

Silent Witness: Rachel Whiteread's Nameless Library

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ABSTRACT

Silent Witness examines the British sculptor Rachel Whiteread's Nameless Library, (1996-2000), a holocaust memorial in Judenplatz Square, Vienna. For her project, the sculptor designed an inverted library in concrete, the proportions being derived from those found in a room surrounding the square. While the majority of critics refer to this memorial as an 'inside out' library, this paper argues that Whiteread's design is not so easily understood. It will identify the ways in which her design complicates relationships between sculpture and architecture, container and contained, private and public, interior and façade, as well as domestic and civic scales. The work is placed within a 'counter monumental' tradition of memorialisation, as articulated by James E. Young, which demonstrates a radical re-making of memorial sculpture after the Holocaust. It is argued that this site-specific memorial, partially cloned from the urban context in which it is placed, commemorates a loss that is beyond words. Nameless Library utilises architectural operations and details to evoke a disquieting atmosphere in urban space, borrowing from the local to inculcate neighbouring structures as silent witnesses to past atrocities. The memorial is compared to the casemate fortifications on the Atlantic wall; the defensible spaces of bunkers, described by Paul Virilio in his book Bunker Archaeology as 'survival machines'. It is argued that Whiteread's careful detailing of Nameless Library is designed to keep memory alive. Under Whiteread's direction, the typological form of the bunker is transformed into a structure of both physical and psychic defense. The memorial has been specifically designed to resist attack by vandals and also functions as a defence against entropy, taking into itself and holding onto lost loved ones, preserving their memory.

Rachel Whiteread's sculptural oeuvre evidences an continuing interest in the evolution and transformation of physical interiors. Her public sculpture *Nameless Library* is one project that can be understood as an evolutionary interior: Using her sculptural vocabulary Whiteread strategically unfolds and involutes condensed layers of historical, cultural and architectural activity specific to the project's particular site and surrounding context.

In 2000, Whiteread's Holocaust memorial *Nameless Library* was dedicated in Judenplatz Square in Vienna. Whiteread's memorial design elaborately convolutes relationships between sculpture and architecture, container and contained, private and public, interior and façade, as well as domestic and civic scales. The project's strength inheres in its detailing. The memorial's strategic assemblage of positive and negative cast elements has been carefully detailed to depict a work of mourning

in perpetuity. It achieves this by cannily responding to its historical site and surrounding context, turning the architecture of the square in upon itself to foreground Vienna's disavowal of anti-Semitic persecution since the Middle Ages: looking to the local and its role as silent witness in order to draw attention to past atrocities committed on the site.

In 1994, the late Simon Wiesenthal approached the Mayor of Vienna to discuss the possibility of erecting a Holocaust memorial to commemorate the 65,000 Austrian Jews who died in Vienna or in concentration camps under the National Socialist regime. The proposal emerged from dissatisfaction with an existing sculpture, *Monument to the Victims of Fascism* by Alfred Hrdlicka, installed in the Albertinaplatz in 1988.¹

The organising committee for the competition decided that a figurative design was not appropriate and this was the motivating force behind the selection of participants, which was limited to an invited group of five Austrians and five foreigners. The Austrian entrants were Valie Export, Karl Prantl and architect Peter Waldbauer, Zbynek Sekal, and Heimo Zobernig in collaboration with Michael Hofstatter and Wolfgang Pauzenberger. The foreign entrants were the collaborative artists Michael Clegg and Martin Guttman, Ilya Kabakov, Rachel Whiteread, Zvi Hecker, and Peter Eisenman. Judenplatz or 'Jews Square' was decided upon as the location for the memorial. It was the site of the first Jewish ghetto and is located in Vienna's First District (Figure 1).

The small, intimate square is accessed by five narrow streets, and is populated by buildings predominantly from the Baroque period. Judenplatz's picturesque aspect is belied however, by closer inspection into the history of the site.



Above
Figure 1 Anti-Semitic Plaque on Haus zum Grossen, Judenplatz 2, Vienna (detail).
Photo taken by author

The Judenplatz site has had a tumultuous history and many of the competition entrants made direct or oblique reference to this history and the recent excavations in the square.² In 1995, the City of Vienna Department of Archaeology discovered beneath the proposed memorial location the remains of the city's oldest Synagogue, dating from the Middle Ages. The unearthing of flagstones from the synagogue revealed scorch marks that testified to the torching of the temple in 1421. In this pogrom, several hundred Jews burned themselves alive in the synagogue rather than submit to being forcibly baptised. The sculptural reliefs and the inscriptions that adorn the surrounding buildings on the square bear witness to prior Christian occupations of the Judenplatz and to historic anti-Semitic activity.³



On the eastern side of the square is a bronze sculpture of the Enlightenment poet, playwright, and advocate for tolerance, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. The sculpture was designed by Siegfried Charoux and unveiled in 1935 (Figure 2). In 1939, the Nazis removed the sculpture and melted it down for ammunition. In 1968, Charoux rebuilt the piece and installed it in Morinplatz. The work was relocated to its original Judenplatz location in 1981. For the Holocaust memorial competition, some entrants construed the figure of Lessing with ambivalence, for the Enlightenment thinker championed reason and it was a 'rationality gone mad' that reached its terrifying conclusion in the catastrophic event of the Holocaust.⁴

The competition regulations laid particular emphasis on the monument as a work of art that carefully attended to its surroundings and the architectural essence of the Judenplatz. The memorial was also to be considered in relation to Misrachi House at Judenplatz 8, a building that has existed on the site since the fifteenth century and had become a locus of Jewish Education. Two compulsory texts, rendered in German, Hebrew, and English were also required on the memorial: the first commemorating the loss of 65,000 Austrian Jewish lives during the Holocaust, and the second listing all of the concentration camps in which these Austrian Jews were killed.

COUNTER-MONUMENTS

Brian Hatton observed that the competition was set between negative terms as 'not monument, not anti-monument, not museum, not an installation, not an urban intervention.'⁵ This negation of the very idea of the monument is emblematised by the emergence of the 'counter-monument,' a new sub-genre of Holocaust monuments investigated in detail by the art historian James E. Young. Counter-monuments are memorial spaces that are 'conceived to challenge the very premise of the monument.'⁶ These projects eradicate the heroic and triumphal from their schedule, addressing instead the void left in the wake of mass genocide. They seek to question the traditional monument's capacity to do our memory work for us.⁷

In counter-monumental practices, it is the monument's very negation, its disappearance that has been foregrounded by many artists charged with designing German Holocaust memorials. Strategies of inversion, self-effacement, and disappearance, are evident in projects such as Horst Hoheisel's negative form monument *Aschrott-Brunnen Monument*, Kassel, 1987, Jochen and Esther Shalev-Gerz's *Harburg Monument Against War and Fascism and for Peace*, Harburg, 1986-1993, and Micha Ullman's *Bibliothek: Memorial to the Nazi Book Burnings*, Bebelplatz, Berlin, 1996.

As with these contemporary memorials, Whiteread's proposal is also characterised by a form of negation. It fails, however, to stage a disappearing act. Rather than being subsumed within the subterranean realm, *Nameless Library* imposes itself unequivocally within the public domain.

Whilst living in Berlin for 18 months between 1992-3, Whiteread travelled throughout Germany and Eastern Europe and became fascinated with the history of Berlin under the Third Reich. She visited concentration camps in Germany and read extensively on the subject, in particular survivors' testimonies of the Holocaust. Given this experience, the artist felt equipped to address the subject of Holocaust memorialisation.⁸

THE MEMORIAL

In Jewish tradition the first memorials came in book form, and Whiteread's memorial makes reference to Jewish people being the people of the book.⁹ Her proposal resembles a domestic library seemingly turned inside out so that thousands of cast replicas of books, cast as positive concrete forms, face out toward the viewer; their spines inward set. The roof bears a cast in the negative of a ceiling rose, a detail characteristic of those found within the bourgeois apartments lining the square. The front elevation displays a negative cast of double doors that face the statue of Lessing. The memorial is located on the North East side of the square, and its orientation was determined by the position of the excavated bimah and its axis by the edge of the building at Misraschi House.

The drawings for Whiteread's competition entry were made in collaboration with the architectural firm, Atelier One. All the technical drawings submitted were at a scale of 1:100 and included a ground plan of Judenplatz Square and the memorial site, sections and elevations, foundation details and wall details of book fixings, and ground and roof plans. The model for the project was made at a scale of 1:20 from wood, glass, model paste, and paint in collaboration with model maker Simon Phipps (Figure 3).

Some critics were wary of appraising the finished project based on these competition documents. Andrew Graham-Dixon wrote about the room devoted to this project in the exhibition *Shedding Life*, cautioning 'It is represented by a model...on which it should certainly not be judged.'¹⁰ Rebecca Comay also acknowledged that 'The crucial differences in detail...between the model and the monument, may nonetheless reveal an essential ambiguity.'¹¹

Mark Cousins, Brian Hatton, and William Feaver also had reservations about Whiteread's proposal at this early stage. Cousins' was suspicious that the project had been hijacked by the symbolism of Jews as the people of the Book, and the Nazi



Figure 2 Anti-Semitic Plaque on Haus zum Grossen, Judenplatz 2, Vienna. Photo taken by author

Figure 3 Rachel Whiteread, 1:20 Scale Model of Nameless Library, 1996, Judenplatz Museum, Vienna. (Model Maker: Simon Phipps). Image courtesy of Rachel Whiteread.

book burnings, which, he suggests: 'begins to dilute the technical clarity of her work. We shall see.'¹² Architectural critic Brian Hatton had reservations about how successful the work would be at a scale of 1:1. He comments:

On examination, convincing as it was as an icon, it was inconsistent as a cast. It, too, was an assemblage, of panels and bolted racks; indeed, hollow. Paradoxically, its hollowness, its semblance, seemed to some to compromise its capacity to 'hold' the dead. It should withhold, like the Wailing Wall, like a cave wall, no yonder site, offering, precisely in its terminus, infinitude. Or, like the walls of that remembered war memorial (of Maya Lin), holding more in name than it ever could in measure. But Rachel Whiteread's archive reverses that too. 'The dead are here,' it reminds, 'but their names are elsewhere.'¹³

Hatton's reservations were founded upon the memorial being a hollow assemblage of cast parts. However, this form of assembly was employed in Whiteread's earlier room-scaled castings and had not hindered these works from conjuring up copious thoughts of loss and memory. It is proposed that the completed memorial, with its strategic assemblage of positive and negative cast elements has been carefully detailed to depict a work of mourning in perpetuity.

Rebecca Comay also questioned Whiteread's decision to enlist, for the first time, positive book castings in this work, rather than her signature negative castings.¹⁴ One can argue against Comay's objection on a number of counts. Firstly, Comay suggests that Whiteread all but abandons her predilection for negative casting in this memorial, negating her own hallmark. But this might be precisely her intention. Hatton notes that each memorial testifies twice 'first in its ostensive subject of commemoration, and second in the index it presents of its builders' commitment to remind. Whatever signs they deploy in their monuments, builders of memorials also, unavoidably represent themselves.'¹⁵

This turn toward an apparent positivity may in fact be an attempt by the artist to ameliorate the impact of the artist's signature on the act of memorialisation so that it didn't overwhelm the memorial programme. Secondly, the very strength of Whiteread's project lies in the artist's combination of casts of both positive and negative prefabricated elements. The work is caught between presence and absence, making any attempts at 'positivising' this object unfathomable. The artist's decision to use positive rather than negative book castings was also to make her subject more legible. Whiteread comments that the positive book forms were 'much easier to read as a series of books, and I didn't want to make something completely obscure.'¹⁶

At the memorial's unveiling, Simon Wiesenthal said of this act of holocaust remembrance that 'it is important that the art is not beautiful, that it hurts us in some way.'¹⁷ The memorial's power lies precisely in its ability to disturb distinctions between architectural typologies, between interiors and exteriors, rendering the familiar strange.

OBJECTIONS TO THE MEMORIAL

Following the announcement of Whiteread as the unanimous winner of the competition, objections to the memorial were fielded from across the archaeological, aesthetic, political, cultural, economic, and religious spectrums of the Viennese community. Hatton suggests that Whiteread's entry convinced the judges 'by virtue of precisely denying easy identification with received versions of its subject or the legibility of its modality - the monument.'¹⁸ Hatton also presciently notes that perhaps it was this illegibility that was accountable for its belated inauguration, for, 'as if too cryptic to accept, it has precipitated an unresolved controversy.'¹⁹ Some opposed the memorial on the grounds that Whiteread was not Jewish. Shop owners and landlords opposed to the memorial project set up an 'anti-Whiteread' petition, collecting 2,000 signatures. They complained of a projected loss of business (allegedly 40%), a loss of car parking spaces and voiced their reservations that the square would be 'disfigured by the concrete colossus.'²⁰ Some residents also believed there would be potential security concerns, as the memorial might become a target of Neo-Nazi assault. The memorial was also criticised on the basis that it would occlude the excavations beneath it, which many already deemed a suitable memorial to the persecution of Viennese Jews.²¹ Criticism also came from within theological quarters, where some deemed it an 'affront to the Book and the Name posed by this shrine to illegibility and anonymity.'²² In contrast, others saw the memorial as too readily stereotyping Jews as intellectuals, as 'the people-of-the-book', thereby ignoring working class victims.²³ The memorial's dedication was also hindered by the rise of Jörg Haider's right-wing Freedom Party in Austria.

After Whiteread was granted the commission, there was growing pressure from prominent members of the Jewish community to change the appearance of the memorial. Suggestions were even made to move it to Heldenplatz and preserve the excavations as a more suitable memorial.²⁴ This suggestion was unequivocally rejected by the artist, saying 'This particular site gave me my vocabulary.'²⁵ On 26 October 2000, the memorial and museum were finally unveiled.

Whiteread's scheme was complemented by architects' Christian Jabornegg and Andras Pálffy's re-design of the square and a new Museum of Medieval Jewry at Misrachi House. At ground level, the museum contains a room dedicated to the drawings, models, and prototypes designed by Whiteread for the memorial. It includes a 1:1 scale plaster mock-up of the ceiling rose, a wooden book prototype, a door handle, and architectural drawings. In this setting the memorial's details are exhibited as tectonic fragments whose representational purpose has been served. They now lie in state; their still lives hermetically sealed in glass cases.

Nameless Library marked a point of departure from Whiteread's earlier room-scale sculptures in that none of the memorial's architectural details were directly cast from an existing interior. The proportions of a domestic interior hidden behind the baroque facades of the Judenplatz were used to dimension the memorial.²⁶ Inspiration was also gleaned from the ubiquitous architectural features

found within the interiors surrounding the square. An interior footprint was drawn out into the public realm, and into a square that the artist also saw as domestic in scale. The Judenplatz was allied to an interior, and the streets leading to it were seen as multiple doorways.²⁷ Like her earlier architectural casts displayed in galleries, Whiteread once again places a room within a room. On this occasion however, the room is situated within the public domain and must endure the storms of both controversy and climate (Figure 4).

Whiteread's memorial references a typology whose contents are structured to reveal multiple layers of interiority. Comay has observed that in its degrees of containment, the library 'would stand at the extreme limit of such a logic of incorporation. A room full of shelves full of books full of pages full of words would logically function as a container of a container of a container of a container....interiorisation would here reach its absolute limit.'²⁸

The memorial is lined with 350 book modules, produced as positive concrete casts. The dimensions of this module correspond with the librarian and metrician Melvil Dewey's Golden mean of bookshelf length.²⁹ The cast fore-edges of books rusticate *Nameless Library*, mimicking the base course of its opulent surroundings. Many buildings with elaborate courses of banded, vermiculated, and pyramidal rustication share close proximity to the memorial. By aping the articulated surface treatments of neighbouring buildings the memorial firmly solders itself to the square, while its grey concrete pallor and squat profile serve as a *béton brut* counterpoint to the stucco finish of the existing facades.



Shadow play operates on the library's crenulated surfaces. Its elevations fleetingly carry the silhouettes of water towers and other urban furniture populating the roofscapes on surrounding buildings. The cantilevered book modules themselves project shadows onto the surface of the memorial, casting corrugated canopies across the structure, erupting the verisimilitude of its surface according to the trajectory of the sun (Figure 5).

BOOKS

Under Whiteread's direction, the ability to open up the diegetic space of the book, a space of narrative passage that moves between scales through time has been foreclosed. Whiteread chose to cast books of the same height, endowing them with an association to the encyclopaedic and bureaucratic, lending the work allegiances to the Nazis' obsession with bureaucratic procedures and record-keeping. The books on the memorial make reference to a knowledge base that has been eradicated, alluding to the stories unable to be told, just as the lives of the authors were stopped short. The victim's testimonies assume these lost forms: regimented assemblies of Dewey's divine proportion.



READING NAMELESS LIBRARY

There are multiple ways the memorial can be read with respect to the interior. Most often, critics position the viewer in relation to the project in the following manner: as looking at a domestic library whose walls and bookshelves have been peeled away, so that we are looking at the back of the bookshelves, replete with the petrified fore-edges of books. In this scenario, the viewer's position is complicit with the absent internal wall. The fictitious bookshelves are eradicated and the live load of the books is transferred to a new interior wall element.

There are two other ways the viewer might attempt to 'read' the memorial. It could be construed as a series of internal library walls that have been unfolded and turned outward, much like the interior as it is described in the developed surface drawing, where a room is represented independently from its surroundings. If one were to turn the walls of a library replete with books out toward the exterior, then it would be reasonable to expect the spines of the books would now face outward. Here, however, the fore-edges face outward. The spine, the exoskeleton of the book, has been pushed into the dark recesses at the back of the bookshelf. This formal gesture serves to prohibit any attempts to catalogue the immensity of the losses sustained by the Jewish community because of the absence of titles embedded into the spines. By detailing the book modules in this way, the memorial alludes to a medieval common practice, identified by Henry Petroski, of storing books with their spines set inward.³⁰ This detail enables Whiteread to not only commemorate the lives lost in the Holocaust, but also make an oblique reference to the Medieval pogrom, without direct reference to the excavations beneath the Judenplatz. In this interpretation, the viewer would perceive the memorial as an interior turned outward, and cast out into urban space, surrounding a central void. There is no need to attempt to situate ourselves within the interior as it is already laid out for us to inspect. Finally, if one were to try and access the titles of these fossilised tomes, to attempt to name and catalogue this loss of life, an alternate interpretation is needed, one requiring the viewer to insinuate themselves into the fabric of the memorial itself, into the liminal space between the pre-cast concrete wall

Opposite
Figure. 4 Rachel Whiteread, *Nameless Library*, concrete, 1996-2000, 390x 752 x 1058cm, Judenplatz Square, Vienna.
Photo taken by author.

Above
Figure. 5 Rachel Whiteread, *Shadow Play on Nameless Library*, concrete, 1996-2000, 390 x 752 x 1058cm, Judenplatz Square, Vienna.
Photo taken by author.

of the memorial and the positive book castings. In an attempt to recuperate the spine and its ability to identify the lost object, the viewer must occupy a space in which they are sandwiched between the bolts and the book spines of the library. Given that there are a number of ways to decipher the spatial machinations at work in the project, commentators such as James E. Young who suggest this memorial is 'inside-out' over-simplify matters.³¹

ABSENT INFRASTRUCTURE

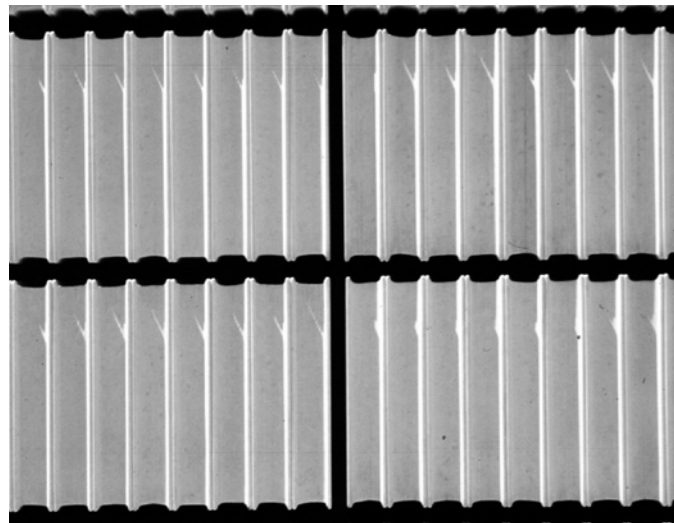
As with all of Whiteread's room-scaled casts, the memorial carefully evades showing any visible signs of structural support. There are gaps left on the library walls that evince the spaces where the phantom bookshelves once were (Figure 6).

The memorial foregrounds the invisibility of the bookshelves: the constructional apparatus on which knowledge is supported and contained within the interior. The live load of the book modules is transferred to the interior of the memorial and, by analogy, to the interior of the viewer who must attempt to recuperate this structural framework in their imagination to 'make sense' of the interior's apparent inversion. The channels left in the wake of the absent infrastructure articulate a regular cruciform patterning

across the memorial's elevations. This detail can be allied to the use of the cross motif in modern tomb art. Pedro Azara notes that the cross is often expressed, 'in the form of horizontal and vertical chinks (as in Ignazio Gardella's Pirovani vault of Francesco Venezia's tomb),' which are employed to 'signal the presence of the deceased person, express his beliefs or his faith, and symbolise the power of light to elbow matter aside.'³²

DRAINAGE POINT

The use of positive book castings is complemented by negative casting details on the ceiling (now roof) of the memorial (Figure 7). The ceiling has been inclined towards mid-point, so that rainwater is diverted through a drainpipe in the centre of a ceiling rosette and distributed into the existing sewerage system. The ceiling rose has been interpreted as having malevolent undertones, being transformed by the artist into an uncanny harbinger of death. There is an unsettling shift in the function of the detail, whereby a conduit for electricity is now transformed into a drain. Critics have also made affiliations between the inverted ceiling rose and the formal allusions to the architecture of the gas chambers, sites of ethnic 'cleansing,' which masqueraded as shower rooms.³³



DOORS

Negative casts of double winged doors articulate the front elevation of the memorial (Figure 8). Azara has identified the door as a detail used in the design of tomb art where,

The passage from life to death is often symbolised by a façade. The sides of some Etruscan and Roman sarcophagi containing the remains of architects or builders are ornamented with reliefs representing half-open monumental doorways, which symbolise both the gates of Hades and the doors of the houses or towns the dead person built in his day.³⁴

In contrast to these historical precedents, the door on Whiteread's memorial is shut fast. The memorial's front door is in fact internal, foreclosing access immemorial. One must, by an act of projection, attempt to enter the void of the interior:

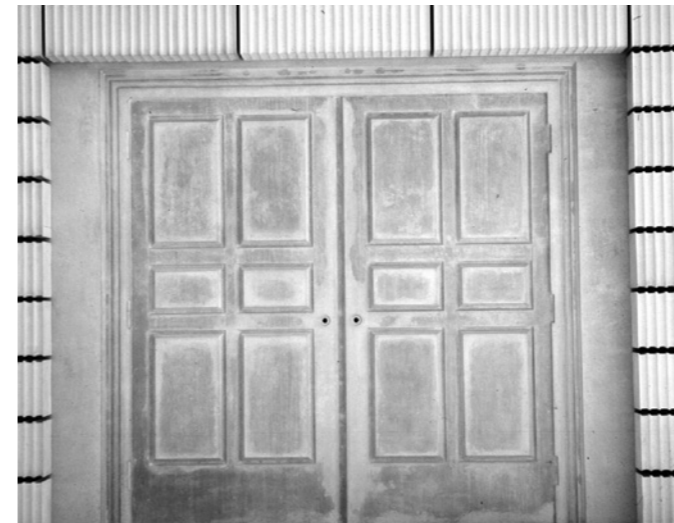
THE PLINTH

The plinth surrounding the memorial accommodates the names, in alphabetical order, of concentration camps where Austrian

Jews were killed. The surface of the plinth set below the panelled doors, contains an inscription in German, English, and Hebrew, 'In memory of the more than 65,000 Austrian Jews murdered by the National Socialists in the period from 1938-1945 (Figure 9):'

Whiteread utilises the plinth as a critical device to complement her memorial practice. The plinth institutes a 'buffer zone' between the memorial and the excavations beneath, elevating the library above this torrid site of contention. This plinth also operates to expand the topographic field of the memorial, referencing geographic displacements that connect this site-specific work with the locales of terror to which the Viennese Jews were freighted.

Whiteread's ersatz plinth simulates a reunification of sculpture and its substructure the plinth, but this connection is undercut in the section. The sectional drawings produced for the competition in collaboration with Atelier One reveal that the plinth does not register on the interior of the project. The interior void of the library is without the support of sculptures substructure, just as the books are without the support of the bookshelves (Figure 10).

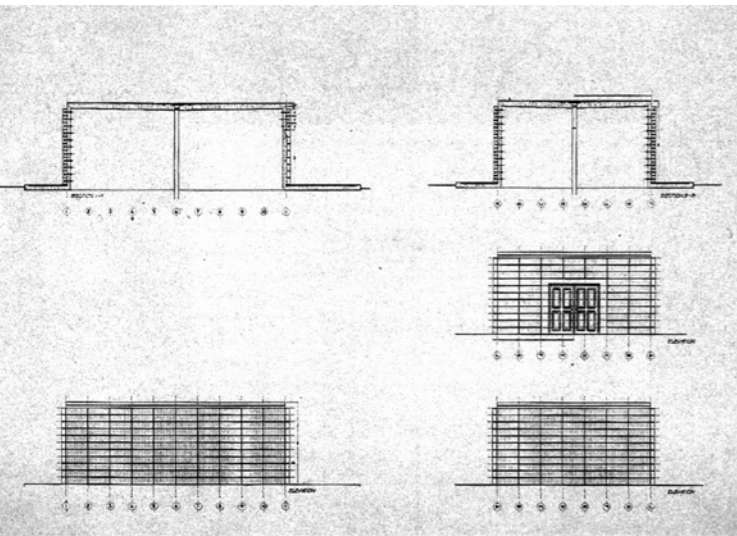


Opposite Left
Figure. 6 Rachel Whiteread, Detail of book modules on Nameless Library, concrete, 1996-2000, 390 x 752 x 1058cm, Judenplatz Square, Vienna. Photo taken by author.

Opposite Right
Figure. 7 Rachel Whiteread, Ceiling/Roof, Nameless Library, concrete, 1996-2000, 390 x 752 x 1058cm, Judenplatz Square, Vienna. Image courtesy of Rachel Whiteread.

Above Left
Figure. 8 Rachel Whiteread Door detail, Nameless Library, concrete, 1996-2000, 390 x 752 x 1058cm, Judenplatz Square, Vienna. Photo taken by author.

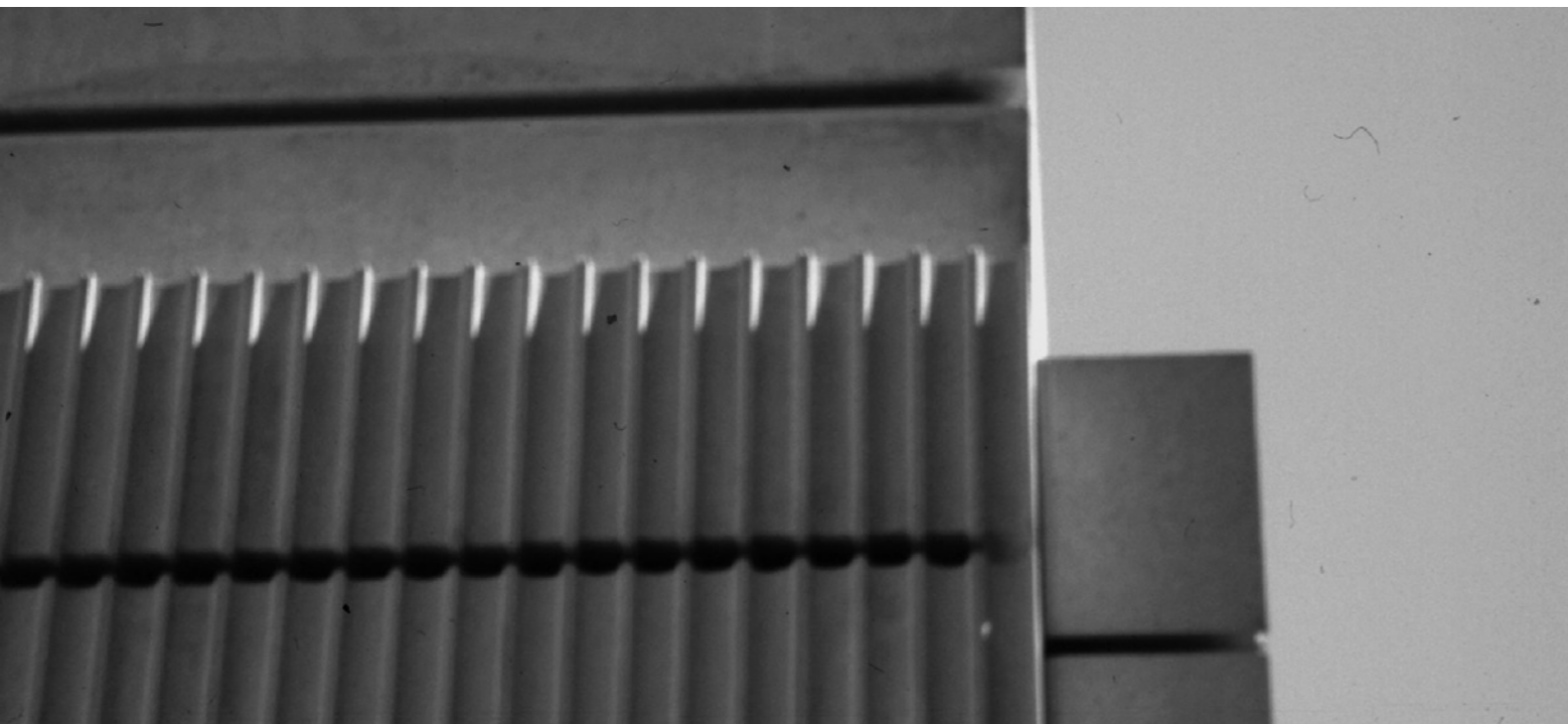
Above Right
Figure. 9 Rachel Whiteread, Plinth Detail, Nameless Library, concrete, 1996-2000, 390 x 752 x 1058cm, Judenplatz Square, Vienna. Photo courtesy of Votava/PID and the Jewish Museum, Vienna.



THE CORNER PROBLEM

At the termination of each façade of the memorial, the blank covers of the final hardback volumes meet at right angles, constructing an indent (Figure 11). This gesture recalls the design of the corner detail in Mies Van der Rohe's Illinois Institute of Technology Building, Chicago, (1945-1947). Reyner Banham observes that Mies' English critics saw this detail as:

'A philosophical problem in abstract aesthetics: did the failure of the two planes to meet at the corner mean that Mies's facades were to be read as endless, indeterminate?'³⁵ Such corner details, enlisted and applied to a memorial programme, can operate to imply that the vast archive of loss extends far beyond the parameters of the memorial itself.



Architectural theorist Anthony Vidler recognises the corner as 'one of the defining problems of modern architecture.'³⁶ He identifies the psychological effects of the corner in protecting both the occupant and the building:

In a domestic context, corners signify security. They are places of rest, where two walls moving horizontally come to peace with each other; the intersection of the two walls demonstrates and creates closure, forms a volume in which the space is held safely; corners are cosy nooks for reading and thinking. In extremis, they are the last defense of the domicile: backed into a corner, the householder, like a boxer, can come out fighting while protecting the rear from surprise.³⁷

In contrast, Whiteread enacts an uncanny conversion on the corner, the ultimate in homey spaces. Her walls of books splay out from one another at the corners of the memorial. There is no intersection at these points; the walls are not, and cannot be, at peace. The corner is divested of its responsibility to ensure the structural integrity of the interior. This formal device, coupled with the absent bookshelves articulates the immensity of the memorial's programme, inferring a catastrophic loss that remains insupportable. Whiteread's work refuses to contain and also be contained within typological categories. Both Vidler and Hatton suggest that the memorial is characterised by its 'consummate negation,'³⁸ slipping in-between archetypal forms and the disciplinary categories of sculpture and architecture. Its in-between-ness is exacerbated by the artist's use of positive and negative cast elements to mimic details from the surrounding urban context. Searle notes that 'As much as it is a sculpture Whiteread's memorial is a closed, windowless, single storey building.'³⁹

THE BUNKER AND MEMORIAL AS SURVIVAL MACHINES

One of the typological forms that inspired the memorial were the bunkers that make up the Atlantic wall. Whiteread went to Normandy to look at these fortifications and was fascinated by how they were constructed.⁴⁰ While the memorial does not duplicate the aesthetic of the bunker, with its thickset walls, rounded corners, and strategic openings, it does express a certain ambiguity that also inheres in the definition of this typological form. As Hatton has observed, the word bunker in English can mean 'store as well as shelter: it can keep in as well as out.'⁴¹

Under Whiteread's direction, the typological form of the bunker is transformed into a structure of both physical and psychic defence. The memorial has been specifically designed to resist attack by vandals and also functions as a defence against entropy, taking into itself and holding onto lost loved ones, preserving their memory, keeping it alive. In his book *Bunker Archaeology*, Paul Virilio studied these fortifications in detail. He argues that the bunker operates as a 'survival machine,' one designed to hold up under 'shelling and bombing, asphyxiating gasses and flame-throwers.'⁴² *Nameless Library* defies easy identification with historical practices of memorialisation. It operates

Opposite Top

Figure. 10 Atelier One and Rachel Whiteread, Sections and Elevations of Nameless Library, 1996. Image courtesy of Rachel Whiteread.

Opposite Bottom

Figure. 11 Rachel Whiteread, Corner Detail, Nameless Library, concrete, 1996-2000, 390 x 752 x 1058cm, Judenplatz Square, Vienna. Photo taken by author.

against convention. In a manner similar to the utilitarian requirements demanded of the bunker, Whiteread's memorial project seeks to defend the physical act of remembrance, keeping the memory of a catastrophic event alive. The placement of the memorial within an urban context was also pre-figured by the placement of bunkers. During the Second World War, these defensive structures were not only confined to the 'horizontal littoral,' alongside the Atlantic, but also cropped up:

In the middle of courtyards and gardens...their blind, low mass and rounded profile were out of tune with the urban environment... as though a subterranean civilization had sprung up from the ground. This architecture's modernness was countered by its abandoned, decrepit appearance. These objects had been left behind, and were colourless; their grey cement relief was silent witness to a warlike climate.⁴³

As well as being drawn out of its immediate environment, Whiteread's memorial is foreign to it. The project interrupts site lines across the picturesque square. Its concrete pallor is also in stark contrast to the stucco facades surrounding it. The project brings to the surface of the city its subterranean shame. It casts out the snug bourgeois interior, rendering interior comforts extrovert and inaccessible. Whiteread has taken a 'living' room and executed mortiferous renovations on it out of doors. The artist's amalgamation of interior details and exterior façadism locate it between the private and public realms and endow it with an uncanny aspect. The construction lies between room and tomb, signalling a shift between the functional and symbolic. *Nameless Library* is intent upon disturbing, as Kirstie Skinner notes, 'the smooth veneer of civilised appearances in Vienna.'⁴⁴ It functions as a perennial reminder that interiors are repositories for grave secrets and buried memories, hidden behind even the most picturesque of facades.

CONCLUSION

The construction of *Nameless Library* can be read as signalling structural absences: in the evacuated bookshelves, the corner detailing and in the loss of the sculpture's substructure within the interior of the memorial. These design decisions reflect the idea that this catastrophic loss of life is insupportable. In Whiteread's memorial, the notion of the interior is strategically re-worked. The library is excoriated and petrified. Its locus of artificial illumination is extinguished and entry to the interior has been terminally foreclosed. Its combination of positive and negative casting elements ensures that the work resides in a perpetual state of disconsolate mourning. Mark Cousins compared the processes the subject undergoes during mourning to those at work in Whiteread's signature casting practice. He suggests that her work is,

A strict analogue for the obscure process of identification which operates in mourning. When I am 'turned out' in grief, I do not look like you, or rather I look like the you I turned into, being your imprint. You are exactly what is lost since only you would fit the mould which I have

become... The work of grief now turns toward the undoing of the identification, the minutely detailed work of unpicking the subject from the object. In a way the object must die twice, first at the moment of its own death and secondly through the subject's unhitching from its own identifications. It is only then that the object can pass into memory, and that stones can be set.⁴⁵

Whiteread's memorial refuses to do our memory work for us and utilises formal strategies that function as an analogue for a process of identification that operates in mourning. For example, this undoing of identification appears to take shape where the bookshelves, the very scaffold or armature that supports and takes on this loss, have been removed. This separates the subject from the mould of the object they have become. Also, in divesting the books of their names (the 'titles' of the individuals that perished) Whiteread's memorial lodges the viewer in mourning. As Cousins notes, it is in recalling the name of another that 'one moves from mourning to memorial.'⁴⁶

When a book is completed it often signals a time of mourning for the reader. Before its termination, the reader is often wont to protract the last few hours with the beloved object of their gaze, rationing out the final leaves of the composition before putting it to rest. The finished book then takes its place on the bookshelf, along with other digested tomes. The books on fully stacked shelves are always lifeless objects, catalogued and stored. With the infrastructure absented from the memorial, the loss remains insupportable, transferred into the interior of the subject. Whiteread's proposal pays homage to all the nameless victims of mass destruction through the absence of their testimony. The armoured covers of the books are shut fast, disinheriting the psychic imagination their forms so readily invite.

Nameless Library is both made from, and foreign to, its environment. Its strength inheres in its strategic design: a design that defends the act of memorialisation itself and utilises architectural operations and details to evoke a deeply disquieting atmosphere.

NOTE: An earlier version of this paper was delivered at the 2009 Atmospheres Symposium at the University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Canada. This version of the paper has been revised in light of feedback from the Symposium and also in relation to the IDEA Journal's provocation.

NOTES

1. Robert Storr comments: 'The only acknowledgment of the fate of Austrian Jewry in Hrdlicka's grandiose scheme of writhing marble nudes is a small carving of a crouching bearded man scrubbing the streets, as Jews were compelled to do by the Nazis. Adding further insult to this demeaning symbol was the fact that people routinely used his neck as a bench until 'sculptural' barbed wire was wrapped around him by the artist to prevent such casual disrespect.' Robert Storr, 'Remains of the Day,' *Art in America*, April 1999, 108.
2. Brian Hatton, 'Judenplatz Vienna 1996,' *AA Files* 33, Summer 1997, 90.
3. On the façade of *Genossenschaftshaus der Gaswirte* (Judenplatz 3-4), on a building built in nineteenth century by Ludwig Schöne there are plaques commemorating Mozart's residency in 1789 (during which time he composed the

opera *Così Fan Tutte*), as well as a relief on Judenplatz 4 depicting the Madonna. The next building in the square, located at the corner of Parisergasse is the *Haus zum Englischen Gruss* at Judenplatz 5, was named after the relief that adorns it. The façade of the building *Pazeltshof* (Judenplatz 6) located between Parisergasse and the Drahtgasse carries a plaque dedicated by the Archdiocese of Vienna in 1998 that acknowledges the part played by the Christian church in the persecution of the Jews and the anti-semitism of the Middle Ages. On the west side of the square is the *Kleines Dreifaltigkeitshaus* (Judenplatz 7). This structure was built near the end of the eighteenth century and contains a statuette of the Holy Trinity in a recess above the protruding corner. R. Pohanka, 'Judenplatz after 1421,' in M. Häupl & B. Görg (Eds.), *Perspektiven: Judenplatz Mahnmahl-Museum*, June/ July 2000 Vienna, 101.

4. Comay notes: 'The tension goes deeper than the obvious irony of having Lessing, the seer of the Enlightenment, suddenly cast into the role of witness and overseer to an object which would seem simultaneously to insist on the promise of enlightenment and to spell the latter's ultimate opacity and relapse into myth and barbarism.'

Rebecca Comay, 'Memory Block,' *Art & Design*, 12, 7/8, 1997, 65.

Peter Eisenman's competition entry explored the malevolent extremes of Enlightenment thinking. See U. Pasterk & G. Matt (Eds.) *Judenplatz Wien 1996* (Vienna: Folio Verlag, 1996), 46-9.

5. Hatton, 'Judenplatz Vienna 1996,' 90.

6. James E. Young, *At Memory's Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 96.

7. Ziva Freiman, 'The Sorrow and the Pity,' *Progressive Architecture*, February 1993, 76.

8. Whiteread notes: 'This is the only reason I felt in any way qualified to address such an emotive subject. I have been asked to make proposals for other public commissions, but unless I've had a direct relationship with the place and understand something of its history, I simply cannot begin to engage. I can only make work that is somehow connected with my own experiences.' Rachel Whiteread quoted in Andrea Rose, *Rachel Whiteread Venice Biennale 1997* (London: The British Council, 1997), 31.

9. Rose, *Rachel Whiteread Venice Biennale 1997*, 31.

10. Andrew Graham-Dixon, 'Conjuring Art out of Thin Air,' *The Independent*, 1 October 1996, sec. 2: 14.

11. Comay, 'Memory Block,' 65.

12. Mark Cousins, M. (1996), *Inside Outcast*. *Tate*, 10, 41.

13. Hatton, 'Judenplatz Vienna 1996,' 92.

14. Comay writes of Whiteread's model:

'Rather than functioning negatively as the materialization of an absence, the model here presents us with a positive volume without a trace of negativity or absence. In this respect the memorial might seem to go against the grain of Whiteread's entire practice. No doubt it will for this very reason be suspected. For does it not seem to reverse the entire pathos and promise of the cast as the refusal to reify or posit what can only be rendered as absence or negativity? Does it not threaten to reinstate-indeed at the very level of the monument-a kind of positivity which would in this context be more than suspect?... Whatever Whiteread's projected monument is inverting here, it would appear to perform a rather different kind of negation. It is particularly striking that the peculiar hallmark of the negative cast - everything that we have come to associate with Whiteread - is in this work almost entirely abandoned. The ceiling rose and door mouldings are the only true negative forms or strict inversions in the entire structure, and would effectively function here only as artist's signature.' Comay, 'Memory Block,' 71.

15. Hatton, 'Judenplatz Vienna 1996,' 88.

16. Lisa Dennison (ed.) *Rachel Whiteread: Transient Spaces* (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2001), 59.

17. Simon Wiesenthal in 'Grim Memorial Shows Wounds Still Festering,' *New Zealand Herald*, 27 October 2000, sec. B: 3.

18. Hatton, 'Judenplatz Vienna 1996,' 88.

19. Hatton, 'Judenplatz Vienna 1996,' 88.

20. 'Some politicians in Austria did not want a Holocaust memorial. Others opposed her because she is not Jewish. Others said the metaphor of the piece - a concrete cast of a library of books, representing Hitler's attempted destruction of a people and its culture, ignored working class victims and concentrated only on intellectuals.' David Lister, 'Bitter Struggles

Bury Holocaust Memorial,' *The Independent*, 12 June 1997, 12.

21. 'Archaeological value apart, there are the moral and philosophical issues of whether the Nazi Holocaust was unique and should be commemorated singly as such, or whether it was the climax to centuries of pogrom and persecution and should therefore best be marked by emphasising historical continuity.' Ian Traynor, 'Vienna Unearths Its Jewish Guilt,' *The Observer*, 6 October 1996, 20.

22. Comay, 'Memory Block,' 65.

23. Lister, 'Bitter Struggles Bury Holocaust Memorial,' 12.

24. A symposium in January 1997, entitled, *Bone of Contention: Monuments-Memorials-Shoah Remembrance* was organised by the Jewish Museum Vienna and Institute for Human Sciences in collaboration with the Moses Mendelssohn Centre for European Jewish Studies, Potsdam, to discuss issues arising from the controversy surrounding the Judenplatz Memorial.

25. S. Lessard, 'Towering Presence,' *Vogue*, September, 1998, 426.

26. Lisa Dennison (ed.) *Rachel Whiteread: Transient Spaces* (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2001), 59-60.

27. Andrea Schlieker, 'A Book Must Be the Axe for the Frozen Sea within Us' in G. Milchram (Ed.) *Judenplatz Place of Remembrance* (Vienna: Jewish Museum Vienna & Pichler Verlag GmbH & CoKG, 2000), 25.

28. Comay, 'Memory Block,' 71.

29. Henri Petroski, *The Book on the Book Shelf* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 82.

30. Henri Petroski, *The Book on the Book Shelf*, 94.

31. James E. Young, *At Memory's Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 10.

32. Pedro Azara, 'The House and the Dead: On Modern Tombs' in Mónica Gili (ed.) *The Last House* (Barcelona: Gustavo Gili, 1999), 38.

33. Simon Morrissey, 'Rachel Whiteread: Shedding Life,' *Untitled: A Review of Contemporary Art*, Winter 12, 1996/7, 7.

34. Azara, 'The House and the Dead: On Modern Tombs,' 26.

35. Reyner Banham, *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?* (London: Architectural Press, 1966), 18.

36. Anthony Vidler, 'Architecture Cornered: Notes on the Anxiety of Architecture.' In Joseph Newland (Ed.), *The Architectural Unconscious: James Casebere + Glen Seator* (Massachusetts: Addison Gallery of American Art, Philips Academy, 2000), 42.

37. Vidler, 'Architecture Cornered,' 43.

38. Hatton, 'Judenplatz Vienna 1996,' 92.

39. Searle, 'Review,' *The Guardian*, 26 October 2000: page number unknown.

40. Rose, *Rachel Whiteread Venice Biennale 1997*, 31.

41. Hatton, 'Judenplatz Vienna 1996,' 31.

42. Paul Virilio, *Bunker Archaeology*. (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1994), 39.

43. Virilio, *Bunker Archaeology*, 12.

44. Kirstie Skinner, K. 'The Nameless Library: Rachel Whiteread's Holocaust Memorial,' *Sculpture Matters*, 13, 2001, 8.

45. Mark Cousins, 'Inside Outcast,' *Tate*, 10, 1996, 41.