

# Minimalist Aesthetics and the Imagined and Inhabited Interiority of Peter Eisenman's Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe

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## ABSTRACT

*Since the dedication of Maya Lin's Vietnam Veterans Memorial in 1982, minimalist design strategies have transformed the way in which public memorials, particularly those that deal with problematic pasts, have been conceived, constructed, managed and understood. Contemporary approaches stress the affective potential of memorial space, where physical and emotional engagement is as significant as symbolic and material form. This embodied and affective focus to memory-making is ultimately an expression of interiority, the social construction of the interior through embodied experience.*

*This paper examines the imagined and inhabited interiority of Peter Eisenman's Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in the context of the effectiveness of the communicative aspects of minimalist design strategies employed in the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, as described in Jeffrey Karl Ochsner's theory of 'linking objects'. Intended meanings for the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe as a place of remembrance, it is argued, are negated ultimately by the lack of signification within its design, the absence of 'linking objects'. In contrast to the imagined interiority of the memorial, the inhabited interiority of the memorial it is argued, is predominantly one of play and performance rather than one of reflection and understanding.*

## INTRODUCTION: INTERIORITY AND SPACES OF MEMORY

The nascent discourse of interiority within the interior and spatial design discipline stresses its socio-spatial/temporal dimension. Interiority is conceptualised as a function of inhabitation and embodiment, an abstract condition produced through the appropriation of space rather than as simply a function of architectural parameters. Here interiority is understood as a cultural construct that is socially produced through lived experience, both a social product and a means of social control.

Spatial relations, both material and symbolic, shape everyday social practices, including those involved in the representation of memory. Whether public or private, spaces of memory are cultural representations that are socially produced; their meanings are negotiated through social action.

Memorial artefacts allow for the past to be represented and made meaningful in the present. Dominated by figurative representation until the mid-twentieth century, the memorial design typology in the West has since this time been under challenge to respond to the uncertainties and discontinuities of the contemporary. Where figurative representation is limited by its singular meaning, abstract representation has offered the potential for supporting multiple interpretations of the past and instead of limiting meaning, provides 'new ways of provoking responses from visitors, transmitting messages, and addressing new subjects of remembrance.'<sup>1</sup>

## MINIMALIST AESTHETICS, EMBODIMENT AND THE PRODUCTION OF INTERIORITY

Following the dedication of Maya Lin's *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* in 1982, minimalist design strategies have become the default aesthetic for public memorial design in the West. While not a defined artistic movement, the term 'Minimalism' refers to an avant-garde art aesthetic that evolved in the United States in the 1960s and is primarily associated with the works of Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt, Carl Andre, Dan Flavin and Robert Morris.<sup>2</sup> Predominantly found in sculpture, minimalism is marked by single or repeated geometric forms and an overt rejection of illusionism. As a reaction against the dominant contemporary aesthetic of Abstract Expressionism of the 1940s and 1950s, minimalism sought to remove all evidence of the hand of the artist, in particular any trace of emotion or spontaneity.

Minimalist sculpture of the 1960s appears 'minimal' in the sense that it appears to be reductive, depersonalised and anonymous and hence devoid of intention or feeling on behalf of the artist. Conventional aesthetic aims of composition, expression and artistic intent are rejected. Equally, they appear minimal in terms of their level of artistic execution. Minimal artists were focused on the 'objectness' of the work - its physical presence in relationship with the viewer - and sought to challenge painting as the dominant plastic art, its emphasis on sight and the frontal relationship with the viewer; the containment of artistic expression within the picture frame and its referential underpinnings.

Susan Best notes that minimalism is typically interpreted as 'anti-subjective, anti-expressive and anti-aesthetic,'<sup>3</sup> generally understood to mark the beginning of the anti-aesthetic tradition in Western art and the rejection of the subjective dimension in art. Best argues that minimalism has been positioned erroneously as the beginning of the anti-aesthetic tradition and that rather than seeing minimalism as a rejection of conventional aesthetics, it was more a 'refiguring of aesthetic problems.'<sup>4</sup>

The debate around Minimalism revolved around form and materiality as well as context, or how the works were encountered, that is, the relationship with the viewer. Even in the modernist tradition of Western sculpture there was an understanding that sculpture was a defined entity that was separate from other objects in life and experienced primarily by sight. Modernist sculpture was experienced across a space that defined the difference between the real world and the world

of illusion of the sculpture. The transition point between these two worlds was the plinth, which physically and conceptually separated the work from everyday life in the same way as a frame of a painting does. The minimalist eradication of the plinth affected both the form of the sculpture and its perception. A new relationship between the viewer and the work was brought into existence. In contrast to modernist intentions in sculpture, minimalist works change the emphasis from formal and compositional relationships within the sculpture to a relationship with the viewer. Placement of the work within the confines of the gallery space or landscape is orchestrated by the artist so that the viewer becomes aware of their movement through space. The physical situation of the minimal work is therefore as much a part of the work as the object itself.

Minimalist sculpture is therefore more corporeal than visual, it engages the viewer on a sensual and phenomenal level rather than a literal or simply aesthetic one. The viewer becomes part of a bodily experience mediated by sculpture. Minimalist sculpture 'intrude(s) on us in such a way as to make us acutely aware of its physical presence in our space.'<sup>5</sup> As Morris argues, sculpture therefore moves from the formal aspects of the art object – scale, colour, composition – to the viewer's response and self-awareness – 'In a sense, what is most important is what the sculptural object *does* – in terms of response – rather than what *it is*.'<sup>6</sup>

Susan Best, referring to an analysis of minimalism by Rosalind Krauss and Thierry de Duve, notes that minimalism represents a 'shift from an aesthetics of production to an aesthetics of reception'<sup>7</sup>:

To calibrate the achievements of minimalism more precisely we could say that minimalism questioned the expressionist theory of art, but not expression *in toto*. It questioned one account of the subject, but not subjectivity in general. It questioned the focus upon the artist's hidden thoughts and feelings, but not the whole question of intention. And these various moves have important consequences, one of which is the shift of focus away from production and on to the work and its reception.<sup>8</sup>

Minimalism therefore stresses the temporality of perception, an interest in the body and in the presence of objects. Minimalist sculptures in particular, through their size, scale and relationship with the gallery interior or external landscape sought to facilitate an embodied experience of the artwork. The viewer's bodily presence is thereby registered against the size, scale and form of minimalist sculptures making them aware of their physical movement, their sensory reactions and the physical context of the work and its spatial relationship with it. Minimalist sculptures, often physically large and dominant in terms of their physical context, rely on interaction with its audience in order for the work to be understood.

Because of the minimal physicality of the artwork - its visual flatness, use of reductive materials, simple geometric shapes and repetition of form – the viewer is not absorbed in its illusory qualities and hence it's potential to refer to things beyond itself. Because the viewer is not drawn to the

illusory qualities of the work, focus is drawn to its physical qualities and its context, both physical and sensory. Changing qualities of light and shadow, openness and enclosure, depth and frontality, reflectivity and flatness, produce a rich embodied experience when coupled with the interaction of the boundaries of the artwork's site and the presence of other viewers. In emphasising embodied experience, minimalist aesthetics mediate the production of interiority.

The philosophical basis of Minimalist art is grounded in the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Robert Morris uses the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty to describe the experience of the minimal work as a temporal encounter between the body, the work and the space containing the work.<sup>9</sup> Describing the experience of a viewer moving around a minimalist work, Morris makes a comparison between the experience of its physical shape against the mental image of its form. For Morris, the goal of the new sculpture is to allow this form to become visible to a spectator moving around the object.

Merleau-Ponty's contribution to phenomenology is essentially a revised understanding of perception and perceptual consciousness and a rebuke of the prevailing subject-object relation. The classic understanding of perception, with the treatment of one's own perceiving body as an object with various properties that creates certain impressions that consciousness deciphers, ignores the 'subjective' nature of human experience. Merleau-Ponty argues for perception as the fundamental human function and for the perceiving human to be acknowledged as the central reference point in Western philosophy. He suggests that the perceiving human being is the central point of reference in the posing and debating of philosophical issues, arguing that we are in a constant relationship with our environment and we only come to know our selves in terms of what we perceive and experience – 'Our body is in the world as the heart is in the organism. It keeps the visible spectacle constantly alive ... and with it forms a system.'<sup>10</sup>

The Minimalist subject, unlike its Cartesian precursor, is a subject that perceives in relation to the conditions of the spatial field experienced. That is to say, the Minimalist subject perceives in an ever-changing temporal sense. For Merleau-Ponty's subject, perception is contingent upon the conditions of the situation. We are immersed in a world through our body, a lived perspective. Our body has dimensions and orientations – a top and bottom, a front and a back, a left and right side. These conditions establish what Merleau-Ponty calls a level of 'pre-objective experience', a datum of reference points which functions as the reference for our engagement with the world – 'To be a body, is to be tied to a certain world, as we have seen; our body is not primarily in space: it is of it.'<sup>11</sup>

For Merleau-Ponty, perception also plays a key role in the construction of space. Space is not perceived simply as it is, it is partly perceptually constructed. For Merleau-Ponty, space is seen as 'a certain possession of the world by my body, a certain gearing of my body to the world.'<sup>12</sup> Merleau-Ponty's conception of space is essentially Kantian, whereby space is seen not

as an objective construct, but affected by the subjective nature of human sensory faculties. For Merleau-Ponty, however, it is the body that plays an essential role in the constitution of space – space is constituted by the body and is perceived and subjectively experienced through the embodied subject. Geometrical co-ordinates are therefore seen as simply a tool in understanding space. Space is defined not as a physical setting in which objects are contained but a form of external experience where the relationships of and between objects are constituted by the experience of the perceiver – ‘The body is our general medium for having a world.’<sup>13</sup>

Minimalism was therefore grounded in a world perceived by the body rather than an art of the object. Minimalism also rejected traditional composition thereby often assuming repetitive, aggregative forms, pushing art towards the utilitarian and the anti-artistic. On the surface, this has compounded the misreading of minimalist art as reductive.

### MINIMALIST AESTHETICS AND MEMORIAL ARCHITECTURE

As an aesthetic response, minimalism is key to the power of the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial*. Since its dedication in 1982, minimalist design strategies have transformed the way in which public memorials, particularly those that deal with problematic pasts, have been conceived, constructed, managed and understood.

The *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* appeared in a context when public art had become an increasingly accepted form of articulating public space. The positive critical reception of the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* design recognised its direct influences from the sculptural traditions of late 1970s minimalist work and the site-specific public art of the time. Criticism of Lin's design from the non-art world however, began soon after the design was publicly revealed. The design was initially criticised as not being sufficiently heroic, ‘a black gash of shame.’<sup>14</sup> This criticism however, dissipated quickly after its dedication when it became clear that the memorial had a profound emotional response in visitors. Sonja K. Foss attributes the success of the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* in responding to divergent experiences and meanings of the war to a number of factors - its rejection of traditional rhetorical conventions of idealisation and heroism in favour of the focus on individual names; the intimate relationship of the memorial with its site, including its welcoming formal gesture; the absence of didactic information on the war; the focus on the loss of life rather than the events of the war; and the use of ‘multiple referents’, abstract forms that allow the memorial participant to focus on aspects that conform to their own experience and understanding of the war.<sup>15</sup> Foss argues that the ease with which the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* allows the visitor to enter the work is directly related to the fact that it does not attempt to tell its audience what to think – ‘It confirms, supports, and reinforces whatever individual expectations and perspectives visitors wish to bring to the memorial so that we are able to maintain them without fear of challenge or rejection.’<sup>16</sup>

The inhabited interiority of *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* is exclusively one of contemplative reflection and ritual performances. Touching names, taking rubbings of names, leaving personal objects and participating in communal gatherings are ritual behaviours that are an essential part of the design of the memorial. Lin designed the memorial with the intent that the names themselves would be the memorial. What she did not foresee however, was the power of the specific strategies of naming that she employed to encourage visitors to leave behind mementoes of life, to ‘give those names the keepsakes of identity, as if to restore to the dead the intimate worlds they lost.’<sup>17</sup>

While a symbolic object such as a memorial is one way in which a permanent link can be established with the past, the mechanism by which this may happen has had limited investigation with the exception of the work of architectural historian Jeffrey Karl Ochsner.

In his discussion on the communicative aspects of the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial*, Ochsner refers to and extends the work of psychoanalyst Vamik Volkan and his theory of ‘linking objects’ in the process of mourning. Ochsner considers the way in which the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* communicates with its audience, theorising the memorial as a ‘linking object’, as conceived by Volkan.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, Ochsner argues that the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* is able to foster active, intimate responses because it creates a ‘space of absence’ as defined by Richard Etlin, a void in which is experienced the simultaneous absence and presence of the dead. Ochsner argues that the space of absence as defined by Etlin can be considered as a type of linking object. As a linking object, the space of absence is a ‘site for projection ... we project the life we find.’<sup>19</sup>

Ochsner defines the key aspect of a linking object as one that is ‘psychologically invested with aspects of the deceased and of those who mourn.’<sup>20</sup> In order for active engagement to occur as argued by Ochsner's theory of linking objects, the visual linkage or cue must allow for projection by the memorial participant:

The linking object is not itself actually alive, yet through it we experience the presence of the dead person. This can occur because the linking object is a site for *projection*: That is, we *project* the life we find. Through a linking object, we are able to connect with our own internalised ‘living’ representation of the person being recalled.<sup>21</sup>

For projection to occur, crucially, identification must take place. For identification to take place, a space must be set apart from the everyday to allow for the act of reflection. The *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* creates a distinct space of contemplation through its siting and choreographing of visitor experience. Having set the stage for identification, the strategy of listing the names of the dead employed by Lin allows for individual stories to be told within the larger cultural memory of the war. The names and the way they are expressed on the memorial become the linking object, allowing for the projection of the visitor into the space of memory.



The linking object is therefore a design element of the memorial that acts as the site for the memorial participant's projection of the deceased individual. In the case of the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial*, the linking objects are the inscribed names of the individuals. The 'linking' capacity is not simply through the use of the name itself, but significantly through the strategy of chronological listing.

Ochsner argues that the names and the reflective surface of the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* operate as the linking object in the memorial and allow the memorial participant to actively engage with and project themselves into its space. Through its reflective surface, the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* allows a simultaneous awareness of both surface and space and of connection and separation: 'The spatiality of the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* – the relationship of physical space and virtual space, mediated by a surface of names – allows proximity to and identification with the dead, and an experience of the simultaneous reality of separation and connection, of living and dying.'<sup>22</sup>

Ochsner argues that the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* 'is essentially incomplete without human participation; it cannot be fully understood without addressing the issues raised by human interaction.'<sup>23</sup> Interiority is therefore key to the intent and affective power of the work. In the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial*, experience is foregrounded because of the use of typical strategies of minimalism – abstraction and reduction of form and a muteness of expression and meaning. Rather than focus attention on visual codes of representation, the minimalist aesthetics of the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* focus attention on a range of senses – sight, sound, movement, touch. Through the formal qualities of the work, the memorial participant's direct experience of the work becomes focal, the memorial participant becoming part of the experience of the work.

The *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* challenged the idea of memory as a knowable object and changed forever the popular conception of what a public memorial should be and how it should work. The benchmark set by Maya Lin's design changed the context for future memorial design. Visitors would now expect to physically and emotionally interact with a memorial and to be moved

potentially to a point of catharsis. An emphasis on interiority and embodiment, through the incorporation of minimalist aesthetics continues to pervade contemporary memorial design.

#### THE IMAGINED INTERIORITY OF THE MEMORIAL TO THE MURDERED JEWS OF EUROPE

Dedicated in 2005, Peter Eisenman's *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* is located in the Friedrichstadt district of Berlin, around 170 metres south of the Brandenburg Gate. On three sides of the site are located foreign embassies and housing and on the fourth, facing west, is located the Tiergarten, Berlin's largest park. The space of the memorial is therefore part of the urban fabric of Berlin, accessible twenty-four hours a day and capable of being used by visitors as well as passers-by. Beneath the memorial field is an underground 'Place of Information' that holds the names of all known Jewish victims of the Holocaust, obtained from the Israeli museum Yad Vashem. The Place of Information fulfils an educative and didactic role, supporting the intended role of the above-ground memorial field as a place of remembrance and contemplation.

The memorial is composed of 2,711 concrete slabs or stelae arranged in a grid pattern across a sloping site of about 19 hectares. The stelae are 2.38 metres long and 0.95 metres wide and vary in height from 0.2 metres to 4.8 metres, creating an undulating, wave-like appearance when seen en-masse. While the stelae are abstract, their individual differences in height imply the anonymity of a packed crowd. Eisenman's intention is that the Holocaust is remembered as an active condition within the present, an abstracted placelessness that is a point of reference to events rather than representing the events themselves.

The notion of interiority is key to the design of the memorial. Eisenman conceptualises the memorial as a phenomenal enclosure: 'I said all along that I wanted people to have a feeling of being in the present and an experience that they had never had before. And one that was different and slightly unsettling. The world is too full of information and here is a place without information.'<sup>24</sup> Interiority is embedded in the design of the memorial through



Above  
Figure 1: Peter Eisenman, Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, Berlin, 2005. Photographic representations of the urban interiority of the Memorial in architectural publications typically portray it as an imagined space of quiet solitary reflection. Source: Author.

the physical scale and placement of the stelae and gridded internal passageways. Eisenman's intention is that visitors take away with them the emotional experience of inhabiting the memorial. Visitors descend into the space of the memorial, disconnecting themselves from their surroundings visually and aurally:

Because of its subject, the serenity and silence perceived from the street are broken by an internal claustrophobic density that gives little relief as it envelopes the visitor who enters the field. 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, in its excess, in the excess of a reason gone mad, then such a work becomes a warning, a mahnmal, not to be judged on its meaning or its aesthetic but on the impossibility of its own success.<sup>25</sup>

The rows of stelae placed close together in a seemingly endless configuration is intended to evoke feelings of disorientation and claustrophobia. The tight arrangement of the stelae, each two degrees off the vertical, is designed to produce a disorienting, uncomfortable atmosphere when one moves within the field. Eisenman's aim here is for a contemporary audience to experience emotions that parallel those of the victims of the Holocaust. The restriction of views and sound from within the field of stelae further aim to amplify feelings of disorientation and hopelessness, potentially leaving the visitor feeling claustrophobic, confused and alienated.

The stelae landscape is dissected by a grid of 0.95 metre-wide pathways, designed to allow only for individual passage. At the edges of the field the stelae are only slightly raised above the ground line, appearing much like tombstones. As the visitor moves toward the centre of the field, the ground falls and the stelae rise in height. In describing the anticipated experience of the memorial's interiority, Eisenman emphasises the sense of instability and disorientation created by the architectural containment of the stelae:

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 programme, it is the memorial's obdurate lack of obvious symbolism that makes its public claim to creating the sense of dual time: one experienced in the present; the other, the possible remembrance of the past in the presence. It is this sense of a dual time and the way that this is experienced that is insistently architectural in its being. This is achieved through the denial of the ground as a datum reference. Instead, there are two topological and undulating surfaces marked by the tops and bottoms of the pillars. These define a zone of instability with respect to the datum of the surrounding street and to the upright subject who enters the field above the pillars and, as the ground falls away, becomes enveloped within them. This necessity of containment and enclosure, now articulated in a different way, can only be understood as architectural.<sup>26</sup>

Eisenman's imagined interiority as represented in his own words and in photographic representation, is a field of disquiet, a context from which the meaning of the Holocaust may begin to be addressed. Photographic images published in architectural journals and monographs in particular reinforce this imagined interiority – invariably the memorial is depicted as a pure, abstract, ghostly form in the landscape, usually devoid of human presence. Where people are shown, it is the imagined reflective experience of the solitary figure that is portrayed.



## THE INHABITED INTERIORITY OF THE MEMORIAL TO THE MURDERED JEWS OF EUROPE

While the *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* is grounded in minimalist design strategies and precedents, unlike the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial*, it appears as a field without a centre or distinct focus. While surrounded by significant civic institutions, the meaning of the memorial is not generated by its relationship to its context. Unlike the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* which is embedded in its context and directly gains meaning and gives meaning to its context, particularly the *Washington Monument* and the *Lincoln Memorial*, the *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* is conceived as an interior, appearing purely self-referential and inward looking.

While the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* is set apart from its surroundings through a strategy of excavation, the *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* abruptly connects with its surroundings. While the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* has a distinct beginning and end, a defined approach and a clear narrative, the *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* appears as a field, has no distinct boundaries or point of approach and hence no clear beginning or end point and no narrative other than visitor experience.

Conflicting extremes of visitor motivation ranging from respect and remembrance to voyeurism and tourism exist in tension at the *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe*. The memorial engenders human interactivity through its manipulation of the ground plane, the form and placement of the stelae and its material presence. Memorial participants become conscious of their bodily movements as a result of the focus on maintaining a steady passage across the undulating terrain. The gradual rise in the height of the stelae encourages visitors to step over the 'top' of the memorial by jumping from one stela to another. Those stelae that approximate the height of a chair or table are used by visitors to recline or sit on. Because the terrain falls gently towards the centre of the site, a natural soundscape is created, encouraging the echoing of the human voice. The concrete materiality of the stelae invites the sense of touch, particularly on warm days when the surfaces of stelae are in the shade.

Above

Figure 2: Peter Eisenman, Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, Berlin, 2005. Photographic representation of the interior spaces of the Memorial in architectural publications typically stress its compositional and formal qualities and its solemn, contemplative character. Source: Author.



The 'hyper' interaction of visitors in the space however, denies the possibility of the space operating as a space of reflection. Rather it is a space of action and distraction: 'Immediately after the opening on May 12, 2005, discussion over proper behaviour began. 'Stop Disgracing Ourselves,' the *Berliner Kurier* said in one headline. The *Tagesspiegel* complained about some of the visitors' 'strange customs' like kissing and sunbathing around the pillars. Some younger people used it as an amusement park, jumping from the top of one slab to another.'<sup>27</sup>

Quentin Stevens explores the critical and public reception of the *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* including observations of visitor behaviour, noting that the memorial is 'highly theatrical,'<sup>28</sup> allowing for multiple and varied forms of physical interaction. The pure abstraction of the memorial offers no clues to participants of appropriate codes of behaviour within the space. Unlike the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial*, the *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* is not physically bounded as a space that signals a different mode of behaviour than normal:

Rather than framing a fixed, collective audience, this complex field creates multiple, individuating viewpoints and stages for individuals to act differently. People are dispersed throughout the site. The field's interstitial pathways are intentionally too narrow for people to walk abreast. Visitors are forced to walk in separate aisles. People move through the stelae field site along two different axes, in different directions. The regular gridded layout allows people to frequently turn corners and change aisles; it also brings strangers together, leading to close encounters, sometimes very suddenly.<sup>29</sup>

As opposed to the imagined interiority of the memorial as a place of reflection and contemplation, the inhabited interiority predominantly operates as one of play and performance. The stelae appear as a field, not for remembrance but for human performance. The repetitive form, materiality and colour of the stelae form a mute background to the colour and movement of human interaction with the space. New visitors to the space are encouraged by the actions of others. Stevens argues



that the mood of the memorial space of the *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* is a function of how people are behaving in the space at a given point in time. Days before the dedication in 2005, Eisenman acknowledged the potential for the memorial to be used in ways that may not be consistent with its commemorative purpose:

...When you turn a project over to clients, they do with it what they want – it's theirs and they occupy your work. You can't tell them what to do with it. If they want to knock the stones over tomorrow, honestly, that's fine. People are going to picnic in the field. Children will play tag in the field. There will be fashion models modelling there and films will be shot there. I can easily imagine some spy shoot 'em ups ending in the field. What can I say? It's not a sacred place.<sup>30</sup>

While some audience behaviour is related to remembrance and reflection related to the Holocaust and the imagined interiority of the memorial, the dominant form of behaviour however, relates to physical interaction with the forms and spaces of the work: 'Most visitors do not appear to think, or to be receiving or producing meanings. Many visitors' apparent obliviousness to the 'negative' sensations intended by the MMJE design demonstrates that its meaning is not contained in its physical form.'<sup>31</sup>

## CONCLUSION

It can be argued that the success of the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* popularised what had previously been regarded as the difficult formal language of minimalist art. At the same time, its popularity initiated a surge of interest in formal memorialisation worldwide, particularly in response to problematic events. The effectiveness of Lin's *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* lies in its ability to frame an aesthetic response in terms of the experiential, to address issues of identity construction both personal and national and to create a place of remembrance capable of holding multiple interpretations and meaningful memory making.

While grounded in similar minimalist design strategies to the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial*, intended meanings for the *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* as a place of remembrance, it is argued, are negated ultimately by the lack of signification within its design, the absence of 'linking objects'. In contrast to the imagined interiority of the memorial, as represented by text and photography, the inhabited interiority of the memorial is one dominated by play and performance rather than one of reflection and understanding.

Public spaces that contain memory attempt to fix and define the use of a particular site. The appearance and aesthetic qualities of these sites attempt to communicate specific symbolic meanings that will either stimulate certain actions such as reflection and contemplation or inhibit other actions. The aesthetics of abstraction and minimalism of contemporary memorialisation allows for many personal and communal readings to mutually co-exist. In the case of the *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* however, the pure abstraction of the design may offer no clues to participants of appropriate codes of behaviour within the space.

The dominant forms of inhabited interiority experienced in the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* and the *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* may be explained to some extent by differing societal constructions of interiority, public space and national remembrance. The key issue here, however, is the dramatic disjunction between the imagined interiority of Eisenman's work and its inhabited reality. In the *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe*, the aesthetics



In Ochsner's terms, the *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* is not a space that enables identification and projection as the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* allows. Intended meanings for the memorial as a place of remembrance are negated ultimately by the lack of signification within its design, the lack of 'linking objects'. The aesthetics of minimalism in the *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* is taken to its extreme in terms of abstraction. The result is an interiority of play and performance rather than reflection and understanding.

Figure 3: Peter Eisenman, Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, Berlin, 2005. The inhabited interiority of the Memorial is one that is dominated by play and performance, at odds with its commemorative intent. Source: Author.

Figure 4: Peter Eisenman, Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, Berlin, 2005. The nature of containment and enclosure and lack of commemorative signification in the Memorial facilitates a very physical engagement and performative form of interiority. Source: Author.

Opposite

Above

of contemporary memorialisation results in visitors often being unaware of the significance of its memorial setting. The memorial's imagined interiority assumes that visitors are able to differentiate the memorial space from its everyday surroundings and act appropriately within it.

People, through their own initiative, actively fashion public space to suit their own needs. Physical features such as walls, ledges and slopes are often designed into public spaces in order to define spatial and behavioural boundaries but they can also serve other purposes, becoming places to sit, recline, climb, linger and play. In the case of representational spaces such as memorial sites, the unregulated and often unanticipated actions of people in these spaces results in the loosening up of the dominant meanings of these sites. For the most part, these forms of behaviour are benign, but in the case of the *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* they are fundamentally at odds with the traditional expectations of memorials as places where both memory and social behaviour is contained, restricted and interiorised.

## NOTES

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