

Identity, Representation, and the Politics of Recognition

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Competitors are challenged to create a memorial to the victims of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack on the Pentagon. Like all memorials, this one must speak *generally*—as the U.S. government’s official response, it represents all Americans—and *specifically*—it must also embody the deeply personal tragedy that the events of that day visited on the families of the victims. Whether it is large or small, kinetic or static, both the sponsors and the families of the victims want the memorial to address not only the loss of those murdered at the Pentagon, but the dedication to the principals of liberty and freedom that this terrible event re-awakened in people around the world (September 11, 2001 Pentagon Competition Guidelines, 4, italics added).

Competition entrants were challenged and invited to submit concepts for a ‘dignified’ memorial, a ‘testament’ honoring the 125 individuals killed in the Pentagon and the 59 innocent people who died aboard American Airlines Flight 77 September 11, 2001. (Pentagon Competition Guidelines, 8) This memorial competition is exemplary—it is the first completed memorial competition after September 11. The project also participates in a larger commemorative movement against the anonymity of mass killing in America.

Naming, ever since Maya Lin’s Vietnam War Memorial, has been a hallmark if not an explicit expectation placed on memorial design. Micheal Kimmelman, from the New York Times, remarks with curiosity and criticism the inherent value and potential familiarity in a name. He asserts “without thinking, we say we know someone when we know his [or her] name.” (New York Times, August 31, 2003) What is it about a name that makes it necessary for memorialization? What is it about *recognition* that is necessary in memorial design and memorial design competitions?

Recognition is arguably an important part of our environment of commemoration—as exemplified by the Vietnam War

Memorial and Hans and Torrey Butzer’s Oklahoma City Bombing Memorial—and memorial design competition criteria—as exemplified by the World Trade Center and Pentagon September 11, 2001 Memorials. (1) Built evidence of individuality and the prescribing of individual differentiation is evidence of our societal expectations, or, as Charles Taylor would state, our need and demand for recognition in political and public processes. (Taylor, 25)

This paper compares the construction of memory with respect to identity, representation, and recognition in the six final Pentagon Memorial Competition entries commemorating the September 11, 2001 attack on the Pentagon. Here, the ‘construction of memory’ connotes a making and consumption of material and conceptual structures enabling the formation of memory and remembering. Remembering, in turn, utilizes what is represented and recognizable.

The research presented in this paper is part of a broader investigation questioning the form, function, and phenomena of recognition existent in recent memorial design competitions commemorating violent events in the United States, namely the Oklahoma City Bombing Memorial, the Texas A&M Bonfire Memorial, and the forthcoming World Trade Center Memorial. The purpose of this paper is to engender discussion that knowledgeably engages issues surrounding the politics of recognition, the commemoration of violence, and the construction of memory in a multicultural society.

First, I will introduce the scope of analysis and the concept of recognition in Charles Taylor’s essay *Multiculturalism: examining the politics of recognition*. Second, I will discuss the six competing proposals in terms of identity, representation, and recognition. Lastly, I will articulate how the definition, production, and reception of memorial architecture commemorating violence in the United States is not critical of the lens by which we view difference nor the construction of commemoration.

Design competitions are committee processes that must negotiate the concept and built construct of representation. The decision to commemorate initiates a deliberative process concerning memory. Presumably, questions concerning *'who is to be remembered'* and *'who is remembering'* are central to memorializing. In addition, questions concerning *'what is represented'* as well as *'who is represented'* are closely associated with memory formation and identity politics. Constituent participation in design processes invites the expectation of ownership. This ownership, in conjunction with our democratic society, fuel the desire and demand for recognition.

Recognition, of both the living and the lost, has programmatic, formal, and spatial implications. Analysis therefore centers on the space and form of each memorial proposal as each relates to competition criteria, the representation and location of identity, and recognition.

What do I mean by the politics of recognition, equal dignity and difference? Why are they important? According to Charles Taylor, the acknowledgement of individual identity enables the construction of the self and in some instances, the construction of culture. Misrecognition or denial of recognition, can result in a form of oppression. Recognition, on the other hand, can result in a form of empowerment (Taylor, 25). Identities, therefore, have a dialogical character with other human beings – we at once acquire and express our identity while others read and project identities on to us. The dialectic surrounding recognition is paramount in self-discovery and self-affirmation – identity formation depends upon human relationships (Taylor, 32, 36). Similarly, memorialization is a dialectic, demanding an active relationship between the commemorated and the commemorator (Sensie, 27 and Smith, 105).

The notion of identity emerged at the end of the 18th century. Thinkers such as Rousseau, Herder, Hegel, and Kant produced an authentic, moral, and autonomous individual within a collective. During the Enlightenment, the collapse of social hierarchy, a system that distinguishes individuals by rank, was replaced with the notion of dignity. Dignity, a concept freely obtainable and compatible within democratic society, is a shared by the collective and is a discrete human characteristic. Its participation in the construction of identity places the act of recognition inseparable from democratic culture (Taylor, 27). Democracy, in turn, introduces and affirms the politics of equal recognition. (2)

Our modern notion of identity, however, is complicated the politics of difference, the belief that "everyone should be recognized for his or her unique identity" (Taylor, 38). Individual uniqueness conflicts with the notion of equal dignity and demand for recognition because multiculturalism asks that we acknowledge individual characteristics that are *not* shared (Taylor, 39). Here, we have conflict – between the demand for the recognition of equality and of difference.

Both the construction of the universal and acknowledgement of specificity have political and procedural implications relevant to the framing and execution of memorial design competition projects. Not only are we faced with political constructs of recognition, we encounter physical manifestations of recognition, beginning with site.

The memorial site (Fig. 1), as described in the competition brief, is 165 feet from the west façade of the Pentagon. Two roads bind the southern and western edges, the Arlington National Cemetery is north-northwest across route 27, and a clover-leaf is immediately southwest of the site. Pedestrian access is from the south, originating from the Metro station, and from the west, through a pedestrian tunnel under Interstate 395. Both pedestrian paths cross the south parking lot.

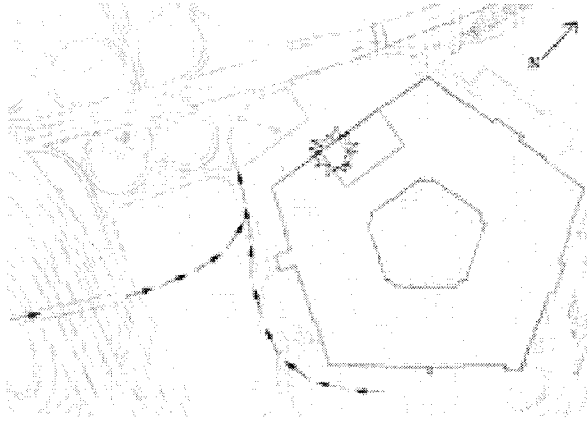


Fig. 1. Diagram of site illustrating pedestrian paths, flight path, point of impact, area of demolition, and memorial site (Pentagon Memorial Competition Guidelines).

While the site is a destination distant from the immediate infrastructure of the Pentagon's pedestrian system – paths intersect parking – and is framed by infrastructures larger than the pedestrian experience – limited access roadways and the Pentagon itself – the site is literally and contextually visible. The site is seen from the road and has an unobstructed visual relationship with the portion of the Pentagon American Airlines flight 77 hit. Visibility, in this instance, is privileged over scale or access. (3)

In addition to site, other criteria explicitly set forth by the competition include that the memorial design convey general and specific, national and individual, concepts pertaining to the tragedy (September 11, 2001 Pentagon Competition Guidelines, 4). The memorial should also be a "dignified and moving testament to the sacrifice of both those killed in the building, and the innocent people who died aboard American Airlines Flight 77 as it was crashed into the building" (September 11, 2001 Pentagon Competition Guidelines, 8). Differentiation of victims, in this instance, is privileged in conjunction with visibility.

The winning competition entry, number 1717, proposes a rational organization for individual memorial units within a memorial park. The organization is based upon differentiation and visibility. With respect to differentiation, memorial units are organized by both age and location of each victim at the time of the attack. Here, the number of children lost are made apparent through spatial separation (presumably there is a gap in ages) and the orientation of memorial units – 59 memorial units face one way while 125 units face another. Orientation of the memorial units clarify who was aboard the commercial aircraft and who was inside the building (Fig. 2).

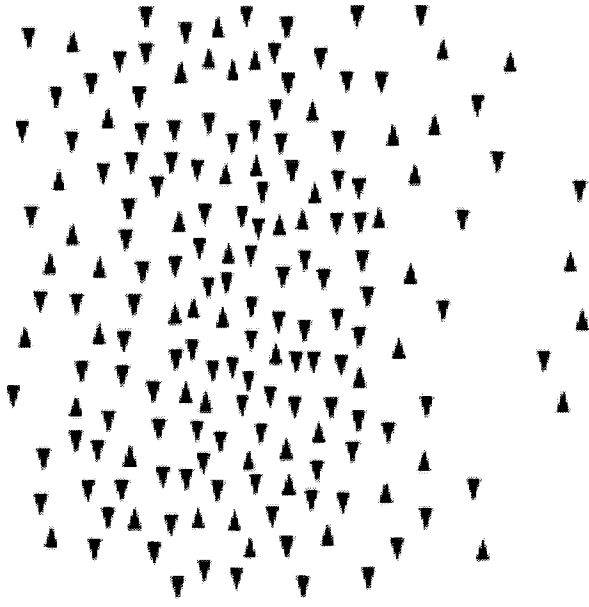


Fig. 2. Conceptual abstraction of victims' location organized by date of birth, entry 1717.

With respect to visibility, the specificity of recognition goes further – a visitor viewing an engraved name on a memorial unit representing a person killed in the Pentagon will see the reconstructed wall of the Pentagon. A visitor viewing an engraved name on a memorial unit representing a person lost aboard American Airlines Flight 77 will see the sky. The association and collage between view and individual name reinforces categories of differentiation. Difference in visual field is equated to difference among victims.

Entry number 1717 also proposes a wall visible on the site and from the road. This wall organizes information vertically in order to convey the totality of loss – all victims are part of a single wall – and individuality of loss – all victims are presented on the wall, chronologically, by age. Age, in this instance, corresponds to wall height.

Similar to 1717, entry number 2248, proposes 184 glass monoliths, each engraved with a victim's name, as part of an interdependent, cyclic, and interactive memorial experience. Here, memory is constructed through participation, through processes of renewal and regeneration. By design, visitors are

able to leave messages, traces, on a layer of condensation. Messages are then written and re-written as the identity of the visitor is superimposed on the representation of the individual victim (Fig 3). Both, visitor and victim, obtain recognition. Visibility is ephemeral and local.

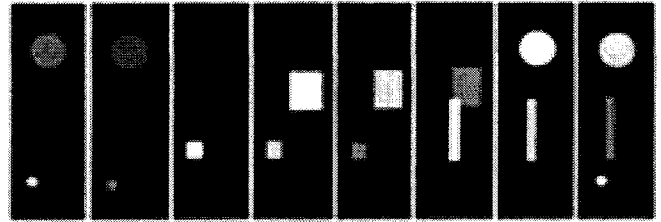


Fig. 3. Conceptual abstraction of time and participation, entry 2248.

Entry number 4163 proposes a pedestal as the symbol and process of democracy. Through the orchestration of perceived scale, the visitor is to understand the significance of the space, the list of names, the magnitude of the event, and the importance of memorials (Fig 4). Here, scale and time, whether intimate or monumental, present or past, is designed to promote recognition. Visitors, however, unlike entry 2248 must, through their imagination, activate and enact memory.

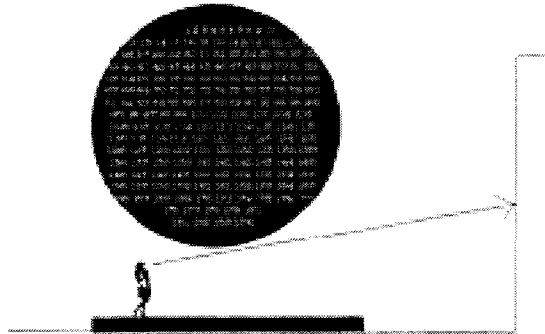


Fig. 4. Conceptual abstraction of form and imagination, entry 4163.

Similar to 4163, entry number 2857 proposes a tangible space of memory that collapses the form of individual recognition and democracy. Specifically, the space contains a large table, representing the meeting place of both family and government. The benches on either side of the table invoke multiple interpretations – they are empty and represent the loss, they are empty and available for us to occupy and mourn, they are empty and represent an absence of our governmental table, and/or they are empty and available for us to occupy and participate in democracy (Fig 5). The proposal implies a formal continuity between the private and public sphere, a shared loss, and a suggested emptiness. (4)

Entry number 4099 proposes a re-representation of aircraft black box life recorders as memory containers. The contents of each life recorder, 184 of them, is determined by the survivors of each victim. The surface of each Life Recorder has, etched, a map of the individual's birthplace. Aside from birth places, they

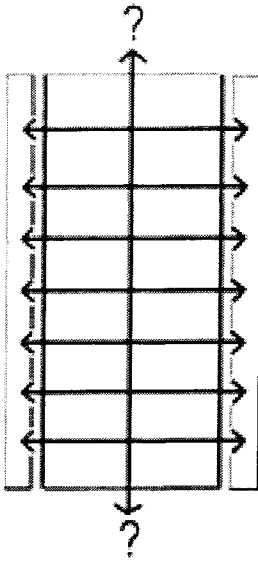


Fig. 5. Conceptual abstraction of table. entry 2857.

share an aesthetic – they are orange – and a specific purpose – reflecting the sky and water.

The life recorders are organized spatially in two shifted grids – alphabetical with a symbol denoting whether or not the victim was on American Airlines Flight 77 or in the Pentagon.

While life recorders are of the same dimension and constructed of the same materials, they contain and exhibit different information. They are simultaneously unified in form and place and differentiated by content. Here, difference is negotiated within the context of collective representation and recognition.

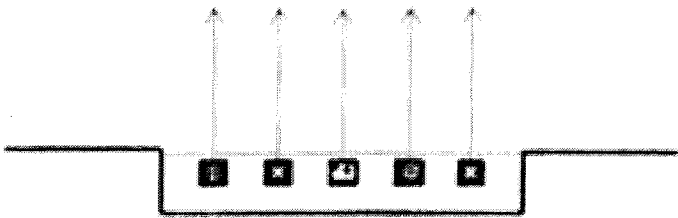


Fig. 6. Conceptual abstraction of unity and specificity. entry 4099.

Like entry 4099, entry number 1276 proposes a formal negotiation between individual and collective loss. Here, individual loss is removed or 'subtracted' from a proposed wall on the memorial site. The subtracted form is placed, by surviving family members, elsewhere in the world (Fig 7). Individual identity, therefore, is seen as a void, and can only be *imagined* as a discrete entity in a unique location.

The scattering of identity in entry number 1276 has significant implications; the site is no longer immediately tangible, processes of discovery necessitate time and distance, each victim's individuality is potentially heightened by the specific

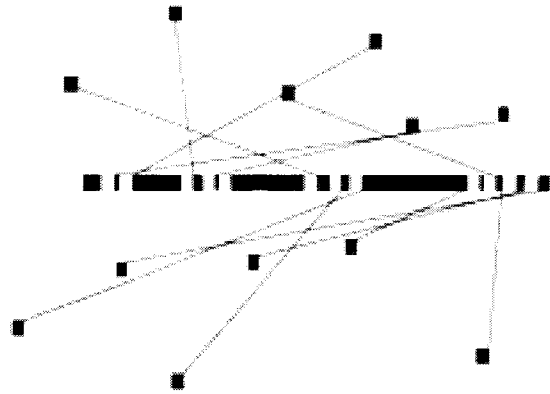


Fig. 7. Conceptual abstraction of subtraction and site. entry 1276.

location of his or her memorial, family and friends participate in the process of recognition, and visitors must theoretically travel to experience each discrete entity and know the socio-geographic impact of events on September 11, 2001.

With the exception of two, entries number 4163 and 2857, final entries represent each victim individually as a group of 184 'units.' The degree of difference, organization, and visibility of identity, however, of units varies.

Entries 4163 and 2857 share an ordering concept – democracy. Both utilize naming as representation in conjunction with a symbol – a pedestal or table. Compared to 1717, the degree of differentiation and specificity of recognition is less. Entry number 1717 utilizes an ordering device – age – to differentiate between individuals on American Airlines flight 77 and in the Pentagon. With respect to recognition this is universal – we share aging, we were once or will be any number of consecutive ages. Age, is therefore simultaneously differentiating and unifying and participating in the demand for recognition.

Entries 4099 and 1276 differ the most with respect to the degree of individuation and recognition. Entry number 1276, for example, extends recognition beyond the memorial site. Entry 4099, like 1276, does not utilize external categories to group victims – individuality of birthplace, for example, is part of individual recognition but not part of group recognition. More significantly, however, 4099 and 1276 require explicit participation on the part of surviving family members. The result of this participation – locating a memorial in New Jersey or determining the contents of a Life Recorder – is invisible to the public. We do not know the contents of the Life Recorder or the geographic location of the distant memorial.

Entry number 1717 not only keeps the construction of memory within the limits of the site both literally and figuratively, as described and presumed by the competition guidelines, it makes a categorization of victims visible. Categorization, in this instance, is acting as a surrogate means of representing

difference, not just 184 undifferentiated units marked by 184 different names.

The balance between heterogeneity and homogeneity of representation in memorial design is indicative of the conflict between the politics of recognition and the politics of difference. Charles Taylor's discussion of recognition aptly contextualizes the questions *'who is represented'* and *'who is remembering.'* First, I will address *'who is remembering'* in the context of identity and recognition. Second, I will address *'who is represented'* in the context of multiculturalism.

Memorials recognize individuals who are no longer able to demand recognition for themselves. As survivors, we represent and recognize victims on their behalf and use memorials to construct memory. In the context of identity formation, recognition affirms tragedy and loss for the living—we see ourselves in the memorial, participate in memorialization, and collapse our identity onto the event and the site. (5) The process of participatory recognition is analogous to Taylor's description of a dialectic relationship between identity and other human relations. Participatory recognition also fosters equality—all want to 'belong' similarly and respectfully.

Why discuss recent memorial design competitions in the context multiculturalism? The answer is at least two fold. Charles Taylor asserts the politics of difference is founded on equal recognition—difference is 'blind' and valued equally. Interestingly, competition entry number 1717 stratifies individuals into categories. We, for example, know, based on design, where someone died September 11, 2001. Entry number 1276, stratifies individuals into single entities—no two voids need to be alike. Do differences in age, location of death, birthplace, etc. constitute multiculturalism? No, but it constitutes difference, the basis of multiculturalism.

Here, I must return to Charles Taylor's examination and critique liberalism and the politics of equal dignity. First, 'difference-blind' liberalism is "not a possible meeting ground for all cultures, but is the political expression of one range of cultures". Second, "liberalism can't and shouldn't claim complete cultural neutrality" (Taylor, 62). Difference, in the context of these proposals, is limited to universal categories of experience or it is not addressed at all. If we are to meaningfully examine multiculturalism and difference in the Pentagon Memorial, we must then recognize what is and is *not* represented.

If recognition of individual victims is pervasive, needed, and demanded, why are the 5 hijackers aboard American Airlines Flight 77 absent, omitted from the event and the construction of memory? Arguably, it would be shocking or upsetting to imagine Hitler recognized in a Holocaust memorial or Timothy McVeigh in the Oklahoma City Bombing Memorial—they are understood as criminals. Differences, however, between Timo-

thy McVeigh, and the 5 hijackers, exist. Timothy McVeigh is white and American—the 5 hijackers are neither. It is not the first time practices in the United States have omitted a group of individuals from memorialization. (6) In the past and presently, we have been eager to exercise moral judgment at the expense of identity formation and construct history on an axis rather than a field of recognition. The omission of the hijackers is not shocking but, in the context of globalization, reveals unchecked assumptions about cultural value, difference, and recognition and affirms Taylor's belief; liberalism does not, at least not yet, have a means of assigning value to difference.

I am not proposing we recognize hijackers, or Timothy McVeigh in the Oklahoma City Bombing Memorial, in the same manner we recognize victims. I am suggesting, however, it is both the presence and absence of real recognition that signifies a missed opportunity in memorial design. It is memorial architecture that can enable a connection between our present experience and past events and it may be the only physical manifestation of memory over time. The roles and relationships between site, event, memory, and identity have design potential. Presently, these potentials are stymied by a predominant cultural propensity to categorize difference numerically.

Thomas Keenan, director of the Human Rights Project at Bard College, remarks that the apparent fixation on the statistics surrounding September 11, 2001 reveals a false reliance on numbers to quantify and remember loss (New York Times, November 30, 2003). He argues that categorization has intervened and molded our comprehension of the event. If the construction of commemoration relies upon numerical representations of difference and identity, what are we memorializing? census data? Has the politics of recognition, equal dignity, and difference led us to equate categorization with representation, with identity?

If, and only if, we are able to comprehend the complexity of violent events, confront the politics of recognition, and weigh difference, will invention, rather than the application of a memorial style, redraw, and potentiality relocate, the construction of memory, representation of identity, and event in politics, community processes, mission statements and in memorials themselves.

NOTES

¹ The memorial competition guidelines at ground zero require that the design recognize each individual victim on September 11, 2003 and February 26, 1993 (World Trade Center Memorial Competitions Guidelines). The Oklahoma City Bombing Memorial, as built, assembles and organizes representative elements for each individual lost (Linenthal, 2001).

² A full explanation can be found in Charles Taylor's *Multiculturalism: examining the politics of recognition*, page 25-73.

³ The scale of the pedestrian is inconsequential to the scale of the Pentagon. The Pentagon has 6.5 million gross square feet. 17.5 miles of corridors, covers

34 acres, and a total perimeter of 921.6 feet and total height of 77 feet (Pentagon Competition Guidelines, 6).

⁴ Interestingly this proposal does not explore the shape of table and its implications.

⁵ Harriet Senie describes this participatory activity in "Mourning in Protest: spontaneous memorials and the sacralization of public space" (Harvard Design Magazine, Fall 1999; p. 23-27). Levi Smith describes the relationship between the memorial and the visitor in "Window or Mirror: the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the Ambiguity of Remembrance" (Symbolic Loss: the ambiguity of mourning and memory at century's end, Peter Homans, ed. Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 2000; p 105-125).

⁶ Native Americans have been subject to oversight and misrecognition.

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