



Chi Chi Earthquake Memorial Competition

Submission for Arch 384: Competitions Essay Component

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Building Type: Monument

Materials: Concrete, Gardens, Bioengineering

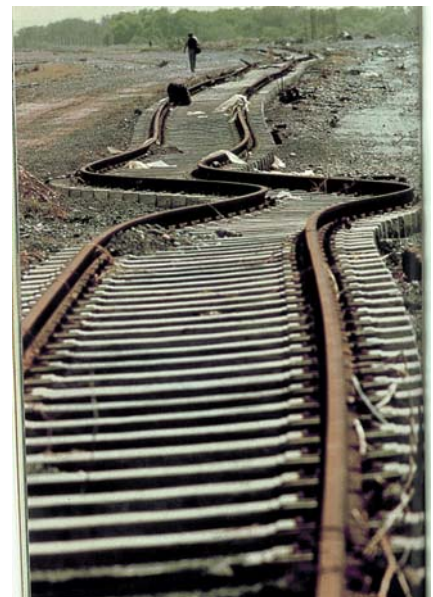
Precedents:

- Louis Kahn: Memorial to the Six Million Jewish Martyrs. New York. 1972.
- Maya Lin: Vietnam Veteran's Memorial. Washington DC. 1982.
- Peter Eisenman: Field of Stelae. Berlin. 2005.

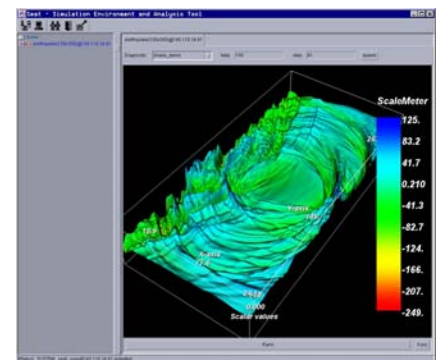
The Chi Chi Earthquake Memorial competition was an international competition for a monument to memorialize the victims of a massive earthquake centered in Taiwan on the morning of September 21, 1999. The quake, measuring 7.3 on the Richter scale deformed the Chi Chi area of Taiwan instantly. In the quake and its aftershocks, an estimated two thousand people died, more than eleven thousand were injured.

Growing Memories was the title for an entry for the competition for a monument to the victims of the Chi Chi Earthquake. The design of the monument was influenced by modern and contemporary monument designs. Growing Memories, although derived from the typology of these fixed monuments, proposed to create a new kind of monument – one that changes over time.

The Chi Chi monument draws reference from the western lineage of monument design. Traditional monument typology was more or less the same for thousands of years. In the mid 20th century the modern monument broke away from traditional monument typology and has continued to evolve to contemporary times. One reading of this typological evolution starts with Louis Kahn's Holocaust Memorial and continues



Photograph of the Chi Chi area after the earthquake.



Computer simulation of the Chi Chi earthquake.

through Maya Lin's Vietnam Veteran's Memorial to Eisenman's Field of Stelae. There is a strong influence on the later monuments from land art and minimalist art. The history of these memorials maps a paradigm shift in Western culture's understanding of sites of remembrance.

Historically, memorials have been understood as contemplative destinations often in the form of discrete objects. Pre-modern monuments can be characterized by the tripartite "object on a plinth" type. Typically figures, horses, obelisks, arches, or pyramids were placed on a podium or plinth and finished with a finial. The other necessary component of the traditional memorial was the inscription which specified its purpose. These monuments fixed memories to a certain time and place and used iconographic symbols and styles as a mnemonic device. Christopher Wren's *Monument to the Great Fire Of London* is an late example of this type as is Sir Edwin Lutyens's *Thiepval Memorial* which was created as late as 1927.

In the mid-20th century, Eero Saarinen and Louis Kahn were among many architects who searched for a new kind of monumentality within the vocabulary of modernism. This high modernism was a type of minimalist classicism exemplified by Saarinen's Gateway Arch in St. Louis.

Kahn's Memorial to the Six Million Jewish Martyrs represents one of the first modern memorials to break away from the symbolic representation of traditional memorials. Although it still followed the object on the plinth typology its abstract form stripped any ornamental or referential symbolism from the proposal. The radical departure from the traditional monument is one of the reasons it was never built. The memorial



Sir Christopher Wren. The Monument to the Great Fire Of London (1671-79) near London Bridge consists of a 61-metre (202 feet) column topped with a gilded urn of fire.



Sir Edwin Lutyens. Thiepval Memorial (1926-27) is the largest and one of the most emotive memorials to the missing of the Somme.

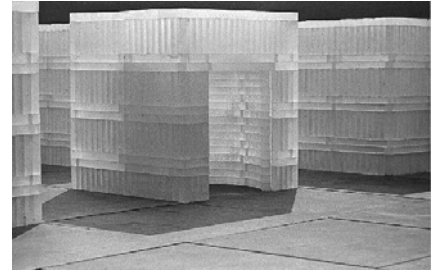
committee was not ready at the time to commit to such an abstract proposal.¹

The site for the memorial was located at the southernmost tip of Manhattan in Battery Park, with a view to New York Harbour, the Statue of Liberty, and Ellis Island. Kahn's original design for the memorial was simple: a grid of cast-glass piers sitting on a square plinth. Kahn was particularly interested in the use of glass to control light. Rays of sunlight are captured and refracted in the depth of the glass while the water, sky, and distant monuments are reflected and distorted by the surface.

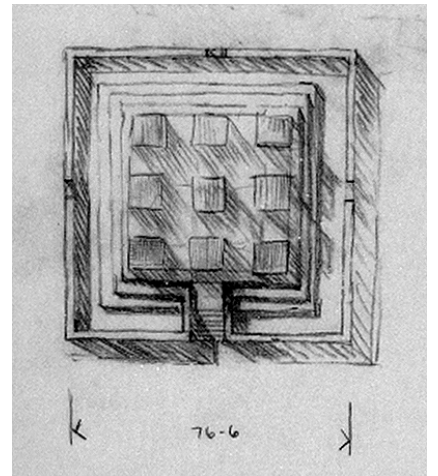
Kahn's first proposal showed thirteen piers which evolved over time to his favoured nine pier plan. The committee included several Talmudic scholars who disagreed with the nine square scheme on symbolic terms. In Jewish numerology the number nine is equated with human gestation, childbirth, and the bringing of life into the world. Thus the scholars argued that the number nine was thus an inappropriate symbol for a monument commemorating victims of the Holocaust. Some members of the committee preferred six piers in reference to the six million martyrs. But many on the committee remained uncomfortable with the lack of recognizable figurative elements in the design.

Kahn reluctantly reworked the proposal with a revised design of six perimeter piers and a central unique pier but the committee rejected the new proposal as many members were still concerned with the scheme's abstract composition.²

Kahn continued to resist the pressure to create a more literal representation of the Holocaust and insisted that only an abstract concept could convey idealism, hope, and triumph.



Louis I. Kahn, Memorial to the Six Million Jewish Martyrs Battery Park New York, NY; 1966-72; (Unbuilt)



Louis I. Kahn, Memorial to the Six Million Jewish Martyrs Battery Park New York, NY; 1966-72; (Unbuilt)

"Changes of light, the seasons of the year, the play of weather, and the drama of movement on the river will transmit their life to the monument."

Louis I. Kahn

The modern concept of memory is not a fixed one so minimalist abstraction functions in a memorial context as a mirror for a self-aware and changing world. Without iconography the viewer is confronted with abstract forms that allow for a wide interpretation or projection on their surface. The design was completed in 1968 but was never built due to disagreements within the committee.

At the same time Kahn was struggling to get his memorial built a group of artists were developing two movements that would change our idea of representation: land art and minimalism. These movements broke away from the high modern symbolism of Kahn's work and other high modern abstract art. Where Kahn's memorial referred to the traditional object on the plinth – minimalist and land art de-emphasized the art object and focused on the experiential or phenomenological nature of the user's experience.

Donald Judd and Carl Andre's sculptural use of industrial materials questioned the precious materials used in previous sculpture to elevate the art object and Richard Serra, Robert Smithson, Michael Heizer, Bruce Nauman, Richard Long and other land artists questioned the museum as container for the art object and created works that reinterpreted the landscape as an aesthetic experience. Time and movement became more important than material or form for these artists. This was a defining point in art where the focus shifted from sculpture as an object to the viewer as a subject. With land art there is no privileged vantage point, no correct path to follow, and no place to experience the whole work. The work is the experience itself and it happens over time.³

Almost twenty year's after Kahn's failed proposal Maya Lin's



Schunnemunk Fork. Storm King Art Centre. Mountainville, NY. 1990-91.



Donald Judd. Untitled. Marfa Texas. 1972.

minimalist Vietnam memorial in Washington was built to public acclaim. Lin was highly influenced by the experience of the land artists – particularly the work of Richard Serra. The similarities between Serra's work and the Vietnam Memorial are striking. Both forms cut into the ground with long sloping walls. ⁴



Richard Serra, Shift, King City, Canada
1972-02.

The Vietnam memorial is comprised of two 247 foot walls cut into the landscape allowing people to read every name on the memorial while standing below the horizon. The 58000 names were listed by date of death or disappearance rather than alphabetically creating a timeline. The experience of walking along the wall slowly descending and going back in time the monument uses the relationship of the body and emotions to slow the visitor down as a device for commemoration and remembrance.



Vietnam Veteran's Memorial.
Washington DC, USA. Maya Lin. 1982.

In contrast to Kahn's Memorial to Memorial to the Six Million Jewish Martyrs. Lin's abstract scheme avoided the formal symbolism of the piers on the plinth by integrating her monument with the ground. By listing all the names of the veterans she avoided having to resort to symbolic references. ⁵ Her political strategy succeeded to convince the public where Kahn's high modernism failed.

"A progression in time is memorialized. The design is not just a list of the dead. To find one name, chances are you will see the others close by, and you will see yourself reflected through them."

- Maya Lin from Lin, Maya Ying.
Boundaries. New York : Simon & Schuster, 2000

Maya Lin's controversial Vietnam Veteran's Memorial redefined the typology of the monument. By taking references from minimalist sculpture and land art combined with the use of a text inscription, Lin's memorial brought high art to the masses. At the same time she managed to make abstraction an acceptable form for a memorial by avoiding symbolic elements.



Vietnam Veteran's Memorial.
Washington DC, USA. Maya Lin. 1982.

Although Lin's scheme departed radically from the traditional

tripartite symbolic monument, she astutely kept the other essential element of the monument – the inscription. The combination of the siting of the work, the long progression of the viewer and the list of all the names of the dead was a shift from the formal inscription of the traditional monument to a more populist, democratic experience. People read the monument it is no longer an object in the field it is cut into the field. Thus we witness people touching, looking at their reflection, leaving flowers and photographs beside the names.

The public's acceptance of Eisenman's Berlin Holocaust memorial owes much to the success of Lin's Washington memorial. Eisenman's Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe, originally conceived with Richard Serra extends the minimalist typology of Lin's Vietnam memorial. Where Lin's sculptural form cut into a topological field, Eisenman's memorial creates a topological field of stelae.⁶

The memorial is composed of 2,711 concrete slabs arranged in a grid pattern. The heights of the stelae vary creating an undulating field that is open on all sides and framed by the green canopy of Berlin's Tiergarten and the neoclassical grandeur of the Reichstag. Covering a field the size of two football fields the memorial was erected over the surviving underground tunnels used by Joseph Goebbels, the infamous Nazi propagandist.

Richard Serra was also an influence in the Field of Stelae. It was originally a joint Eisenman-Serra proposal. Shortly after the design had been selected Serra left the project due to artistic differences and changes that were being made by the committee.

"The enormity and scale of the horror of the Holocaust is such that any attempt to represent it by traditional means is inevitably inadequate ... Our memorial attempts to present a new idea of memory as distinct from nostalgia ... We can only know the past today through a manifestation in the present."

⁸
(Peter Eisenman, 1998)



The Field of Stelae by Peter Eisenman - Berlin, Germany



The Field of Stelae by Peter Eisenman - Berlin, Germany



The Field of Stelae by Peter Eisenman - Berlin, Germany

The grid pattern and sheer size of the site allows for individuals to choose individual paths and spaces for memory. Unlike Lin's deterministic linear pathway in the Vietnam memorial, Eisenman's field becomes a site for remembrance rather than a fixed monument. Despite the Vietnam memorial's formal departure from the historical monument typology of the statue with the inscription, the basic typological elements are the same. A sculpture with an inscription. Lin's work reads as an object in a field whereas Eisenman's memorial is a field. The viewer becomes a participant and inhabits the sculpture. While the stelae refer back to the more traditional iconography of the monument.⁷

Unlike the Vietnam memorial there are no signs to tell visitors what they are passing by or whether they should explore the many neat rows undulating stelae. It seems almost more a monumental abstract installation piece than a memorial. Different people will engage it differently, will linger at one place or another, will move quickly or slowly, and will then retain different memories. But walking between the many undulating rows of stelae memory returns.

It was within the context of the typological lineage of these contemporary memorials that the Growing Memories project was proposed for the Chi Chi memorial. The references to the Field of Stelae are unmistakable a similar topological gridded field. But where Eisenman's proposal is a representation of topology, Growing memories is an actual moving field. The memorial moves over time. The movement is represented by three time scales.

The longest time scale is the grid of pathways themselves. The original grid has been shifted in response to an imaginary



The Field of Stelae by Peter Eisenman - Berlin, Germany



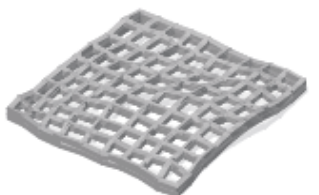
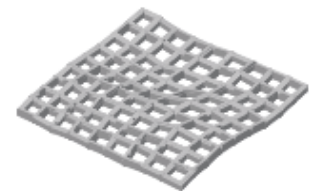
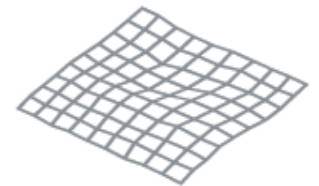
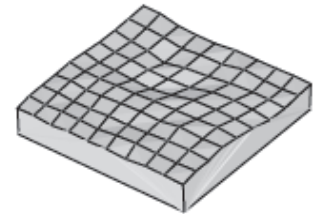
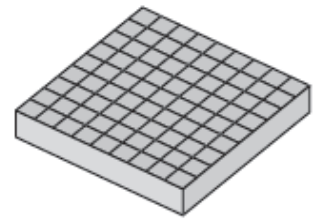
Vietnam Veteran's Memorial. Washington DC, USA. Maya Lin. 1982.

earth movement. It monumentalizes the power of the earth's fluidity. The grid of narrow walkways is designed to shift with the event of a major earthquake. The pattern of the pathways will change every 50-100 years depending on the strength of the earth's movements. The structure of the garden will slowly change over time in response to the earth.

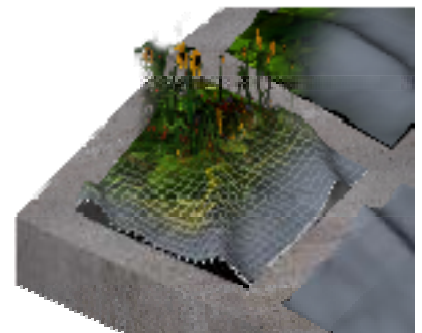
The medium shifting timescale is the garden of rolling mounds. It is a fluid garden of suspended ripples contained between the shifting pathways. The earth ripples are supported by a woven biomes of plant branches that stabilize and sustain the surface over time. Traces of the biomes can be seen as a woven surface pattern on the ground. As the garden grows the vegetation from the biomes emerges as an undulating garden that increases in complexity and diversity over time.

The shortest time shift is in the meditative area in the centre of the garden. It is an area of rest, a sanctum of relief in the middle of the undulating garden. There are benches along the perimeter and in the centre is a small reflecting pool. The bottom of the pool is fitted with a plate that is connected to a seismograph. The plate sends amplified wave signals from the earth that result in the rippling of the surface of the pool. The bottom of the pool is inscribed with all the names of the people that lost their lives in the 921 earthquake.

Growing Memories is a space for the slow movement of the earth and the slow movement of our memories. It is a space for the healing nature of the garden and the healing of our memories. It is a space of delineation of the sudden movement of the earth and our sudden realization of our fragile existence and respect for the ground that sustains us. It's a fluid monument that teaches us to live, grow, change, heal,



Growing Memories. Evolution of the grid over time.



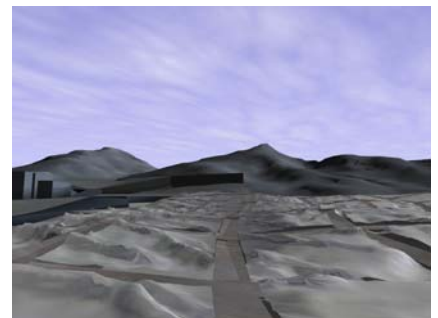
Growing Memories. Detail of the Biomes.

move and remember the earth and the people that live on it.

The Growing Memories proposal is an evolution of the typology of the modern-contemporary memorial. Following the evolution of minimalism and the shift from the object on a plinth typology to an experiential field, Growing Memories extends that field to move over time. This movement reflects our contemporary understanding of memory as an evolving experience and allows for healing over time.



Growing Memories. Site Plan.



Growing Memories. View of the garden structure.

"There is a secret bond between slowness and memory, between speed and forgetting....the degree of slowness is directly proportional to the intensity of memory; the degree of speed is directly proportional to the intensity of forgetting." –

Slowness Milan Kundera from "Slowness" in 2G International Architecture Review, No. 9, 1999

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Endnotes:

¹ Larson, Kent. **Louis I. Kahn: Unbuilt Masterworks**.

² Larson, Kent. **Louis I. Kahn: Unbuilt Masterworks**.

³ Kastner, Jeffrey (Editor). **Land & Environmental Art (Themes and Movements)**.

⁴ Abramson, Daniel. "Maya Lin and the 1960s: Monuments, Time Lines, and Minimalism,"

⁵ Abramson, Daniel. "Make History, Not Memory: History's Critique of Memory."

⁶ ArcSpace: **Peter Eisenman Field of Stelae Berlin, Germany**

⁷ Bitte, Jan. "Memory Field".

⁸ **Stiftung Denkmal Für Die Ermordeten Juden Europas**. <http://www.denkmal-fuer-die-ermordeten-juden-europas.org/>