth, modern political lies transform truth, thereby effacing reality from the public realm. “Reality,” Arendt insists, “is different from, and more than, the totality of facts and events.”⁶²² It is made-up of our unique and individual perspectives. Hence the need for commemorative spaces not only to accommodate multiple points of view but also to engage competing perspectives. Without contestation, provocation, and the possibility of disagreement, memorials are politically empty. When opinions are no longer open to debate, where things can no longer be seen from opposing points of view, memorials fail in their charge to inspire a critical relation to the past. At its worst, this failure results in a certain kind of thoughtlessness: identity thinking.

Identity thinking (what Arendt also describes as logicity or ideological thinking) proceeds with self-evident statements from which everything can be deduced with consistent regularity. It “can claim a reliability altogether independent of the world and the existence of

620 Ibid., 231.

621 Arendt’s understanding of objective reality differs from that of modern historiography, which evacuates history of all that is subjective: “the historian’s abstention from bestowing either praise or blame, together with an attitude of perfect distance with which he would follow the course of events as they were revealed in his documentary sources,” provide the basis of scientific objectivity in the nineteenth century. As such, historical objectivity follows from a detached and impartial perspective. Arendt’s notion of objectivity also begins with impartiality, excluding particular interest. However, Arendt’s impartiality, unlike that of modern historiography, takes into account a multiplicity of perspectives. This multiplicity is not about an exchange of subjectivities or the recognition of subject positions. For Arendt, the reality of an object or an event is constituted through “incessant talk” and an “inexhaustible flow of arguments,” which means that opinions are things to be respected, not removed, from the public realm and the reality it generates. Hannah Arendt, “The Concept of History: Ancient and Modern,” in *Between Past and Future*, 49-51.

622 Arendt, “Truth and Politics,” 261.

other people.”⁶²³ Isolated from the world of human affairs (absent plurality), such thinking is incapable of producing meaning or effecting understanding outside of its own internal logic. The manipulation of fact and aversion to historical reality characteristic of identity thinking betrays a

demoralizing fascination in the possibility that gigantic lies and monstrous falsehoods [can] eventually become unquestioned facts, that man may be free to change his own past at will, and that the difference between truth and falsehood may cease to be objective and become a mere matter of power and cleverness, of pressure and infinite repetition.⁶²⁴

As truth claims, facts hold so long as there exists a shared space in which differences of opinion can appear publicly. In a world where this common space is lost, and plurality no longer holds, “what convinces masses are not facts, but only the consistency of the system of which they are presumably part.”⁶²⁵ Truth “is no longer an objective issue about which many people may have opinions, but has become as real and untouchable an element in their lives as the rules of arithmetic.”⁶²⁶ Divorcing truth from judgment distorts reality and renders thought infallible.

Thus, identity thinking creates a world of self-reference whose ordering principle is self-consistency. To this effect, it is unable to account for whatever does not fit its syllogistic logic: human spontaneity, the introduction of something new, an unanticipated beginning. Thinking solely in causal (deterministic) terms, such reasoning, which is independent of experience,

623 In pursuit of self-consistency and internal coherence, the individual mind, guided by the logic of deductive reason, “is unable to understand anything.” “To equate thought and understanding with these logical operations means to level the capacity for thought ... to its lowest common denominator.” Arendt, “Understanding and Politics,” 317-318.

624 Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, 1979), 333.

625 Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 351. Identity thinking “orders facts into an absolutely logical procedure which starts from an axiomatically accepted premise, deducing everything else from it, that is, it proceeds with a consistency that exists nowhere in the realm of reality. The deducing may proceed logically or dialectically; in either case it involves a consistent process of argumentation which, because it thinks in terms of a process, is supposed to be able to comprehend the movement of the suprahuman, natural or historical processes.” Ibid., 471.

626 Ibid., 363. Similarly, Michel Foucault (recalling Nietzsche’s 1873 text “On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense”) claims that “truth is undoubtedly the sort of error that cannot be refuted because it was hardened into an unalterable form in the long baking process of history.” See Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” *The Foucault Reader*, ed., Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 79.

“needs neither the self nor the other nor the world to function safely.”⁶²⁷ Based on self-evident premises, its truths (founded on logical deduction) can exist independently of human community. Yet these truths, produced by the force of inner coercion, reveal nothing; they yield no new understanding. To define truth in terms of logical coherence and self-consistency hollows the world of meaning.

1.2

Identity thinking is a kind of thoughtless thinking, what Arendt characterizes as an inability to consider an issue from another person’s perspective. Arendt’s account of the 1961 trial of Adolf Eichmann – Nazi official entrusted with the task of administering the forced emigration, concentration, and extermination of European Jews – is a case study of such thoughtlessness.

Eichmann’s character suffered from the “inability ever to look at anything from the other fellow’s point of view.” Not only was his testimony consistent, like a syllogism or proof, “what he said was always the same, expressed in the same words. The longer one listened to him, the more obvious it became that his inability to speak was closely connected with an inability to *think*, namely, to think from the standpoint of somebody else.”⁶²⁸ Eichmann’s incapacity to reflect on an issue or imagine a situation from an alternate point of view impaired his ability to think and judge independently, to give shape to a world constituted by multiple perspectives. “As Eichmann told it, the most potent factor in the soothing of his own conscience was the simple fact that he could see no one, no one at all, who actually was against the final solution.”⁶²⁹ This inability to assume the point of view of others not only crippled his capacity for critical thought,

⁶²⁷ Ibid., 477.

⁶²⁸ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994), 48-49.

⁶²⁹ Ibid., 116.

it also impaired his memory. Selective, but not erratic, Eichmann's memory kept him insulated from opposing perspectives.⁶³⁰ His understanding of the exterminations – based on selective, partial, and fabricated knowledge – had acquired the epistemic weight of factual truth; it was not open to debate or revision.

The rigidity of Eichmann's thoughtless (identity) thinking, a fundamental feature of totalitarian domination, would seemingly manifest holes of oblivion into which individuals and events could be forgotten absolutely.⁶³¹ However, "nothing human is that perfect, and there are simply too many people in the world to make oblivion possible. One man will always be left alive to tell the story."⁶³² The giving and receiving of stories – fragments, anecdotes, and parables – are actions within everybody's grasp. Insofar as it weakens the validity of fabricated truths that have hardened into fact, storytelling, facilitated by what Arendt describes as "the gift of memory," challenges the conformist tendencies of identity thinking.

2.

Arendt's politically mindful act of remembrance returns possibility to time by exposing the contingency and unpredictability of human action, at once reconciling individuals to the factuality of the past (accepting the finality of what is absolutely necessary), while also loosening the appearance of historical necessity.

630 Eichmann was no longer capable of having the kind of back-and-forth dialogue with oneself characteristic of independent thought. "All thinking, strictly speaking, is done in solitude and is a dialogue between me and myself; but this dialogue of the two-in-one does not lose contact with the world of my fellow-men because they are represented in the self with whom I lead the dialogue of thought. The problem of solitude is that this two-in-one needs the others in order to become one again: one unchangeable individuals whose identity can never be mistaken for that of any other. For the confirmation of my identity I depend entirely upon other people." Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 476.

631 "The concentration camps, by making death anonymous (making it impossible to find out whether a prisoner is dead or alive) robbed death of its meaning as the end of a fulfilled life. In a sense they took away the individual's own death, proving that henceforth nothing belonged to him and he belonged to no one. His death merely set a seal on the fact that he had never really existed." *Ibid.*, 452.

632 Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 232-233.

“Memory,” writes Arendt in her 1929 study of Saint Augustine, is “the storehouse of time.” By way of imaginative representation, memory “collects and recollects what otherwise would be doomed to ruin and oblivion. The time region in which this salvage takes place is the Present of the thinking ego,” the timeless gap between past and future, the Now of thinking.⁶³³

What appears to us as time in our everyday lives, or clock time, depends on an uncoupling of past and future, which occurs when we wedge ourselves in the flow of sheer change such that “simultaneousness unfolds itself in the guise of a sequence.”⁶³⁴ That is to say, time is a continuum of change until human beings place themselves into its stream, breaking time into the tenses of past, present, and future. Continuity between the tenses is achieved because our experience of time in everyday life is spatially determined by “a fixed point from which we take our bearings, looking back or looking forward.”⁶³⁵ This gap between past and future is accessible through memory: reflection abstracted from the sequential temporality of everyday life.

Arendt, reading Augustine, claims that time exists because of the fact that individuals take measure of it. Absent this measuring of time, there would be nothing but continuous change. For Arendt, the space of memory is the “yardstick” with which time is measured. As that which measures time, memory becomes the possibility of arresting change and constituting

633 It is not by coincidence that Arendt uses Benjamin motifs – collection, ruin, salvage – to describe remembrance. “The greatest evildoers are those who don’t remember because they have never given thought to the matter, and, without remembrance, nothing can hold them back. For human beings, thinking of past matters means moving in the dimension of depth, striking roots, and thus stabilizing themselves, so as not to be swept away by whatever may occur.” Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, vol. 2, *Willing* (New York: Harcourt, Inc, 1971), 12.

634 Hannah Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 59.

635 Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, vol. 1, *Thinking*, 205.

time anew. “It is only by calling past and future into the present of remembrance and expectation that time exists at all.”⁶³⁶ Moreover,

it is memory and not expectation (for instance, the expectation of death as in Heidegger’s approach) that gives unity and wholeness to human existence. In making and holding present both past and future, that is, memory and the expectation derived from it, it is the present in which they coincide that determines human existence.⁶³⁷

Thus, not only is our sense of time felt through and born of memories, human life is made meaningful by acts of remembrance.

If our experience of time must pass through memory, then we must ask the question: in what time is time itself thought? Alluding to Walter Benjamin’s notion of now-time [*Jetztzeit*], Arendt suggests that it is the timeless Now of the present in which time is enacted. “The Now,” according to Arendt “is what measures time backwards and forwards, because the Now, strictly speaking, is not time but outside time,” meaning it is not located within the space of memory, but constituted by memory itself. Understood here as the moment of remembrance in which time is measured, the Now is heterogeneous to the linear order of sequential temporality and the causal logic of identity thinking. “This small non-time-space in the very heart of time, unlike the world and the culture into which we are born, can only be indicated; it cannot be inherited and handed down from the past.”⁶³⁸ Though remembrance is an atemporal condition, thinking never assumes an external vantage point above or beyond time. In other words, thinking, and the reflective judgment it provokes,⁶³⁹ is an act taken up by temporally and spatially conditioned

636 Hannah Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, 15.

637 *Ibid.*, 56.

638 Arendt, “Preface to *Between Past and Future*,” in *Between Past and Future*, 13.

639 “If thinking, the two-in-one of the soundless dialogue, actualizes the difference within our identity as given in consciousness as its by-product, then *judging, the by-product of the liberating effect of thinking, realizes thinking*, makes it manifest in the world of appearances, where I am never alone and always much too busy to be able to think. The manifestation of the wind of thought is no knowledge; it is the ability to tell right from wrong, beautiful

subjects. This point stresses the political import of remembrance: time can only be enacted when and where past and future converge in the non-time-space of the thinking present. “Each new generation, indeed every human being as he inserts himself between an infinite past and an infinite future, must discover and ploddingly pave it anew.”⁶⁴⁰

“Thinking is out of order because the quest for meaning produces no end result that will survive the activity, that will make sense after the activity has come to its end.”⁶⁴¹ This explains why Arendt’s non-time-space of thought cannot be inherited and handed down from the past, but must be realized by the experience of thought itself. The activity of thought described by Arendt illuminates, as it were, the site of its own thinking.⁶⁴² Neither past nor future throw light upon the present. Rather, the space between past and future, materialized in memory, removes the thinking present from the hold of time’s tenses. This distance promotes a condition of disinterested impartiality, that is, an independent yet engaged position from which to judge reflectively and render experience meaningful.⁶⁴³

2.1

from ugly. And this may indeed prevent catastrophes, at least for myself, in the rare moments when the chips are down.” Hannah Arendt, “Thinking and Moral Considerations,” in *Responsibility and Judgment* (New York: Schocken Books, 2003), 189. Emphasis added.

640 Arendt, “Preface to *Between Past and Future*,” in *Between Past and Future*, 13. This imperative characterizes the infinitely demanding responsibility identified by Adorno and later developed by Simon Critchley.

641 Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, vol. 1, *Thinking*, 123. “The trouble with the wisdom of the past is that it dies, so to speak, in our hands as soon as we try to apply it honestly to the central experiences of our time.” Arendt, “Understanding and Politics,” 309.

642 According to Arendt, the meeting of opposing forces – past and future – projects an unending force, which is none other than thought itself. “This diagonal force, . . . whose eventual end lies in infinity, is the perfect metaphor for the activity of thought.” “This diagonal, though pointing toward the infinite, remains bound to and is rooted in the present.” Arendt, “Preface to *Between Past and Future*,” in *Between Past and Future*, 12.

643 “In this gap between past and future, we find our place in time when we think, that is, when we are sufficiently removed from past and future to be relied on to find out their meaning, to assume the position of ‘umpire,’ of arbiter and judge over the manifold, never-ending affairs of human existence in the world, never arriving at a final solution to their riddles but ready with ever-anew answers to the question of what it may be all about.” Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, vol. 1, *Thinking*, 209-210.

Stimulated by the exchange of perspective inherent in representative thinking,⁶⁴⁴ reflective judgment frees thought from the instrumental pursuit of knowledge, which, following Kant, is governed by the subsumption of particulars under universal principles.⁶⁴⁵ In the words of political theorist William Connolly, “creative thinking is needed to decide which standards to recompose and which to draw upon to inform the recomposition.”⁶⁴⁶ With Arendt and Benjamin, Connolly views thinking and judging, in their reflective modes, as acts that exceed the deductive (and politically reductive) logic of rule following. The time of thought, in Connolly’s terms, is a dwelling in duration, where duration is understood as alteration within continuity. “Waves of the past melt into the protraction of the present, enabling new experiences irreducible to memory as mere recollection or to simple repetition of the same.”⁶⁴⁷

In his account of the temporality of lived experience, Connolly distinguishes between what he calls *clock time* and *durational time*: the former partitioning the flow of becoming into

644 Representative thinking describes the thought process through which opinions are formed. “Political thought is representative. I form an opinion by considering a given issue from different viewpoints, by making present to my mind the standpoints of those who are absent; that is, I represent them.” Opinions, on Arendt’s account, are not subjective biases, personal tastes, or preferences, though these may inform one’s opinion. Rather, opinions are the result of reflective judgment, which involves taking up various perspectives, representing other points of view (with the help of one’s imagination), and bringing those perspectives to bear on judgment. Representing others’ perspectives is a disinterested act, what Arendt refers to as the liberation from one’s private interest. “Opinion formation is determined by those in whose places somebody thinks and uses his own mind.” One is never alone in such thought, but remains bound to a “world of universal interdependence.” Base opinion formation takes only one’s own interest, or the interest of the group to which they belong, and thus fails to judge non-determinatively, i.e. reflectively. Opinions attain their validity by coming into conflict and reconciliation with other opinions. As such, “their validity depends upon free agreement and consent; they are arrived at by discursive, representative thinking; and they are communicated by means of persuasion and dissuasion.” Thus, no opinion is self-evident; each stands in need of reflection and judgment. See Arendt, “Truth and Politics” in *Between Past and Future*, 241, 247.

645 Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer call attention to the unreflective character of identity thinking and determinative judgment. “Thinking, as understood by the Enlightenment, is the process of establishing a unified, scientific order,” where unity is achieved through self-consistency. “Knowledge consists in subsumption under principles.” By way of reason, the particular is deduced from the universal, and the conformity of the particular to the universal is assured through understanding. See Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944), ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 63.

646 William Connolly, *Pluralism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 126.

647 “Thinking mixes affect, feeling, memories, and ideas into a qualitative ensemble indissoluble into separate ‘parts.’” *Ibid.*, 165-167.

discrete and finite moments (past, present, future), the latter protracting the present into infinite pasts and indeterminate futures. Clock time is important for everyday interactions and experiences. Durational time is politically significant insofar as it is within moments of temporal dissonance and simultaneity that instrumental (causal) modes of thinking and acting are broken, allowing for alternate relations to emerge.

Connolly's understanding of memory as it relates to durational time recalls Henri Bergson's notion of duration. A "continuous pulse of time," duration names the temporality in which a memory crosses "the point at which it is called up as recollection."⁶⁴⁸ Recollection, as such, is without intention. The incident recalled is "not plucked immediately out of a huge storehouse" of accumulated memory, rather, it is "crystallized from a *wave of memory*," brought to one's attention by an immediate force. Within durational time, "memories bubble up as they will, feeding into the conversation without becoming objects of it."⁶⁴⁹ Something new appears in memory, which is never a repetition of the same, or a one-to-one representation. Memory causes a 'rift' in time inaugurating the new: "the past becomes what it was during the protraction of the present even as it is not entirely exhausted by what it now becomes."⁶⁵⁰

When read in light of Connolly's reflections on memory and duration, Arendt's understanding of thought – the event of meaning in which time is measured – can be seen as a form of remembrance. Connolly's *dwelling in duration* thus corresponds to Arendt's *Now of thinking*: "this small track of non-time which the activity of thought beats within the time-space of mortal men and into which the trains of thought, of remembrance and anticipation, save

648 "Duration is the flow of time as becoming. It is waves of memory protracted into a present unfolding towered an altered future." Ibid., 102.

649 Ibid., 100-101.

650 Ibid., 114.

whatever they touch from the ruin of historical and biographical time.”⁶⁵¹ The ruin of chronological, or clock time, which replaces the fragments of tradition with historical continuity, directly threatens our relationship to the past. Arendt writes: “we are in danger of forgetting, and such an oblivion – quite apart from the contents themselves that could be lost – would mean that, humanly speaking, we would deprive ourselves of one dimension, the dimension of depth in human existence.”⁶⁵² Concerted acts of remembrance informed by experience maintain the dimension of depth in human existence that we come to know as meaning.

Arendt’s spatial conception of thought captures the event-like quality of meaning, which, she argues, is inseparable from experience:

the curve which the activity of thought describes must remain bound to incident as the circle remains bound to its focus; and the only gain one might legitimately expect from this most mysterious of human activities is not a result, such as a definition, or the attainment of a goal, such as a theory, but rather the slow, plodding discovery and, perhaps, the mapping survey of the region which some incident had completely illuminated for a fleeting moment.⁶⁵³

Meaning – which cannot be preserved or passed down – is generated in single instances of thought and judgment. These reflective and inaugurative activities, which take their bearing neither from the specific content upon which they reflect, nor the results they yield, are politically significant not only because they resist the instrumentality of identity thinking, but more importantly, because they open possibilities for meaningful engagements with the world.

“Thought itself,” so long as it remains non-teleological, non-determinative, non-identical, “arises out of the actuality of incidents, and incidents of living experience must remain its

651 Arendt, “Preface to *Between Past and Future*,” in *Between Past and Future*, 13.

652 Hannah Arendt, “What is Authority,” in *Between Past and Future*, 94.

653 Hannah Arendt, “Action and the Pursuit of Happiness,” *The Hannah Arendt Papers at the Library of Congress. Annual Meeting of APSA, 1960, 1-2.*

guideposts by which it takes its bearings, if it is not to lose itself in the heights to which thinking soars, or in the depths to which it must descend.”⁶⁵⁴

Relaying wisdom rather than knowledge, Arendt’s incidents (like Benjamin’s stories) are plastic fragments of experience, non-exhaustive, renewable resources of thought. “Incidents in themselves are not persuasive,” writes Arendt, “they are isolated instances by definition and thus open to endless interpretation. Moreover, they are often ordinary and common.”⁶⁵⁵ Incidents track the events of everyday life. Lacking the compelling force of syllogistic logic or mathematical proof, they are non-coercive, providing thought with landmarks of experience that guide its course rather than determine its destination. By way of memory, incidents retain their power to animate thought long after the events from which they are born have come to an end. In other words, memory actualizes incidents in thought, which – if it is to be independent of ideological and identity thinking – must take its bearings from lived experience. With Arendt, we do well to remember that “the triumph of memory, is that in presenting the past and thus depriving it, in a sense, of its bygone quality, memory transforms the past into a future possibility.”⁶⁵⁶

Arendt opposes thinking’s vertical dimension, depth, to the horizontality of thoughtlessness, which has no world, no public space from which to see reality from opposing points of view. Thoughtlessness, and the evil it bears, “possesses neither depth nor any demonic dimension. It can overgrow and lay waste to the whole world precisely because it spreads like a fungus on the surface. It is ‘thought-defying,’ ... because thought tries to reach some depth, to go to the roots, and the moment it concerns itself with evil, it is frustrated because there is

654 Ibid., 2.

655 Ibid., 2.

656 Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, 48.

nothing.”⁶⁵⁷ Might thoughtlessness, which suffers from an inability to take roots in the depth of human experience, have something do with a failure of memory, of thought losing its relation to the incidents of everyday life, of no longer being ‘bound to incident as the circle remains bound to its focus’? “For memory and depth are the same, or rather, depth cannot be reached by man except through remembrance.”⁶⁵⁸

“The greatest evildoers are those who don’t remember because they have never given thought to the matter, and, without remembrance, nothing can hold them back. For human beings, thinking of past matters means moving in the dimension of depth, striking roots, and thus stabilizing themselves, so as not to be swept away by whatever may occur.”⁶⁵⁹

The depth attained by thought in memory manifests itself in the form meaning and understanding. In other words, the fleeting affairs of men, and the relations given therein, are rendered meaningful insofar as thought takes root in human experience. “The common and the ordinary must remain our primary concern, the daily food of our thought.”⁶⁶⁰ As I argue below, the daily food of our thought, experience, reveals its significance when it is put into a story.

2.2

Reflecting on the possible relation of action to happiness, Arendt recalls “an incident which, though of no great significance itself, happened to revive certain trains of thought which had lain dormant.” What is significant about Arendt’s anecdote is that the incident she recalls is itself unexceptional, which suggests that the passing of daily life, of ordinary experience, is of an

657 Hannah Arendt, “‘A Daughter of Our People’: A Response to Gershom Scholem,” in *The Portable Hannah Arendt* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 396.

658 Arendt, “What is Authority,” 94.

659 “If I refuse to remember, I am actually ready to do anything.” Hannah Arendt, “Some Questions of Moral Philosophy,” in *Responsibility and Judgment* (New York: Schocken Books, 2003), 94-95.

660 Arendt, “Action and the Pursuit of Happiness,” 2.

immeasurable weight when it comes to the way in which memory reveals meaning. “There are incidents and stories behind them which, at least for ourselves, contain as in a nutshell the full meaning of whatever we have to say.”⁶⁶¹ Being awakened by the incidents of everyday life, which is not a matter of remembering something forgotten or repressed, is akin to involuntary memory, where an episodic past bursts with meaning, if only for a fleeting moment.

In *Men in Dark Times*, where Arendt reflects on the Danish writer Isak Dinesen, storytelling is described as a source of life, an invigorating, dynamic, and energizing force that helps individuals understand the events of the world. Narrating the past in the form of a story, Arendt explains, makes history meaningful, yet “solves no problems and assuages no suffering; it does not master anything once and for all.”⁶⁶² Like that of Benjamin, Arendt’s storytelling gives rise to contingent, local, and partial meanings, which need to be articulated and renewed by acts of judgment.

If the existence of a common world, whose beginning and end is human plurality, depends on the ability “to say what is,” that is, “to testify to what is and appears,”⁶⁶³ then sharing experiences, and the unique perspectives they bring, as far as politics is concerned, helps individuals deal with the uncertainty inherent in all human action. Storytelling, as such, makes action legible. Through an exchange of thoughts, judgments, opinions, and perspectives, storytelling reconciles individuals to the “unyielding, blatant, unpersuasive stubbornness,” of

661 Ibid., 2.

662 Hannah Arendt, “On Humanity in Dark Times: Thoughts about Lessing,” in *Men in Dark Times* (New York: Harcourt, 1968), 21.

663 Arendt, “Truth and Politics,” 229.

factual truth.⁶⁶⁴ “To the extent that the teller of factual truth is also a storyteller, he brings about that ‘reconciliation with reality,’” an acceptance and understanding of the past’s finality.⁶⁶⁵

Storytelling, as opposed to textbook historical narration, inquires into the past for the sake of a telling whose effects, like all human action, are incomplete and unpredictable.

If judgment is our faculty for dealing with the past, the historian is the inquiring man who by relating it sits in judgment over it. If that is so, we may reclaim our human dignity, win it back, as it were, from the pseudo-divinity named History of the modern age, without denying history’s importance but denying its right to being the ultimate judge.⁶⁶⁶

Following Arendt, storytelling cannot proceed without judgment, in a realm of objective referentiality governed by the politically disaffecting logic of identity thinking. Political narratives require both speaker and audience to judge reflectively. Arendt insists, the historian/truth-teller/storyteller does not have final say when it comes to historical meaning; we too, the spectators of human drama, must think and judge critically. This is our intergenerational promise to the past, an infinite responsibility befalling each and renewable by all.

“We can no more master the past than we can undo it. But we can reconcile ourselves to it. The form for this is the lament, which arises out of all recollection.”⁶⁶⁷ Memory’s lament describes the passage from recollection to reconciliation. Reconciling oneself to the finality of the past, as Arendt explains, does not necessitate knowledge, as historical fact, nor does it require psychological mediation, reasons and justifications motivating a course of action. Rather,

664 Ibid., 237.

665 Ibid., 262. Acknowledging her ‘Jewishness’ as one of the indisputable factual data of her life, which she never wished to discount or change, Arendt describes her own coming to terms with reality: “There is such a thing as a basic gratitude for everything that is as it is; for what has been *given* and was not, could not be, *made*.” Such an attitude, she says, is pre-political; nevertheless, it affects how we see and understand the world. See Arendt, “‘A Daughter of Our People’: A Response to Gershom Scholem,” 392.

666 Arendt, *Life of the Mind*, vol. 1, *Thinking*, 216.

667 Arendt, “On Humanity in Dark Times: Thoughts about Lessing,” 21.

reconciliation is a kind of understanding engendered by thought in memory, a redemptive gesture that reveals meaning in a punctuated moment of judgment and reflection.

Arendt summarizes her thoughts on storytelling as follows: “It is true that storytelling reveals meaning without committing the error of defining it, that it brings about consent and reconciliation with things as they really are, and that we may even trust it to contain eventually by implication that the last word which we expect from the ‘day of judgment.’”⁶⁶⁸ Arendt’s allusion to ‘the day of judgment’ aligns reconciliation with Benjamin’s redemptive notion of remembrance. Inspired by the incidents of lived experience, reconciliation allows the past to be understood without generalizing or universalizing meaning. Coming to terms with the past means nothing if thought realizes itself in totalities, i.e. if authoritative conclusions bring its free movement to an end.⁶⁶⁹ “As long as the meaning of the events remains alive – and this meaning can persist for very long periods of time – ‘mastering of the past’ can take the form of ever-recurrent narration.”⁶⁷⁰ With Benjamin’s redemptive mode of historical transmission, Arendt’s storytelling accumulates lived experience in an unending chain of tradition, bonds capable of releasing their energy long after they have been lived or narrated in the form of a story.

Being loyal to a story means being loyal to life. “Don’t create fiction but accept what life is giving you, show yourself worthy of whatever it may be by recollecting and pondering over it, thus repeating it in imagination; this is the way to remain alive.”⁶⁷¹ The reward of storytelling,

668 Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*, 105.

669 Independent thinking, for which Arendt holds G.E. Lessing’s *Selbstdenken* as a model, is a means of moving freely in the world. “Freedom of movement,” Arendt explains, “is an indispensable condition for action, and it is in action that men primarily experience freedom in the world.” Acting and thinking, both forms of movement, are free when they are non-instrumental, i.e. non-goal oriented. Lessing’s “thinking was not a search for truth, since every truth that is the result of a thought process necessarily puts an end to the movement of thinking.” Arendt, “On Humanity in Dark Times: Thoughts about Lessing,” 8-10.

670 Arendt, “On Humanity in Dark Times: Thoughts about Lessing,” 21.

671 Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*, 97.

as Arendt insists, is being able to let go.⁶⁷² Letting go is part understanding and part acceptance. “The task of the mind is to understand what happened, and this understanding, according to Hegel, is man’s way of reconciling himself with reality; its actual end is to be at peace with the world.”⁶⁷³ If the mind fails to realize such peace, and reconciliation escapes it, a kind of warfare ensues, where the mind wills backwards, futilely trying to undo the past. It is for this reason that Arendt stresses the past’s finality. Unchangeable, the past is something that human beings must come to terms with if they are to avoid *ressentiment*, what Arendt, by way of Nietzsche, describes as “the thirst for vengeance, the thirst for the power to dominate others.”⁶⁷⁴ Reconciliation with the past, with the transience and passing of time, is a redemption from revenge, from the will’s impotence in face of the ‘It was’.

The ‘It was’ of time, writes Nietzsche, “that is the name of the will’s gnashing of teeth and most secret melancholy. Powerless against what has been, he is an angry spectator of all that is past. The will cannot will backwards.”⁶⁷⁵ As a reconciliation in remembrance, redemption does not undo the past, but actively affirms it. Though human beings cannot transcend the ‘It was’ of time (the sheer givenness of the world), they can reconcile themselves to it, and be delivered from revenge through understanding.

2.4

672 “The reward of storytelling is to be able to let go: ‘When the storyteller is loyal ... to the story, there, in the end, silence will speak. Where the story has been betrayed, silence is but emptiness. But we, the faithful, when we have spoken our last word, will hear the voice of silence.’” When storytelling rests, silence speaks the language of understanding. Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*, 97.

673 Arendt, “Preface to *Between Past and Future*,” in *Between Past and Future*, 6.

674 Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, vol. 2, Willing, 168. See Friedrich Nietzsche, “On the Genealogy of Morals,” in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, trans., Walter Kaufmann (New York: The Modern Library, 1968), essay 1, §10-11.

675 The will’s inability to go backwards, “is what *revenge* is: the will’s ill will against time and it’s ‘it was.’” Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans., Walter Kaufmann (New York: The Modern Library, 1995), 138-140.

Arendt distinguishes understanding, “an unending activity by which, in constant change and variation, we come to terms with and reconcile ourselves to reality,” from the acquisition of information and knowledge. “Knowledge and understanding are not the same, but they are interrelated. Understanding is based on knowledge and knowledge cannot proceed without a preliminary, inarticulate understanding.”⁶⁷⁶ Understanding derives meaning from what we know, preceding and succeeding knowledge.⁶⁷⁷ Preliminary understanding, which is the basis of what we know, and true understanding, that which follows from reconciliation, both make knowledge meaningful.

However, reconciliation is different from empathetic understanding or identification, though feelings of empathy may emerge as a result.⁶⁷⁸ Catharsis, understood by Arendt as a “cleansing or purging of all emotions that could prevent men from action,” is part of the trajectory of reconciliation.⁶⁷⁹ In a letter to Gershom Scholem, Arendt claims: “Generally speaking, the role of the ‘heart’ in politics seems to me altogether questionable. . . . We both know, in other words, how often these emotions are used in order to conceal factual truth.”⁶⁸⁰

676 “To expect truth to come from thinking signifies that we mistake the need to think with the urge to know.” Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, vol. 1, *Thinking*, 61. As Benjamin scholar Gerhard Richter explains, thinking creates relays through insightful connections (similarities and correspondences) within the breaks of logical deductions, not through cognitive progressions. “What is significant about thinking is not its teleological progression from one certain fact of knowledge to the next, . . . but rather an appreciation of the leap or crack, the blind spot without which conceptual thinking cannot occur.” Gerhard Richter, “A Matter of Distance” *Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (London: Continuum, 2006), 148.

677 Arendt, “Understanding and Politics,” 308-311.

678 As Max Weber explains, empathetic understanding is achieved through sympathetic participation, that is, by grasping the emotional context of action. “The ability to imagine one’s self performing a similar action is not a necessary prerequisite to understanding; ‘one need not to have been Caesar in order to understand Caesar.’ For the verifiable accuracy of interpretation of the meaning of a phenomenon, it is a great help to be able to put one’s self imaginatively in the place of the actor and thus sympathetically to participate in his experiences, but this is not an essential condition of meaningful interpretation. Understandable and non-understandable components of a process are often intermingled and bound up together.” Imagining oneself in the place of another helps, but is not a necessary condition of understanding and meaningful interpretation. See Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (New York: Free Press, 1968), 90.

679 Arendt, “Truth and Politics,” 262.

680 Arendt, “‘A Daughter of Our People’: A Response to Gershom Scholem,” 393.

An emotive condition rather than an affective engagement, empathy not only obscures factual truth, it alone fails to produce meaning, engendering reactive responses, “as though a given subject of investigation had a message in readiness which easily communicated itself, or could be communicated, to the reader or spectator.”⁶⁸¹

Dominick LaCapra’s notion of empathetic unsettlement provides a corrective to the politically enervating and objectifying tendencies of empathetic identification. “An affective aspect of understanding that both limits objectification and exposes the self to involvement or implication in the past, its actors, and victims,” empathetic unsettlement “does not substitute for sociopolitical action but instead is viably articulated with it.”⁶⁸² In other words, empathetic unsettlement critically reframes one’s perspective on the past, so to disrupt modes of identification that might otherwise harmonize or efface the distinction between self and other, past and present. Storytelling stimulates this aspect of understanding by provoking a form of reconciliation that does not obviate the needs of critical thought and action.⁶⁸³

Arendt insists, “the political function of the storyteller – historian or novelist – is to teach acceptance of things as they are. Out of this acceptance, which is also called truthfulness, arises the faculty of judgment.” Where storytelling helps individuals accept things as they are (the ‘It was’ of time), reconciliation releases individuals from the self-destructive cycle of *ressentiment*

681 Hannah Arendt, “Walter Benjamin,” in *Men in Dark Times* (New York: Harcourt, 1968), 203.

682 Dominick LaCapra gives political traction to empathy, which, on his account, is “an affect crucial for a possible ethical relation to the other and hence for one’s responsibility or answerability.” “Empathy is not self-sufficient and does not mean unmediated identification, although the latter does tend to occur.” See Dominick LaCapra, *History in Transit: Experience, Identity, Critical Theory* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 76-77, 135.

683 María Pía Lara suggests that “human understanding depends, according to Arendt’s concept of the use of storytelling, on giving meaning to our actions, on training the imagination to go visiting.” This is right. But Lara goes on to claim, mistakenly, that understanding is not “a way of reconciling the past, but rather, a way of demonstrating that those actions have a permanent significance that allowed a single story to enter history.” As I read Arendt, understanding is a form of reconciliation, the creation of meaning anew through reflective acts of judgment, not the attribution of a “permanent significance.” María Pía Lara, *Narrating Evil: A Postmetaphysical Theory of Reflective Judgment* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 44.

(what LaCapra describes in a psychoanalytic idiom as acting-out). An awakening from political disaffection, reconciliation is important politically because it is both the beginning and end of judgment, which gives meaning to what we do and what we say.

On Arendt's account, human life has an inherent quest for meaning and is in need of understanding.⁶⁸⁴ That is because understanding, by which we reconcile ourselves to what unavoidably exists, is the other side of action.⁶⁸⁵ Understanding "does not mean that certain elements have received their final, definite form, but that something inescapably new was born."⁶⁸⁶ Renewing the energy of what came before it, remembrance not only makes us aware of the contingency of human action, it calls us to the experience of freedom inherent in action.

This suggests that coming to terms with the factual truth of the world has something to do with beginning. As Arendt explains: "the meaning of a committed act is revealed only when the action itself has come to an end and become a story susceptible to narration."⁶⁸⁷ Here, the end of one action provokes the beginning of another (storytelling), whose end result is a meaning born of temporal convergence in an act of judgment. "Every end in history," writes Arendt, "necessarily contains a new beginning; this beginning is the promise, the only 'message' which the end can ever produce."⁶⁸⁸ Thus, the end of a story, its own kind of understanding, marks a

684 "Our quest for meaning is at the same time prompted and frustrated by our inability to generate meaning." "Understanding begins with birth and ends with death." Arendt, "Understanding and Politics," 313, 306.

685 On Arendt's account, human action is both contingent and conditioned. She does not deny that causality is inherent in human affairs, just that necessity is necessary. Causes are at work in our lives, though causality is itself contingent. From Augustine: 'man not only has the capacity for beginning, but is this beginning himself.' Arendt adds: 'a being whose essence is beginning may have enough of origin within himself to understand without preconceived categories and to judge without the customary rules which is morality.' Hence, Arendt's conception of understanding is the flip side of her notion of action.

686 Arendt, "Understanding and Politics," 326.

687 Arendt, "On Humanity in Dark Times: Thoughts about Lessing," 21.

688 Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 479. In a similar vein, political theorist Michael Oakeshott writes: "to understand a substantive performance [i.e. action] in which an agent discloses and enacts himself is to put it into a story in which it is recognized to be an occurrence contingently related to other occurrences. Such a story does not open with the unconditional, 'In the beginning ...' but with a conditional, 'Once upon a time ...'. And it has no

new beginning. “The very fact of the memorable continuity of these beginnings in the sequence of generations guarantees a history which can never end because it is the history of beings whose essence is beginning.”⁶⁸⁹

With Benjamin, Arendt emphasizes the act of telling over its content. Storytelling performs as much as it communicates, enacting the lesson that “beginning, before it becomes a historical event, is the supreme capacity of man; politically it is identical with man’s freedom.”⁶⁹⁰ The end of a story, as such, reveals a memorial promise to be kept by those who, by participating in an event of tradition, realize man’s innate capacity to begin.

A story comes to an end when

the telling-over of what took place comes to a halt for the time being and a formed narrative, one more item, is added to the world's stock. ... Thus the narrative has been given its place in the world, where it will survive us. There it can live on – one story among many. *There is no meaning to these stories that is entirely separable from them. ... No philosophy, no analysis, no aphorism, be it ever so profound, can compare in the intensity and richness of meaning with a properly narrated story.*⁶⁹¹

Inseparable as they are, stories and their meanings change over time. The challenge of storytelling, as an act of historical transmission, is to remain faithful to the affective truth of a story, the “it seems to me” that results from judging experience reflectively.

Underlying Arendt’s account of storytelling is the idea that “the result of understanding is meaning,” which, as Arendt explains, “we originate in the very process of living insofar as we try to reconcile ourselves to what we do and what we suffer.” Understanding is first and

unconditional conclusion; its end is the beginning of another story.” Michael Oakeshott, *On the Understanding of Human Conduct* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 105.

689 Arendt, “Understanding and Politics,” 320.

690 “Freedom as an inner capacity of man is identical with the capacity to begin, just as freedom as a political reality is identical with a space of movement between men.” Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 471-479.

691 Arendt, “On Humanity in Dark Times: Thoughts about Lessing,” 22. Emphasis Added.

foremost “a process of self-understanding” that “begins with birth and ends with death.”⁶⁹² That said, how does Arendt’s theoretical account of understanding square with her personal reflections on coming to terms with the Shoah? I ask this question in order to introduce the relation of reconciliation to forgiveness in the hopes of generating a politically productive form of remembrance that is understood, in philosopher Simon Critchley’s sense of the phrase, as an infinitely demanding responsibility.

2.5

For Arendt, the reconciliation inherent in understanding – “a complicated process which never produces unequivocal results” – is related to, but distinct from forgiveness.⁶⁹³ “The possible redemption from the predicament of irreversibility – of being able to undo what one has done though one did not, and could not, have known what he was doing – is the faculty of forgiving.” Forgiving, Arendt continues, “serves to undo the deeds of the past, whose ‘sins’ hang like Damocles’ sword over every new generation.”⁶⁹⁴ Undoing does not mean changing the past, but reconfiguring one’s relation to it. In this way, forgiveness redeems the accidental and the unpredictable, which, to varying degrees, are inherent features of human action. The redemptive quality of forgiveness, so it seems, releases the present from a causal image of time that forfeits man’s capacity to initiate something new by confusing the past as absolute and determinative of the future.

What is the political status of this undoing from the perspective of remembrance? Like Benjamin’s historical index (the demands of past generations signaled by a weak messianic promise), Arendt’s action, whose effects are unforeseeable, either elicits the judgment of

692 Arendt, “Understanding and Politics,” 308-310.

693 Ibid., 307.

694 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), 237.

spectators so to achieve understanding, or it calls for redemption, an undoing of the past through forgiveness. In both cases, remembrance responds to an impossible claim, to reconcile oneself with the finality of the past in the hopes of achieving something like its undoing. It is this very impossibility that drives us to act in a world where what we do and what we say yields effects that we can never foretell.⁶⁹⁵ “Without being forgiven, released from the consequences of what we have done, our capacity to act would, as it were, be confined to one single deed from which we could never recover.” Thus, where Benjamin’s redemptive remembrance breaks with the catastrophe of the status quo, Arendt’s forgiveness frees us from the hold of causal temporality and the cycles of retributive violence it often engenders. “Only through this constant mutual release from what they do can men remain free agents, only by constant willingness to change their minds and start again can they be trusted with so great a power as that to begin something new.”⁶⁹⁶

Forgiveness, like action, is unpredictable. That is because both rely on human plurality. Following Arendt, forgiving “is the only reaction which does not merely re-act but acts anew and unexpectedly, unconditioned by the act which provoked it and therefore freeing from its consequences both the one who forgives and the one who is forgiven.”⁶⁹⁷ Forgiving oneself is impossible, since what is being forgiven is an act that can only be seen and judged by others.⁶⁹⁸

695 Due to the unpredictability of human life, which corresponds to the fact of natality, history cannot be determined in advance of action. It is for this reason that Arendt argues against predictive and predetermined futures. “The view that everything real must be preceded by a potentiality as one of its causes implicitly denies the future as an authentic tense.” Arendt, *Life of the Mind*, *Willing*, 15.

696 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 237, 240.

697 *Ibid.*, 241.

698 “As in action and speech generally, we are dependent upon others to whom we appear in distinctness which we ourselves are unable to perceive.” *Ibid.*, 241-243. See Chapter 4 for Arendt’s distinction of the who and the what of one’s character.

Can this definition of forgiveness accommodate acts of evil where a principal agent is lacking, as in the case of genocide, Apartheid, and the European destruction of indigenous peoples? The categories of guilt and innocence, Arendt claims, apply to individuals, not groups; individual acts are pardonable, collective acts are not.⁶⁹⁹ “Where all are guilty, nobody is. Guilt, unlike responsibility, always singles out; it is strictly personal. It refers to an act, not to intentions or potentialities.” In a metaphorical sense, entire communities may feel guilty for acts committed by few. And though it is natural to feel shame and bad conscience on a collective level, these feelings only confuse matters, exculpating, in varying degree, those who are guilty. “When taken literally, [feelings of guilt] can only lead into a phony sentimentality in which all real issues are obscured. ... The cry ‘We are all guilty’ is actually a declaration of solidarity with the wrongdoers.”⁷⁰⁰

Guilt and responsibility are two different things. “There is such a thing as responsibility for things one has not done; one can be held liable for them. But there is no such thing as being or feeling guilty for things that happened without oneself actively participating in them.”⁷⁰¹

With this statement Arendt opens her 1968 essay “Collective Responsibility,” which differentiates guilt from responsibility in order to address the role of personal responsibility in political life. Guilt, she argues, relates to individual actions, referring solely to a person and what he or she has done, whereas responsibility pertains to events for which all members of a community are accountable.

699 “In a courtroom there is no system on trial, no History or historical trend, no ism, anti-Semitism for instance, but a person.” Arendt, “Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship,” in *Responsibility and Judgment* (New York: Schocken Books, 2003), 30.

700 Hannah Arendt, “Collective Responsibility,” in *Responsibility and Judgment* (New York: Schocken Books, 2003), 147.

701 *Ibid.*, 147.

Collective responsibility is a political fact of life. A vicarious responsibility in which a “member of a community is held responsible for things he did not participate in but which were done in his name,” collective responsibility holds under the following condition: “I must be held responsible for something I have not done, and the reason for my responsibility must be my membership in a group (a collective) which no voluntary act of mine can dissolve.” It is an eminently political form of responsibility, distinct from the category of moral and/or legal guilt, which is strictly personal. Arendt’s postscript to *Eichmann in Jerusalem* concludes with a statement (repeated in her reflections on collective responsibility) that captures the infinitely demanding (radical and unfulfillable) character of political responsibility: “Every government assumes responsibility for the deeds and misdeeds of its predecessors and every nation for the deeds and misdeeds of the past.”⁷⁰² Arendt’s statement not only applies to governments and nations, but to all forms of community. To this effect, the only way to avoid being responsible to and for a collective is to remove oneself from social life.⁷⁰³ Moving from one community to another does not make one any less responsible. Responsibility for the world befalls each and every individual so long as they belong to a human community. Born as inheritors of a world predating our actions, we are all politically responsible for past and present wrongs.⁷⁰⁴

2.6

702 Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 248. “We are always held responsible for the sins of our fathers as we reap the rewards of their merits; but we are of course not guilty of their misdeeds, either morally or legally, nor can we ascribe their deeds to our own merits.” Arendt, “Collective Responsibility,” 149-150.

703 Removing oneself from public life is one thing, but living apart from all other human beings is another. Arendt explains: “For only within the framework of a people can a man live as a man among men, without exhausting himself. And only when a people lives and functions in consort with other peoples can it contribute to the establishment upon earth of a commonly conditioned and commonly controlled humanity.” Hannah Arendt, “The Jew as Pariah,” in *Reflections on Literature and Culture*, ed. Susannah Young-Ah Gottlieb (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 90.

704 “There exist extreme situations in which responsibility for the world, which is primarily political, cannot be assumed because political responsibility always presupposes at least a minimum of political power. Impotence, or complete powerlessness is, I think, a valid excuse.” Arendt, “Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship,” 45.

When asked of her initial reaction to the crimes at Auschwitz, Arendt recalls feeling the opening of an abyss, sensing that the world preserving force of forgiveness no longer seemed possible.

Amends can be made for just about everything at some point in politics. But not for this. *This ought not to have happened.* And I don't mean just the number of the victims. I mean the method, the fabrication of corpses and so on. ... This should not have happened. Something happened there *to which we cannot reconcile ourselves.* None of us ever can. ... This was something completely different. Personally, I could accept everything else.⁷⁰⁵

Read literally, Arendt's comments exceptionalize the experience of the camps, rendering them incapable of forgiveness and irreconcilable from the perspective of judgment. Yet rather than turn Arendt into a theorist of the exception,⁷⁰⁶ I would like to suggest that her insistence on the unprecedentedness of the mechanisms and effects of totalitarianism draws out the uniquely political demand of understanding and the need for reflective judgment. "For those engaged in the quest for meaning and understanding, what is frightening in the rise of totalitarianism is not that it is something new, but that it has brought to light the ruin of our categories of thought and standards of judgment."⁷⁰⁷ Following Arendt, the absence of criteria from which to judge is not an occasion for silence, a form of withdrawal, or explanation, which yields knowledge but no

705 Hannah Arendt, "What Remains? The Language Remains" in *The Portable Hannah Arendt* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 14-15. Emphasis added.

706 For scholars like philosopher Berel Lang, the Shoah marks a limit to representation. Due to the lack of adequate forms of representation that would make limit cases, like the Shoah, intelligible without distorting its truth, representation must be direct, immediate, and factual, refusing tropes, metaphor, and figuration (i.e. there is a point of literality beyond interpretation). Other scholars, like philosopher Giorgio Agamben, read the Shoah (the camps, totalitarianism, Auschwitz) as a paradigm. "The camp is the very paradigm of political space at the point at which politics becomes biopolitics and *homo sacer* is virtually confused with the citizen." Exceptionalizing the Shoah by making it out to be a paradigm, or claiming its unrepresentability, obviates judgment about human events and ourselves. See Berel Lang, "Is It Possible to Misrepresent the Holocaust?" from *Probing the Limits of Representation*, ed., Saul Friedlander, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992); Giorgio Agamben, "The Camp as the *Nomos* of the Modern," in *Violence, Identity, and Self-Determination*, eds., Hent de Vries and Samuel Weber (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

707 Arendt, "Understanding and Politics," 318.

greater understanding.⁷⁰⁸ An independence of thought, I argue, must renew itself by judging the singularity of human events reflectively.

With the Shoah, forgiveness and understanding approach their respective limits.⁷⁰⁹ It is for this reason that Arendt stresses its singularity, not in the sense of the exceptional or paradigmatic, but in the sense of the novel and the new. “Emphasis upon the radical uniqueness of the Holocaust,” as historian Robert Pois rightly recognizes, “can have the perhaps unanticipated effect of turning it into something *so* singular as to render it, from the historian’s perspective, ‘irreal.’”⁷¹⁰ The intersubjectivity of perspective taking and representative thinking immanent to storytelling mitigates this danger, allowing for the singularity of reflection without privatizing judgment or turning the unprecedented into a species of exceptionalism or impossibility.

“Only a fearful imagination,” writes Arendt, “can afford to keep thinking about horrors. Such thoughts are useful only for the perception of political contexts and the mobilization of political passions. A change of personality of any sort whatever can no more be induced by thinking about horrors than by the real experience of horror.”⁷¹¹ Recall the specious role of the heart that Arendt finds in politics. Dwelling on historical acts of violence can only give rise to

708 Arendt distinguishes knowledge from understanding, but holds the two in a relation of interdependence. The latter “is based on knowledge and knowledge cannot proceed without a preliminary, inarticulate understanding.” “Understanding precedes and succeeds knowledge. Preliminary understanding, which is at the basis of all knowledge, and true understanding, which transcends it, have this in common: They make knowledge meaningful.” Arendt, “Understanding and Politics,” 310-311.

709 “If it is true that the concentration camps are the most consequential institution of totalitarian rule, ‘dwelling on the horrors’ would seem to be indispensable for the understanding of totalitarianism. But recollection can no more do this than can the uncommunicative eyewitness report.” Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 444.

710 “An anguished concern for ethical judgment thus could be responsible for obviating the possibility of historical judgment [i.e. political judgment]. Yet, historical judgment, inherent in any consideration of past events, provides the basis for ethical judgment, the way in which we allow the past to influence or find resonance within present thoughts, emotions, or actions.” Robert Pois, “The Holocaust and the Ethical Imperative of Historicism,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 3, no. 3 (1988): 267-274, (270).

711 Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 444.

‘political passions,’ whether they are empathetic, nostalgic, conciliatory, or resentful. Though victims and survivors may feel compelled to return to past atrocities, such reflections seemingly result in politically enervating forms of pathos, such as those found in feelings of collective guilt.

The experience of the camp, which “can never be fully reported,” gives rise to an apparent aporia of representation for Arendt’s representational mode of thinking. “There are no parallels to the life in the concentration camps. Its horror can never be fully embraced by the imagination for the very reason that it stands outside of life and death.”⁷¹² Removed from communicable experience (the daily food of thought), thinking and judging founder in their quest for meaning and understanding. Reflecting on the horrors of humanity, so it seems, “cannot become the basis of a political community.”⁷¹³

These conclusions come as a surprise, for they question the political efficacy of remembrance that Arendt attempts to recover for reflective judgment. Should not the Shoah, if anything, demand forgiveness and reconciliation? When read in view of her account of storytelling, Arendt’s claims regarding the singularity of totalitarianism do not signal the unrepresentability of the Shoah or the impossibility of knowledge, but mark the limits of epistemic categories of judgment to yield understanding and meaning, both of which are related to, yet independent of knowledge.⁷¹⁴ Arendt’s point is not that one learns nothing from

712 Ibid., 444

713 “Just as the horror, or the dwelling on it, cannot affect a change of character in him, cannot make men better or worse, thus it cannot become the basis of a political community or party in any narrow sense.” Ibid., 441.

714 Philosopher Frank Cioffi exposes some the difficulties of approaching judgment with cognitive demands, and thereby draws out the infinitely demanding character of political judgment (i.e. understanding is an unending activity). “There is a danger that in our exasperation and disappointment at the failure of empirical discourse to meet one particularly urgent set of demands, we may deny its relevance to any. The correct form of the issue is not whether the holocaust demands historical, social psychological, psychopathological enquiry but whether there is in our response to it, our troubled response, something which empirical method passes by. ... Perhaps what we need with respect to the holocaust are neither the facts and figures, nor a more explicit awareness of the feelings and thoughts which give the picture depth, but adequate utterance – a mode of formulating our discoveries which, while

speechless horror, but that certain representations of the horror, namely those rooted in causal explanations and ethical imperatives, lead to speechlessness.

Revisiting events like the Shoah may lead to denial, resentment, and empathetic identification, yet these risks also bear the promise of judgment: meaning and understanding. If memorial architecture is to play a vital role in the ethical and political life of communities coming to terms with the kind of human failures that have by and large come to shape our modern political condition, then they must cultivate a critical historical sensibility informed by reflective judgment. Thinking through memory and the pitfalls of political apathy requires that we loosen ourselves from the hold of preconceived judgments, and awaken an independence of thought capable of understanding the past as an infinitely demanding responsibility. It is not by deduction, denial, or generalization that we come to understand incomprehensible events, but by “examining and bearing consciously the burden which our century has placed on us.”⁷¹⁵ To think through these seemingly worldless moments is to resist reality *as given* and open up the past *as new* so to effect worldly change.

The catastrophe, as I understand it, is not a limit or an exception, but the very condition from which to move forward and begin anew in thought and in action.⁷¹⁶ Only by confronting present challenges with an open historical sensibility, without mythologizing, instrumentalizing, or fetishizing the past, can we claim it as our own and redress inherited forms of exclusion, violence, and domination.⁷¹⁷ Political responsibility, thus understood, is an inheritance self-

acquitting us of the feeling of living evasively, will nevertheless not make life less bearable.” Frank Cioffi, *Wittgenstein on Freud and Frazer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 147.

⁷¹⁵ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, vii.

⁷¹⁶ “Our quest for meaning,” as Arendt explains, “is at the same time prompted and frustrated by our inability to generate meaning.” Arendt, “Understanding and Politics,” 313.

⁷¹⁷ “I do believe that we shall only come to terms with this past if we begin to judge and to be frank about it.” Arendt, “‘A Daughter of Our People’: A Response to Gershom Scholem,” 394.

aware of its active relation to the past.⁷¹⁸ “The idea of humanity,” writes Arendt, “has the very serious consequence that in one form or another men must assume responsibility for all crimes committed by men and that all nations share the onus of evil committed by all others.”⁷¹⁹ If, following Arendt, responsibility is a burden born of evil, it is also a promise befalling each individual as they act in a world of indeterminate beginnings and inconclusive ends.

Adorno: Infinite Responsibility in the Face of Catastrophe

Perspectives must be fashioned that displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be, with its rifts and crevices, as indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in the messianic light. To gain such perspectives without velleity or violence, entirely from felt contact with its objects – this alone is the task of thought.⁷²⁰

-- Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia*

3.

Theodor Adorno’s final entry to *Minima Moralia* (1951), a collection of fragmentary and aphoristic reflections on modern man’s increasingly alienated relation to the world, locates what Arendt would call the promise of politics in an affective mode of thought. Derailed from the teleological trajectory of identity thinking, Adorno’s negative dialectic⁷²¹ opens the possibility of reorienting perspectives without moralizing the political or exceptionalizing its practice. With Benjamin and Arendt, Adorno attempts to redress the inequalities and injustices of historical

718 “Every nation for the deeds and misdeeds of the past.” Political responsibility is an inheritance: “every generation, by virtue of being born into a historical continuum, is burdened by the sins of the fathers as it is blessed with the deeds of the ancestors.” Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 298.

719 Arendt, “Organized Guilt and Universal Responsibility,” in *Essays in Understanding*, 131. Similarly, Derrida claims, “we are all heir, at least, to persons or events marked, in an essential, interior, ineffaceable fashion, by crimes against humanity.” Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (London: Routledge, 2001), 29.

720 Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans., Edmund Jephcott (London: New Left Books, 1974), 247, n. 153.

721 Negative dialectic, as an immanent, material, and reflective thinking, is a mode of self-critique that follows from non-predictive identification and reflective judgment. “If negative dialectics calls for the self-reflection of thinking, the tangible implication is that if thinking is to be true ... it must also be a thinking against itself.” Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 2000), 365.

violence through a praxis-oriented refiguring of perspectives attuned to the demands of thinking through memory.⁷²²

Adorno's 1960 essay "The Meaning of Working through the Past" gives theoretical expression to this mnemonically charged political responsibility, asking: "How far it is advisable to go into the past when attempting to raise public awareness, and whether precisely the insistence on it does not provoke a defiant resistance and produce the opposite of what it intends." This question, "laden with the greatest responsibility," is an immediate concern for memorial architecture in particular, and public forms of commemoration more generally. How the past is made present depends on "whether one remains at the level of reproach or whether one withstands the horror by having the strength to comprehend even the incomprehensible."⁷²³ Such strength is required if individuals, confronted by the infinitely demanding responsibility of past and future, are to renew themselves as a community in the here and now of the present.

Meeting the challenge of coming to terms with events that seem incomprehensible means moving beyond a critical awareness of facts, which can only go so far when helping individuals achieve an understanding transformative of how they act.⁷²⁴ The passage from knowing facts, to understanding their meaning, to acting upon the demands they place on us, calls for a practice of self-reflection that acknowledges our innate ability to change forms of political rule and social order.

722 "But a true praxis capable of overturning the status quo depends on theory's refusal to yield to the oblivion in which society allows thought to ossify." Refusing to yield to thoughtlessness, non-identity thinking constantly turns over itself, moving to the depths, tirelessly returning and reflecting upon its matter without conceptual reification or totalization. Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 33.

723 Theodor Adorno, "The Meaning of Working through the Past," (1960) in *Can One Live after Auschwitz?*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 15.

724 "As far as wanting to combat anti-Semitism in individual subjects is concerned, one should not expect too much from the recourse to facts, which anti-Semites most often will admit or will neutralize by treating them as exceptions." *Ibid.*, 17.

As I have argued throughout the preceding chapters, acceding to the status quo stems from a politically disaffected condition of economic, religious, and social despair, a condition that balks at the possibility of cultivating alternate forms of life. From this perspective, the question, “What does working through the past mean?” betrays a desire “to close the books on the past and, if possible, even remove it from memory.”⁷²⁵ The civically detached purveyors of memory and memory tourists, who call the past into view as a repository of instructional, informational, and instrumental knowledge, adopt an attitude that past injustices should be forgotten, and perhaps forgiven, but not heeded as an incessant call upon the present. It is for this reason that, “above all, enlightenment about what has happened must work against a forgetfulness that all too easily turns up together with the justification of what has been forgotten.”⁷²⁶

To realize the goal of memorial architecture as a materialization of living memory, we must first view the past as having an immortal after-life. Modernity’s fear of forgetting, I argue, must be tempered by a fear of remembering, of perfect memory, of remembering to the point of total recall. Working through the past [*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*] is an interminable part of the human condition. In the words of Adorno, “the past will have been worked through only when the causes of what happened then have been eliminated.”⁷²⁷

But events are always unequal to the sum their parts. Following LaCapra, “working through trauma does not imply the possibility of attaining total integration of the self, including the retrospective feat of putting together seamlessly (for example, through a harmonizing or

725 For Adorno, forgetting is irrational insofar as it distorts the past to which it is referred to. However, “its impulses and modes of behavior,” are rational in that they follow from “the desire to get on with things.” Ibid., 3.

726 Ibid., 14.

727 Ibid., 18.

fetishistic narrative) the riven experience of the past trauma. Any such retrospective ‘suturing’ would itself be phantasmatic or illusory.”⁷²⁸ As LaCapra makes clear, traumas are experiences for which we have no context, i.e. those exceeding what we know to be thinkable and imaginable.

Yet all events are traumatic, each with its own degree of shock. This shock upsets the cognitive and affective registers of everyday life. In the words of Derrida: “an event always inflicts a wound in the everyday course of history, in the ordinary repetition and anticipation of all experience.” Though this wound is marked by memory and bound to the past, it remains open insofar as the threat (and anxiety) of a future terror (or trauma) prevents the wound from healing or achieving closure. “It is the future that determines the unappropriability of the event, not the present or the past.”⁷²⁹

Take Arendt’s 1950 reflections on the political landscape of post-war Germany, which outline the traumatic effects of the physical destruction of cities on their population. “The sight of Germany’s destroyed cities and the knowledge of German concentration and extermination camps have covered Europe with a cloud of melancholy. Together, they have made the memory of the last war more poignant and more persistent, the fear of future wars more actual.”⁷³⁰ Arendt’s remarks illustrate the futural temporality of trauma, a temporality captured by Adorno’s claim that “since Auschwitz, fearing death means fearing worse than death,” a claim given theoretical expression by Derrida’s *à venir*, the ‘to come.’⁷³¹ “There is traumatism,” writes

728 LaCapra, *History in Transit: Experience, Identity, Critical Theory*, 118-119.

729 Giovanna Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 96-97.

730 Hannah Arendt, “The Aftermath of Nazi Rule: Report from Germany,” in *Commentary* (October 1950): 342-353.

731 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 371.

Derrida, “with no possible work of mourning when the evil comes from the possibility to come of the worst, from the repetition to come – though worse. Traumatism is produced by the *future*, by the *to come*, by the threat of the worst *to come*, rather than by an aggression that is ‘over and done with.’”⁷³² If traumatic violence endures, if trauma continues to traumatize despite efforts to contain or control it, then one must come to terms with the past as an intractable force weighing on human action.⁷³³ This does not mean succumbing to sentimentalism, nostalgia, or resentment. The past is intractable, but it is also pliable, meaning it can be configured and reconfigured through memorial action.

As William Connolly explains, a traumatic event is “susceptible to articulation ... only *after* it has been assigned a meaning and trajectory. *It becomes what it was.*”⁷³⁴ Counter to how we normally think the relation between meaning and causality, where an action in the past determines the future, traumatic events invert this relation, exposing the present to an indeterminacy of meaning, which can only be ascribed in a retroactive gesture. This gesture, the moment of meaning’s articulation, involves thinking the event anew in an affirmation of the past that rejects totalization, whether it is that of the sovereign subject, the concept, the self-standing fact, or the unified narrative.

“Working-through does not imply avoiding, harmonizing, simply forgetting the past, returning to a status-quo ante, or submerging oneself in the present.”⁷³⁵ Effecting terminal

732 Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida*, 96-97.

733 Derrida’s ‘to come’ – that which resists the assimilatory and terminal effects of mourning – marks the limit of knowledge, but also its remainder. This remainder, an excess irreducible to the order of reason, reveals itself in action. It is for this reason that I read the ‘to come’ as a political injunction and not a deferral of politics.

734 Connolly, *Pluralism*, 112-113.

735 LaCapra’s psychoanalytically inflected account of working-through describes “an articulatory process that generates countervailing forces to acting-out and the repetition compulsion,” thereby mitigating the effects of trauma. “In working through, the person tries to gain critical distance on a problem and to distinguish – as well as

closure or mastery of the event is impossible. This is how I read Adorno's post-catastrophe categorical imperative,⁷³⁶ where the drive to remember is motivated by a desire to prevent the horrors of the twentieth-century from recurring. No rational justification can be given to this task. "Dealing discursively with it would be an outrage, for the new imperative gives us a bodily sensation of the moral addendum."⁷³⁷ Adorno, like Arendt, recognizes the limits of 'dwelling on the horrors.' Bodily sensation (affect), rather than instrumental reason (cognition), demands that 'unfree mankind,' having lost its rational basis for moral action, orient itself against the reemergence of totalitarian modes of thought and life.

Having dislocated morality from the fact of reason (Kant's *Faktum der Vernunft*), the material forces of history call for an affective response transformative of how we think and act in relation to the past.⁷³⁸ "What is at stake," writes Adorno with Horkheimer in the preface to their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, "is not the conservation of the past but the fulfillment of past hopes."⁷³⁹ "The urge to rescue the past as something living, instead of using it as the material of progress, has been satisfied only in art," which maintains itself as practice, as critique, when we avoid treating it as knowledge.⁷⁴⁰ This allusion to Benjamin's redemptive notion of remembrance suggests that pasts can be reclaimed through a rearticulation of what has been. For Adorno, art has the critical potential to give form to the material contradictions of everyday life.

explore the interactions – between past, present, and future." See LaCapra, *History in Transit: Experience, Identity, Critical Theory*, 102-104, 117-119.

736 "A new categorical imperative has been imposed by Hitler upon unfree mankind: to arrange their thoughts and actions so that Auschwitz will not repeat itself, so that nothing similar will happen." Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 365. Restated a year later, the imperative reads: "the premiere demand upon all education is that Auschwitz not happen again." See Theodor Adorno, "Education After Auschwitz," (1967) in *Can One Live after Auschwitz?*, 19.

737 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 365.

738 "The course of history forces materialism upon metaphysics, traditionally the direct antithesis of materialism." The categorical imperative not to repeat the catastrophe demands a break, and thus a transformation, of the objective conditions of everyday life. *Ibid.*, 365.

739 Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, xvii.

740 *Ibid.*, 25.

In other words, art cannot be consigned to a disinterested or relativist position, rather, it must bear the burden of remembering past forms of violence.⁷⁴¹

Art remains true to suffering by provoking an ethical and political challenge to the thinking and acting self. To oppose the systematic administration of life, “one must come to know the mechanisms that render people capable of such deeds, must reveal these mechanisms to them, and strive, by a general awareness of those mechanisms, to prevent people from becoming so again.” As a mode of thought acknowledging the self’s implication in ongoing forms of injustice, critical self-reflection resists thought’s totalization by identity thinking. Ironically, Adorno concludes: “The single genuine power standing against the principle of Auschwitz is autonomy, if I might use the Kantian expression: the power of reflection, of self-determination, of not cooperating.”⁷⁴²

Reformulated by professor of literature and philosophy Josh Cohen, “the task of thinking after Auschwitz demands above all a vigilant resistance to alterity’s assimilation to knowledge.”⁷⁴³ Insofar as traumatic events are both parasitic on thought’s emergence and the condition of possibility of its renewal, reflection, which is in part a thinking of the past, is an incomplete and unachievable task. In other words, there is something within the past that resists cognitive appropriation, something that remains heterogeneous to the order of reason and empirical validity. In instances of trauma, “the more facts accumulate, the more stubbornly they resist accommodation to any rule of reason.” Following Cohen, traumas and catastrophes bring

741 As professor of literature and Holocaust scholar Michael Rothberg explains, “the purpose of art [on Adorno’s account] is neither to represent the interests of the proletariat or the individual, nor to grant meaning to abstract humanity, but to remain true to suffering.” Michael Rothberg, “After Adorno: Culture in the Wake of Catastrophe,” *New German Critique* 72, (Autumn, 1997): 45-81.

742 “The only education that has any sense at all is an education toward critical self-reflection.” Adorno, “Education After Auschwitz,” 21-23.

743 Josh Cohen, *Interrupting Auschwitz* (London: Continuum Press, 2003), 4.

thinking to an “irreducible alterity in excess of conceptual comprehension. As long as thought is governed by the horizon of a completed future, it will fall short of the demand of the new categorical imperative” figured by the names Auschwitz, Holocaust, and Shoah.⁷⁴⁴

Reason is inadequate to thinking the past because it is unable to avoid the threat of its reversal. Thus, if the past is both an entry point and limit to reason, action must perpetually renew itself with the imperative to resist thought’s totalization. In this light, Adorno’s critical project can be read as an ethical intervention into the reification of thought, and a political provocation for its renewal through ongoing critique.

3.1

Adorno’s demand on thought and action is both necessary and impossible. This ambivalence is the demand’s greatest virtue. Unfulfilled, the demand is infinitely renewable, belonging to an indeterminate future. “The impossibility of actualizing the imperative prevents thinking from coming to a rest, from seeking a future in which it would be redeemed from its demand.”⁷⁴⁵ Without teleology – whether moral, political, religious, or historical – Adorno, like Benjamin before him, refigures redemption. Here understood as the refusal of all final solutions, redemption signifies the ethical and political imperative to think in the wake of catastrophe, a tireless search for meaning freed from the necessity of achieving resolution. Oriented toward redemption, thinking balances an internal tension oscillating between the intended and the unintended. This perpetual movement, animated by the past and open to the new, is the

744 Ibid., 1, 5. Auschwitz stands for a constellation of concepts that change over the course of Adorno’s work. As Michael Rothberg explains, the name represents a series of events rather than a geographic location. “The place-name refers both to events proximate to it and to a totality of events of which it is one part.” Thus, Adorno’s reflections on, and contributions to, our post-Holocaust thinking “combines elements of aesthetics (‘To write poetry’), temporality (‘after’), and place (‘Auschwitz’) with a morally or politically evaluative predicate (‘is barbaric’).” Auschwitz occupies an important position in Adorno’s reflection on history – “the final stage of the dialectic of culture and barbarism.” See Rothberg, “After Adorno: Culture in the Wake of Catastrophe,” 54-55.
745 Cohen, *Interrupting Auschwitz*, 25.

“constitutive condition of any future politics. Any politics which comes to rest, which seeks to free itself from the entanglements of finitude, ceases to be a politics.”⁷⁴⁶ The political challenge issued by the past is to think and act from the perspective of redemption without end.⁷⁴⁷

Adorno’s political, philosophical, and ethical project responds to this challenge. His critical engagement with the events culminating in German National Socialism and its aftermath locates the theoretical and practical bearings of thinking in the indefinite redemption of the past, or what Arendt would call understanding, that unending activity through which we come to terms with and reconcile ourselves to the sheer givenness of the world. Restated, the task is how to think without bringing reflection to an end, to speak without bringing conversation to an end, to argue without bringing disagreement to an end, to find understanding without terminating the human quest for meaning. As Simon Critchley rightly emphasizes, redemption is a political and ethical provocation for worldly change. “The task of thinking consists in a historical confrontation with nihilism that does not give up on the *demand* that things might be otherwise. ... [S]uch is the essential, but essentially disappointing logic of redemption.”⁷⁴⁸ Without recourse to a transcendental foundation, redemption disappoints in the face of meaning’s abyss.

“Our metaphysical faculty is paralyzed,” writes Adorno, “because actual events have shattered the basis on which speculative metaphysical thought could be reconciled with experience.” Our feelings “balk at squeezing any kind of sense, however bleached, out of the

746 Ibid., 25.

747 “The more passionately thought denies its conditionality for the sake of the unconditional, the more unconsciously, and so calamitously, it is delivered up to the world. Even its own impossibility it must at last comprehend for the sake of the possible. But beside the demand thus placed on thought, the question of the reality or unreality of redemption itself hardly matters.” Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, 247, n. 153.

748 As defined by Critchley, nihilism is the consequence of moral valuation that comes from the realization that “the categories by means of which we had tried to give meaning to the universe are meaningless.” Simon Critchley, *Very Little...Almost Nothing: Death, Philosophy and Literature* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 14, 10.

victims fate.”⁷⁴⁹ Like Arendt, who while reflecting on the effects of totalitarianism claimed that “something happened there to which we cannot reconcile ourselves,” Adorno concedes that “there is no chance any more for death to come into the individuals’ empirical life as somehow comfortable with the course of that life.”⁷⁵⁰ For both thinkers, totalitarianism signals a crisis of meaning that not only follows from the fact of human mortality, but from the unprecedentedness of the historical event.

Adorno writes: “What the Nazi’s did to the Jews was unspeakable. Languages had no word for it.”

Despite everything, an expression had to be found if the victims, who were anyway too numerous for them all to be remembered by name, were to be spared the obloquy of being consigned to oblivion. For this reason the term *genocide* [E] was introduced in English. But the act of codification that is enshrined in the International Declaration of Human Rights has ensured that the unspeakable has been cut down to size at the very moment that it is protested against. Elevating it to a concept simultaneously acknowledges its possibility. It becomes an institution to be prohibited, rejected, and debated.⁷⁵¹

Once named, genocide becomes a category, not an act to be opposed, but a concept to be evaluated according to principle and use. Given conceptual formulation, the term genocide designates – like the death of all but ourselves – a quantifiable, verifiable, and representable object. Yet it is always the other’s death, never one’s own, that can be represented and known.⁷⁵² At once an “impossible necessary” experience, our death stands at the limit of what we can come to terms with as a matter of fact or truth.⁷⁵³

⁷⁴⁹ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 361-362.

⁷⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 362.

⁷⁵¹ Adorno, *Can One Live after Auschwitz?*, 60.

⁷⁵² For Adorno, individuals are incapable of relating to their death as an end, as that which would “constitute the entirety of their existence.” “It is impossible to think death as the last thing pure and simple. Attempts to express death in language are futile ... for who should be the subject of which we predicate that it is dead, here and now?” Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 362, 369, 371. The impossibility of predicating death as a subjective experience is captured by Samuel Weber’s reading of Sigmund Freud’s essay “Thoughts for the Times on War and Death.” “To

Despite the impossibility of holding knowledge over the experience of our death, reconciliation with the fact of human mortality marks the promise of beginning. Following Critchley: “If God is bracketed out as the possible source of a response to the question of the meaning of life, then the response to that question must be sought within life, conceived as a finite temporal stretch between birth and death.”⁷⁵⁴ As Arendt reminds us, this response can effect an understanding – beginning with birth and ending with death – through which mortality can be endured. Thus, only through nihilism’s delineation does redemption, as both transformation and understanding, become worldly possible.

Delineating nihilism, Critchley argues, is not an inquiry into life’s meaning. “If one has to ask the question of the meaning of life, then one has somehow missed the point.” From the perspective of redemption, the question must be refigured. Meaning and meaninglessness are problems of mortality, categories through which individuals confront, accept, and deny death as absolute. For Critchley, “*the ultimate meaning of human finitude is that we cannot find meaningful fulfillment for the finite.*”⁷⁵⁵ The impossibility of finding meaning in mortality becomes the fulfillment of “redemption from redemption,” where meaning is drawn from the very fact of its impossibility.⁷⁵⁶ Recalling Derrida, Critchley argues that the impossible

think of one’s own death as one normally thinks of other things, namely, by representing it, is to transform it into a spectacle and ourselves into spectators and thereby to miss what distinguishes it from all other worldly events and phenomena: the cessation of our being in the world. To represent one’s own death is thus necessarily to misrepresent it.” See Samuel Weber, *Targets of Opportunity: On the Militarization of Thinking* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 53.

⁷⁵³ I take this notion of death as the impossible necessary from Derrida, who writes in response to Maurice Blanchot’s pronouncement *the instant of my death henceforth always in abeyance*: “Death is, in a single stroke, the ‘impossible necessary,’ where impossibility and necessity co-implicate each other, both subject and attribute each other abidingly.” Jacques Derrida, *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 47.

⁷⁵⁴ Critchley, *Very Little...Almost Nothing*, 29.

⁷⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁷⁵⁶ Critchley characterizes this as a way of “making a meaning out of the refusal of meaning, ... without that refusal of meaning becoming a meaning.” *Ibid.*, 177.

possibility of redemption requires “a commemorative thinking of that which is destined to us and destined handed down historically.”⁷⁵⁷ With Adorno, Arendt, Benjamin, and Derrida, he reminds us that “the reality or unreality of redemption hardly matters. What is important is the messianic demand and not whether this demand is underwritten by some guarantee of redemption. In its very impossibility, the demand leaves open the horizon of the possible understood, I think, as the realm of future *action*.” Thus, messianism amounts to a refusal of redemption in the name of redemption. Action satisfies the “messianic demand” of redemption through a “commemorative thinking” that opposes nihilism (whether active or passive) and affirms political responsibility as a possibility of meaning.

Paying particular attention to *Endgame*, Critchley examines the work of Samuel Beckett to unearth the ethical implications of this affirmation, what he will later call an approval of the demand of infinite responsibility.⁷⁵⁸ For Critchley, ethics is a way of attuning oneself to this responsibility, redressing the ‘moral deficit’ that lies at the core of modern democratic politics. “Ethics is the disturbance of the political status quo.”⁷⁵⁹ This disturbance follows from a critical practice of independent thought and reflective judgment oriented by both past and future, the result of which is understanding, an unending process of meaning creation. If understanding is variable, and reconciliation is unending, then the production of meaning will always be partial, or asymmetric to the experience or event being understood.

⁷⁵⁷ Ibid., 21.

⁷⁵⁸ Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (London: Verso, 2007).

⁷⁵⁹ Critchley’s diagnosis of a moral deficit – “a lack at the heart of democratic life that is intimately bound up with the felt inadequacy of official secular conceptions of morality,” corresponds to what I earlier describe as political disaffection, inaction tacitly affirming the status quo. “In the drift of this deficit, we experience the moral claims of our societies as externally compulsory, but not internally compelling.” Ibid., 8, 39.

However, to forego meaning as a conclusive end is not to foreclose the possibility of meaning all together. Rather, to draw meaning from its very refusal is, following Critchley, “a necessary and impossible task.” This task must be taken up by public forms of commemoration if they are to facilitate an ongoing practice of meaning creation from the aporia that is meaning. Refusing “to offer up a simple and determinate meaning that might be used as a guide for redemption,” memorial architecture has the potential to provide a mode of experience – bridging the aesthetic, the historical, the political, and the ethical – generative of reconciliation redeemed from a terminal notion of redemption.⁷⁶⁰

What might redemption without end look like from the perspective of contemporary memorial architecture? As I have argued throughout, the meaning of an event in memorial cannot be imposed from outside the affected subject, which implies that memorials must resist giving positive expression or conceptual formalization to any kind of universal truth, moral lesson, or normative value.⁷⁶¹ Insofar as tradition – as art, history, or heritage – is irreducible to didactic means, public memorial ought to reject the functionalization of its modes of transmission and reception. Tradition, as such, is not an object to be preserved, but a pursuit of practice.⁷⁶² To this effect, there is a feedback between tradition and action: each draws and returns life to the other. Circumscribing tradition to a universal narrative *in order to* draw out a

760 Critchley, *Very Little...Almost Nothing*, xxiii.

761 “Once tradition is no longer animated by a comprehensive substantial force but has to be conjured up by means of citations because ‘It’s important to have tradition,’ then whatever happens to be left of it is dissolved into a means to an end.” Theodor Adorno, *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998), 175.

762 Tradition, or what Michel Foucault calls heritage, is not an “acquisition, a possession that grows and solidifies; rather, it is an unstable assemblage of faults, fissures, and heterogeneous layers that threaten the fragile inheritor from within or from underneath.” “It disturbs what was previously considered immobile; it fragments what was thought unified; it shows the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent with itself.” See Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” 82.

lesson or explain a phenomenon, rather than allowing it to appear *for the sake of* the particular, weakens the redemptive potential of thinking through memory.⁷⁶³

Thinking through memory, I argue, embraces the challenge of representation (discursive and material) by acknowledging the non-identity of thought and the incommensurability of meaning, i.e. by forgoing the instrumental pursuits of redemption and reconciliation.

Representation, even at its contested limit, does not mean that there is nothing to say. Silence, as invoked by an aesthetic of absence,⁷⁶⁴ is not a source of authenticity or authority.⁷⁶⁵ With Adorno, “in silence we simply use the state of objective truth to rationalize our subjective incapacity, once more degrading truth into a lie.”⁷⁶⁶ The promise of memorial architecture is to help us move beyond our subjective incapacities, so that we may achieve a reconciliation with reality for which we alone are responsible.

763 “To renounce radically the possibility of experiencing the traditional would be to capitulate to barbarism out of a devotion to culture.” Ibid., 176.

764 An aesthetic of absence (as pursued by the memorials of Arad and Walker, Libeskind, Lin, and Eisenman) is not, by virtue of its lack of a formal didactic message, silent. The various manipulations of form, space, and order involved in the architectural predication of experience unavoidably registers an index of meaning.

765 As Michael Rothberg explains, “Adorno preempts the reading of his proposition that implies that because the horror of the annihilation of the Jews cannot be perfectly imitated or reproduced according to the ideals of a naïve realism (as if anything could be), all artistic representation should cease.” The success of art lies in its inability to represent the past, as it was or otherwise. See Rothberg, “After Adorno: Culture in the Wake of Catastrophe,” 69.

766 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 367.

Conclusion: The Democratic Future of Public Memorial

The chapters above have invited us to think about issues of memory, space, and politics for the sake of exploring the democratic potential of public memorial. Asserting the importance of space as that which lies between memory and politics, they defend an ethically aware and politically engaged historical sensibility. Memory, as argued throughout the dissertation, is related to the built environment as a plastic medium marked by – and generative of – ephemeral experiences with place and history. Domesticating space and mediating our relation to time, architecture has the unique capacity to move us away from familiar modes of perceiving and understanding. With other aesthetic works, it has the ability to give space to modes of thinking and acting outside of moral considerations and instrumental pursuits. Memorial architecture realizes this potential when it no longer subsumes memory to knowledge claims and ethical imperatives.

A recurring theme of the dissertation is the belief in memorial architecture's ability to stimulate multiple and intersecting points of meaning. Giving material form to the past, it holds the possibility of inspiring memory without becoming an arbiter of meaning, for any pretension of mastering the past leaves each of us in a passive relationship to the immutable events of history.

Circumscribing public memorial to a pedagogical function risks conflating our understanding of the past to an object of knowledge. Yet as we have seen, knowledge and understanding are not the same. The process of understanding – which passes from knowing facts, to understanding their meaning, to acting upon the demands they place on us – makes knowledge meaningful. In order to preserve the possibility of meaning for future generations,

public memorial should account for historical facts, while also provoking a practice of remembrance transformative of our relation to facts. Facts do not have inherent meanings; rather, their significance needs to be created through judgment. On my reading, the inherent vulnerability and indeterminacy of their meaning is not a danger, but a political possibility.

Remembrance, as we have seen, becomes a political act by challenging the givenness of history. To view history as the unpredictable and contingent result of human action is to give time to alternate futures. It is not just to say that things could have happened differently, but to draw out the unique historical significance of action by putting it to the test of judgment. Through reflective judgment, by which we judge without a concept or a rule, history is transformed from a fact to an event. As an event, history coincides with the moment of politics. In other words, history takes place as past experiences are rescued in a recuperative gesture of memorial action, through which memory attains its worldly and material reality in the form of meaning.

Thinking through memory, reflective judgment makes the past politically meaningful by altering our relationship to it. Making memory politically meaningful is less a matter of claiming a universal truth, and more an act of reclaiming the past from pretensions to truth. Reflective judgment facilitates such acts of reclamation by reconfiguring the relations between objects of knowledge and experience. Opening the possibility of relating to knowledge and experience in ways that are sensible and figural rather than representational and temporal, reflective judgment provokes our understanding in its search for meaning. It is a mode of acknowledging that saves action from becoming a property of reason.

Recognizing the past as heterogeneous to the order of reason and empirical validity, reflective judgment seeks out plurality and calls upon the imagination to gain critical perspective and distance not only from objective and moral categories of judgment but from one's own opinions and beliefs. The ability and willingness to see from standpoints not one's own liberates us from instrumental pursuits and private interests. Taking up other points of view and bringing these views to bear on how we think and act generates shared meanings. Enabling the generation of shared meanings through a multiplicity of perspectives, I have argued, ought to be a fundamental charge of public memorial.

Educational and cultural institutions aid memory and encourage reflection on the moral and spiritual questions raised by the events and figures they represent through the dissemination of knowledge. Yet they should also facilitate the formation of a critical public capable of acknowledging what they know and making the kind of political judgments that are essential to democratic life. Public memorials excite a democratic ethos by maintaining a reflexive and self-critical attitude, one capable of adapting the values motivating their inception to the needs of the present.

As I have shown through readings of contemporary memorial architecture, public memorial has the potential to upset the dichotomy of subjective understanding and objective knowledge by nurturing judgments transformative of our relation to reality. Doing away with the didactic space of timeless truth, I have argued, opens the way for intersubjective modes of understanding. Prompting local and immediate encounters with pasts whose traditions (once objects to be preserved) are pursuits of practice, public memorial helps us move beyond our

subjective incapacities so that we may achieve reconciliation with reality for which we alone are responsible.

Thought in terms of a political responsibility, reconciliation is a self-conscious inheritance of the past. Neither empathy nor identification, reconciliation is a form of understanding that enables individuals to affirm the past without being determined by its finality.

One way of reconciling individuals to the past's finality while also loosening the appearance of historical necessity is through storytelling. The notion of storytelling developed throughout this study is that of a historical transmission that insists on history's original role as remembrance. To articulate history by means of memory, public memorial must do away with the idea of the past as an object of knowledge. Reducing lived experience to an object of knowledge, I have argued, cuts short the reflective act of judgment demanded by democratic practice.

As we have seen in the works of Walter Benjamin and Hannah Arendt, storytelling offers a praxis-oriented notion of remembrance. Encouraging participation, it asks its audience to look upon the world from a multiplicity of perspectives. Drawing its authority, power, and legitimacy from the relay of experience, rather than epistemological or empirical truth claims, storytelling forges bonds capable of releasing their energy long after they have been lived or narrated in the form of a story. Communicating experience rather than knowledge, this narrative practice troubles our assumptions that memory and its meanings can be presented and preserved with definitive certainty. Neither wholly objective nor merely subjective, the meanings that emerge through the relay of past and present impart a common field of reference on reality. Out of this

shared space, action attains political legibility and a place of worldly significance in memory.

Thus, storytelling – and the judgment it inspires – transforms spectators into actors.

History, as we have seen, is not one story, but many, where the meaning of events and experiences change over time. Recognizing the interpretive aspects of narrative representation, storytelling preserves within history a degree of the hypothetical and contingent, reclaiming the power of beginning from the explanatory logic of causality.

Throughout the dissertation, my task has been to show that public memorial is capable of storytelling. Along the way I have called attention to the dangers of objectivism, a view on the past that imposes meaning while relegating judgment to its determinative form. Obviating the politically disaffecting modes of objectivist accounts of history (i.e., those that subsume memory to a moral or universal narrative of progress, domesticating memory by way of nostalgia, sentimentality, and empathy), a recent run of museums-cum-memorials have attempted to pluralize the meaning of memory by emphasizing non-linearity, narrative choice, and the play of signification. Yet by insisting on the singularity of meaning and the ineffability of experience, these memorials compromise the intersubjective mode of meaning formation constitutive of human plurality.

Using Arendt's claim that the *polis* is a form of organized remembrance as my point of departure, I have asked whether public memorial can facilitate a political practice of remembrance and forgetting. Events have an after-life in memory, but their relationship to memory is negotiable. To the extent that all memory is selective, remembrance is always an act of forgetting. Imparting closure on memory confuses the relationship of memory and forgetting as one of mutual exclusivity. Public memorial ought to acknowledge the material effects of

forgetting on our political practices, balancing the objective demands of knowledge and the subjective claims of experience by cultivating an intersubjective ethos of critical reflection.

Memory is inescapably social, yet in order to have political significance it must be made meaningful. A politically mindful act of remembrance – one that makes the intangible durable and gives traction to that which is always passing, namely, time – is about altering our relationship to the past. Liberating the present from feelings of resentment, forgiveness reconfigures our relationship to the past by drawing and releasing the power of memory. To conclude, I would like to clarify the political stakes of forgiveness for a democratic notion of remembrance. Returning to the theme of reconciliation, I ask whether forgiveness can attend to the human desire for understanding and its search for meaning. If, as I have argued, the present cannot be relieved of the responsibility history throws upon it, how should communities mourn pasts they would rather forget?

Truth and Reconciliation

We, the people of South Africa,
Recognise the injustices of our past.⁷⁶⁷

-- Preamble: Constitution of the Republic of South Africa

That upon caution of the Future time, a man ought to pardon the offences past of them that repenting, desire it. For pardon, is nothing but granting of Peace.⁷⁶⁸

-- Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*

767 Statutes of the Republic of South Africa: Constitutional Law, *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act*, No. 108 of 1996, Preamble. www.info.gov.za/documents/constitution/1996/a108-96.pdf. “We therefore, through our freely elected representatives, adopt this Constitution as the supreme law of the Republic so as to heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights.”

768 Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed., Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 106; Chapter 15, sixth law of nature.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines the verb reconcile as follows: “to bring (a person) again into friendly relations to or with (oneself or another) after an estrangement.”⁷⁶⁹ To reconcile means, if not to bring into harmony, then to at least move in its direction. Reconciliation repairs old relations in the founding of new ones. In functional and pragmatic terms, it entails squaring divergent opinions and perspectives, making contradictory facts or stories consistent or compatible with one another so that past wrongs do not endure as a source of future antagonism.⁷⁷⁰ In its collective form, reconciliation is a kind of therapeutic social healing, a settling of accounts through which opposing groups work out their differences. Understood as a political value, reconciliation is an end to be pursued within the institutional (juridical) framework of a liberal-democratic state, such that social and national reconciliation are incorporated into the normative goals of public policy.⁷⁷¹ Assuming a backward- and forward-looking perspective, reconciliation takes the form of a reckoning with the past on the basis of reasonable hope on a shared future.

Truth commissions promote reconciliation by providing an institutional context for the airing of grievances. They help ease political tensions, reconstructing and arbitrating the past through a myriad of complimentary and opposing perspectives. In search of an official historical record, truth commissions provide a forum for disagreement, thereby defusing potential sources of latent conflict. A guiding principle of truth commissions is that reconciliation is possible on the condition that truth is acknowledged.

769 “Reconcile, 1a,” *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., eds. J.A. Simpson and E.S.C. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989). OED Online Oxford University Press. 10 Nov. 2007. <http://dictionary.oed.com/>.

770 Reconciliation would entail the harmonization of “incommensurable world views so that inevitable and continuing conflicts and differences stand at least within a single universe of comprehensibility.” Kader Asmal, Louise Asmal, and Ronald Suresh Roberts, *Reconciliation Through Truth: A Reckoning of Apartheid's Criminal Governance* (Cape Town and New York: David Philip, James Currey, St. Martin's Press, 1997), 162.

771 For a normative account of societal reconciliation see Darrel Moellendorf, “Reconciliation as a Political Value,” *Journal of Social Philosophy* 38, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 205-221.

Yet reconciliation, in its functional and pragmatic mode, may have less to do with truth and more to do with ending ongoing practices of injustice.⁷⁷² Pervasive and prolonged abuses, whether sanctioned by the state or legitimated by its ambivalence, leave behind powerful legacies that survive moments of loss and suffering. For reconciliation to take hold, societies must break with cycles of violence that renew wrongs.⁷⁷³ Burying the past can help the present move forward, but may do so at the expense of denying history and depriving future generations of their collective past and cultural heritage. Giving voice to repressed experiences may have a cathartic effect, but it can also perpetuate feelings of resentment and victimization. Confronting legacies of violence do well to help prevent their recurrence, yet they also increase tensions and deepen old wounds.⁷⁷⁴ Some may want to forgive and/or forget, while others might reject

772 When deciding between truth and justice, argues philosopher José Zalaquett, one should choose truth. “Truth does not bring back the dead, but releases them from silence.” According to this logic, “a community should not wipe out a part of its past, because it will be filled by lies and contradictory, confusing accounts of what happened.” See Antjie Krog, *Country of My Skull: Guilt, Sorrow, and the Limits of Forgiveness in the New South Africa* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2000), 32.

773 Put simply, vengeance characterizes “the impulse to retaliate when wrongs are done. Through vengeance, we express our basic self-respect.” Thus understood, vengeance informs notions of equivalence and justice. Yet vengeance can also “set in motion a downward spiral of violence, or an unquenchable desire that traps people in cycles of revenge, recrimination, and escalation.” Forgiveness offers a way of preventing escalations of violence. Often growing out of a desire to reconnect and recognize the common humanity of others, forgiveness helps strengthen one’s trust in community. As Martha Minow explains, “through forgiveness, we can renounce resentment, and avoid the self-destructive effects of holding on to pain, grudges, and victimhood. The act of forgiving can reconnect the offender and the victim and establish or renew a relationship; it can heal grief; forge new, constructive alliances; and break cycles of violence.” Though vengeance and forgiveness are motivated by concerns of reparation and prevention, the two stand in opposition: “to forgive is to let go of vengeance; to avenge is to resist forgiving.” “Through forgiveness, victims reassert their own power and reestablish their own dignity while also teaching wrongdoers the effects of their harmful actions.” Still, forgiveness may lead to an exemption of punishment. Granting amnesty or pardon can institutionalize forgetfulness and sacrifice justice in a premature move to normalcy. See Martha Minow, *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), 10, 21.

774 “A common formulation,” writes legal scholar Martha Minow, “posits the two dangers of wallowing in the past and forgetting it. Too much memory or not enough; too much enshrinement of victimhood or insufficient memorializing of victims and survivors; too much past or too little acknowledgment of the past’s staging of the present.” What is needed, she argues, is a “formal response to atrocity, some national or international reframing of the events.” Reframing can take on various forms, whether it be aesthetic (memorials, monuments, museums, sculptures, music, poetry, drama), ritualistic (days of memory), or didactic (reforming public education to account for past atrocities; television or radio talk shows and other such informal settings). Whatever form these responses take, they ought to “resist any implication of exactness or closure,” which are impossible to achieve. Because silence is unacceptable, and “legal responses are inevitably frail and insufficient,” an ethic of mutual

reconciliation all together, which to them would deny their experience of suffering. Truth commissions must consider these issues in all of their complexity to arrive at a pragmatic view of what they can achieve.

In her comprehensive account of the development of truth commissions, Priscilla Hayner describes these intermediaries as temporary institutional bodies (lasting six months to two years) whose general mandate is to investigate patterns of abuse over a defined period of time, culminating in an officially sanctioned report of their findings (authorized or empowered by the state). On the whole, truth commissions lack the juridical power to judge or execute and cannot force anyone to speak or testify. Offering what Hayner describes as a victim centered approach rather than one oriented toward the assignation of culpability, truth commissions investigate patterns of abuse by documenting specific events.⁷⁷⁵ Whether or not amnesty is a defined objective, truth commissions are meant to “discover, clarify, and formally acknowledge past abuses; to outline institutional responsibility and recommend reforms; and to promote reconciliation and reduce conflict over the past.” The power of truth commissions, Hayner explains, is that they “can reveal a global truth of the broad patterns of events, and demonstrate without question the atrocities that took place and what forces were responsible.”⁷⁷⁶

To this end, fact-finding is paramount. Intended to end the silence and denial of past wrongs, this evidentiary process addresses the problem of how to forgive without knowing whom to forgive. Fact finding is not so much about unearthing a hidden truth or deeper meaning, but about revealing those that are well known but continue to go unspoken or

acknowledgment must be nurtured among victims, perpetrators, and bystanders. See Minow, *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness*, 2.

⁷⁷⁵ In this regard, truth commissions differ from war crime investigations, which, often through a supra-national body, evaluate evidence with the intent of international prosecution.

⁷⁷⁶ Priscilla B. Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 24, 85.

unacknowledged. This objective confronts those who deny the past with a formal acknowledgment of wrong and admission of violence. In this way, truth commissions afford victims the opportunity to communicate their story, to give their voice a public hearing.

What does it mean when a people claim that they recognize past injustices? Does this recognition, whether literal or symbolic, mark a request and/or granting of forgiveness? Does forgiveness necessarily follow a formal apology? Are acts of forgiveness and apology exclusively related to individuals? These questions inform the way in which the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission presents itself as a working through of the legacy of Apartheid.

The idea of a national truth commission in South Africa began to take shape following the 1994 presidential election of Nelson Mandela.⁷⁷⁷ A year after holding its first fully representative elections, South Africa passed the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act, which inaugurated the South Africa Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in December of that year. The act empowered the commission to grant amnesty to individuals, search and seize evidence, subpoena witnesses, and run a witness protection program.⁷⁷⁸ In all, over twenty-one thousand victims, witnesses, and perpetrators testified in public hearings. These hearings received intense media coverage in print, television, and live radio address. Concluding

⁷⁷⁷ Among the many difficult issues facing the new democracy's truth commission were debates as to whether or not the commission would grant amnesty, which was one of the formal conditions sought after by the South African government and military. The decision was made that "amnesty shall be granted in respect of acts, omissions and offenses associated with political objectives and committed in the course of the conflicts of the past." Abuses motivated by racism without political intent would not be granted amnesty. See *South African Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act 1995*, <http://www.doj.gov.za/trc/legal/act9534.htm> "The greatest innovation of the commission, and the most controversial of its powers," writes Hayner, "was its ability to grant individual amnesty for politically motivated crimes committed between 1900 and 1994. The commission received over seven thousand applications for amnesty. Amnesty was granted only to those who fully confessed to their involvement in past crimes and showed them to be politically motivated." "Neither an apology nor any sign of remorse was necessary to be granted amnesty." Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths*, 243.

⁷⁷⁸ Ibid., 41.

in October 1998 with a five-volume report, the commission's findings focused primarily on gross human rights violations committed between March 1960 and May 1994. These violations entailed killings, abductions, torture, and severe ill-treatment, and excluded the practice of forced removals (the state sponsored relocation of indigenous people to barren and undesirable land). While these removals were already well documented, their exclusion from the documentary process prevented many from voicing their experience of victimization. For Ugandan scholar Mahmood Mamdani, the omission instantiated "the founding myth of the new South Africa" through a "compromised truth," writing "the vast majority of victims out of history."⁷⁷⁹

A discursive mode rather than a material form of confronting historical acts of violence, the TRC represents a social practice of coming to terms with the past through an institutional framework.⁷⁸⁰ Put simply, the TRC was a means for national and societal reconciliation. Forty-five years of apartheid, characterized by killings, tortures, imprisonment, resettlements,

⁷⁷⁹ Ibid., 74.

⁷⁸⁰ If South Africa's negotiated re-founding finds its voice in the proceedings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, its material expression can be found in the recently completed Constitution Hill (2004). The 95,000-square-meter heritage site is both an urban regeneration project and a mixed-use cultural precinct located within Johannesburg's Hillbrow district. It is comprised of the Constitutional Court, various statutory bodies, museums, exhibition and performance spaces, and commercial space for related retail and hospitality services. A modern campus for the protection of human rights, the Constitutional Court (whose open glass structure, like the dome of Germany's Reichstag, symbolizes openness and transparency) is responsible for the preservation and interpretation of the South African Constitution. The new Court stands atop the Old Fort, the former Johannesburg prison complex infamously known as Number Four. Originally a military garrison, Number Four is likened by Mark Gevisser, content advisor to Constitution Hill's Heritage, Education, and Tourism team, to "a gash in the landscape," "an absent center ... right in the middle of the city." The site's authenticity is only part of its appeal. Located in Hillbrow, a multiethnic inner-city neighborhood in transition, Constitution Hill is situated among the ruins of racial violence, "a place where you find yourself between the past and the future, and where you understand that the only way the future can happen, resting on the past, is through your agency as someone in the present." Gevisser's description draws out the political promise of Constitution Hill. As in Berlin, the literal and symbolic capital of memorials, museums, and monuments commemorating the victims of Germany's genocidal violence, "you are in the imperfect present, and you can make the future happen by understanding the past. There's nothing triumphalist about it. Like South Africa itself, [Constitution Hill] is a work in progress." To this effect, the site participates in what has become commonplace in our contemporary memorial vernacular: ambiguity and absence. "There's an essential contradiction to the site that is also the core of its energy: it needs to be both sacred space and living, vibrant space. Sacred because of the ghosts who inhabit the prisons, ... vibrant because it is the place where the Constitution becomes a living, breathing document, a place where democracy is both at work and at play, where we perform the values of the Constitution into being." See Mark Gevisser "From the Ruins: The Constitution Hill Project," *Public Culture* 16, no. 3 (Fall 2004): 507-519.

economic and social discrimination, and thirty plus years of armed resistance by the military wing of the African National Congress, was to have been worked through by oral and written documentation. Testimony was to serve first and foremost as a recognition of wrong, an acknowledgement of abuse demanding redress. Rewriting the official historical record “offered the possibility of reparations for past wrongs, and the possibility of democratic engagement through the democratization of the way the past [was] storied,” thus opening “the potential for a multiplicity of voices to expose and remember atrocities as atrocities.”⁷⁸¹ As Verne Harris, Director of the South African History Archive, explains, the commission exhibited a “commitment to public disclosure and storytelling. ... Central to the TRC’s endeavor was resisting denial and erasure. But equally central was the bringing of healing – in other words, tell the story not in order to then forget what happened, but tell it so that the pain, guilt, anguish, hatred and so on – as lived experience – can be forgotten.”⁷⁸²

Seen in this light, the effects of the commission exemplify a kind of reconciliation with reality that avoids the trappings of resentment.⁷⁸³ “Atrocities were to be remembered as atrocities regardless of which side committed them. In this, the TRC intended not only to break the repetition of past violence, but also to depart from history and justice written by the victors alone.”⁷⁸⁴

781 Brendese, Philip J. “The Politics of the Impossible: Memory and Democratic Practice” (PhD diss., Duke University, 2005), 69.

782 Verne Harris, “The Truth And Reconciliation Commission: An Exercise In Forgetting?” www.saha.org.za/research/publications/FOIP_5_1_Harris.pdf

783 On this point, the interim constitution of South Africa (1993) is quite telling: “The adoption of this Constitution lays the secure foundation for the people of South Africa to transcend the divisions and strife of the past, which generated gross violations of human rights, the transgression of humanitarian principles in violent conflicts and a legacy of hatred, fear, guilt and revenge. These can now be addressed on the basis that there is a need for understanding but not for vengeance, a need for reparation but not for retaliation, a need for *ubuntu* but not for victimisation.” <http://www.info.gov.za/documents/constitution/93cons.htm>

784 Brendese, “The Politics of the Impossible: Memory and Democratic Practice,” 53.

Though pluralizing the way in which the past is narrated offers a more comprehensive account of culpability, the commission – sanctioned, authorized, legitimated, and concluded by the state – participates in the construction of an official historical record. In Harris’s words, “for the state the TRC is no more than a tool for providing a nod at remembering in the interests of a profounder forgetting.”⁷⁸⁵ The archival and documentary process carried out by the commission betrays a pathology of forgetting insofar as it circumscribes memory to an intentional act of remembrance.⁷⁸⁶ As such, it fails to acknowledge the ambivalent temporality of memory and forgetting that lies at the core of a redemptive act of remembrance, which, I have argued, is the residual remainder reclaimed in a moment of political resistance and ethical responsibility. Thus, the commission illustrates some of the inherent difficulties of promoting reconciliation on a collective scale, where the burden of memory is diffuse and the onus of responsibility is elusive.

Returning to the question of reconciliation as it relates to forgiveness, it is clear that from the standpoint of redemption (as refigured in Chapter 5) forgiveness is irreducible to a process of reconciliation or therapeutic healing that would recognize the traumatic experience or violent event closed, complete, and final. Such is the position defended by Jacques Derrida in his 1999

785 Verne Harris, “The Truth And Reconciliation Commission: An Exercise In Forgetting?” www.saha.org.za/research/publications/FOIP_5_1_Harris.pdf. A more forgiving, yet also critical reading of the TRC is provided by Philip Brendese: “Though its historiography is decidedly more democratic, its commissioned memories are products of a brokerage of power and are constrained by the procedural limitations and substantive focus of a specific institutional process. . . . A democratic institution of counter-remembering the past requires a continuous challenge to institutionalized memories that exclude voices from the margins.” Brendese, “The Politics of the Impossible: Memory and Democratic Practice,” 81.

786 Once “archived by a ‘universal conscience’ better informed than ever,” the crimes of the twenty-first century signal a call to forgiveness, which is more an ethical cover for the permission to forget. See Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, 32.

essay “On Forgiveness.”⁷⁸⁷ Derrida’s point of entry into the question of forgiveness is neither legal reparation nor cultural reconciliation. Forgiveness, on his account, is incommensurable to juridical codes and moral prescriptives. The latter, circumscribing forgiveness to a mediation between private parties whereby guilt and injury are assigned to particular wrongs, call for salvation, redemption, and consensus, each of which, for Derrida, mark a bounded horizon.⁷⁸⁸ Yet only the unforgivable – without condition – can be forgiven.

Derrida contests the conditionality of forgiveness. “Conditional forgiveness,” he argues, “concur[s] with law and politics, but it gets reduced to a therapy of reconciliation.”⁷⁸⁹ Conditional forgiveness is calculable, whereas unconditional forgiveness stands outside the order of calculability, that is, reason.

“Must we not accept that, in heart or on reason, above all when it is a question of ‘forgiveness,’ something arrives which exceeds all institution, all power, all juridico-political authority?”⁷⁹⁰ Refigured by Derrida as an impossibility, forgiveness names an open-ended reconciliation with the past, preserved into the future as a promise of infinite responsibility. A promise is an act of inheritance, meaning it is both handed down and claimed. It is also an act of

787 The English “On Forgiveness,” is the text of an interview by Michel Wieviorka “Le siècle et le pardon,” from *Le Monde des débats* (9 Décembre 1999): 10-17. www.hydra.umn.edu/derrida/siecle.html.

788 According to Arendt, “it is always salvation which is the miracle, not ruin; only salvation, and not ruin, depends upon the freedom of man and his capacity to change the world and its natural course.” On her account, salvation depends upon what man does in the world, not what is done to man. Like Derrida, Arendt’s notion of salvation is active rather than passive. When individuals absolve themselves of the responsibility to act for the sake of the world they become a mere appendage of historical necessity (“a manifestly superfluous functionary of the natural law of transience”). “Just as surely as a house built by men according to human laws will fall into ruin as soon as men abandon it, so surely the world fabricated by men and constituted according to human and not natural laws will once again become part of nature, and will be surrendered to catastrophic destruction when man decides to become himself a part of nature – a blind but highly precise instrument of natural laws.” Arendt, “Franz Kafka, Appreciated Anew,” in *Reflections on Literature and Culture*, 101.

789 Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida*, 144.

790 Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, (London: Routledge, 2001), 54.

memory, insofar as it makes an appeal on the future to recall what has past.⁷⁹¹ The promise preserves the indeterminacy of forgiveness so that past forms of violence (Benjamin's catastrophe, synonymous with the status quo) have an afterlife in the form of meaning for which all are responsible. Responsibility, thus understood, is immeasurable. It demands that which is beyond reason but not beyond measure, namely, judgment. In the words of Derrida, "it is between these two poles, *irreconcilable but indissociable*, that decisions and responsibilities are taken."⁷⁹²

For Derrida, the common or dominant axiom of the Abrahamic tradition of forgiveness, now secularized, "is that *forgiveness must have a meaning*. And this meaning must determine itself on the ground of salvation, of reconciliation, of redemption, atonement." Following convention, conditional forgiveness is teleologically oriented. However, "pure and unconditional forgiveness, in order to have its own meaning, must have no 'meaning,' no finality, even no intelligibility. It is a madness of the impossible."⁷⁹³ Such forgiveness is incalculable, that is, irreducible to the order of rule following enacted by determinative judgments. Forgiveness is singular, immediate, and situational. If it is to have meaning, forgiveness cannot be grounded in a maxim, truth, or any other founding principle.⁷⁹⁴

Forgiveness is an exceptional interruption: "it *should not be*, normal, normative, normalising. It *should* remain exceptional and extraordinary, in the face of the impossible: as if

791 Derrida claims that democracy "must have the structure of a promise – *and thus the memory of that which carries the future, the to-come, here and now.*" Jacques Derrida, *The Other Heading*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 78.

792 Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, 45.

793 *Ibid.*, 36, 45.

794 "If anyone had the right to forgive, it is only the victim, and not a tertiary institution." *Ibid.*, 44.

it interrupted the ordinary course of historical temporality.”⁷⁹⁵ Forgiveness and reconciliation are not opposed to one another. As Derrida makes clear, both must resist instrumental rationalization, or any other means-end procedure that would bring the critical work of forgiveness to an end. “A ‘finalized’ forgiveness is not forgiveness; it is only a political strategy or a psycho-therapeutic economy.”⁷⁹⁶

A forgiveness aimed at reconciliation – in view of an end, finality, or purpose – instrumentalizes politics. To avoid instrumentalization, forgiveness must remain “heterogeneous to the order of politics or of the juridical as they are ordinarily understood,” (i.e. as negotiations, calculated transactions, hypothetical imperatives). Political considerations “can certainly appear honorable; for example in the name of ‘national reconciliation.’”⁷⁹⁷ Yet one must keep close watch on the economic calculation and exchange between those who seek amnesty and reconciliation and those who forgive. Resisting normalization means perpetually interrogating the victor-victim distinction. When a community appeals to its constituents to heed the duty of memory, such as in the case of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, its call may have less to do with truth, justice, and forgiveness, and more to do with its own survival, so “that the traumatizations give way to the work of mourning, and that the Nation-State not be overcome by paralysis.”⁷⁹⁸

Recall that for Arendt, forgiveness redeems the past by releasing it from the hold of history and resentment. Forgiveness is a reconciliation with reality through which we understand what is and what was, a coming to terms with the past in the present. We are all capable of

795 “The time of forgiveness escapes the judicial process.” *Ibid.*, 32, 43. This is the disjunctive temporality of Benjamin’s remembrance and Arendt’s (political) reflective judgment.

796 *Ibid.*, 50.

797 *Ibid.*, 39.

798 *Ibid.*, 41.

forgiving and being forgiven insofar as we are human, that is, beings whose essence is beginning. The fact of beginning inherent in man suggests that forgiveness should not be thought in terms of closure, but of opening and possibility.

Thus, reconciliation is a political responsibility oriented around a promise whose temporality is imminent to the now of the present. Promising transcends the moment of its articulation as it keeps individuals together in the *wilderness of the world* long after they have parted. To speak of responsibility is thus to speak of a promise, a promise capable of founding islands of stability in oceans of uncertainty. Ignoring this responsibility condemns humanity, in the words of Arendt, “to wander helplessly and without direction in the darkness of each man’s lonely heart.”⁷⁹⁹

⁷⁹⁹ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 237.

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