

Transcript: The Individuality of Remembering

1. Videocast: Main Introduction + 9/11-Memorial

Main Introduction

Wesley, Tobias and Julia wanted to focus on the personal experience, when it comes to remembering or the interaction with memorial sights. Our assumption was that monuments more often do not invoke specific dates, events, facts or more generally spoken historical aspects, but rather confront us on a more emotional side. These emotions then get transformed via self-reflection into personal values, which actively influence our thinking and way of life.

To analyze individual practices of memory, we needed to examine the emotions they are charged with. Grieve and joy comes to mind immediately, as they are the polar opposite of one another. As a result of our investigation we are going to present you two monuments including some interviews.

Our goal was to answer the following questions: Do monuments make enough room for individuality when it comes to remembering? Are there examples of monuments that already do that? Do people involved need the large monuments that were put in place to commemorate the events so dear to their hearts?

To find out, if we were able finding answers, stay tuned!

9/11- Memorial

Introduction:

Narrator: We were inspired to include the example of 9/11 in our considerations after having listened to one of the teaching staffs' presentations. With the goal of answering the question whether paper itself possesses the ability to remember, Prof. Dr. Snyder-Körber looked at flyers that were put up just days after the tragedy to increase the likelihood of finding lost loved-ones again. This was the point where we realized that from the very beginning, remembering 9/11 and its victims was, is, and will always be highly charged with emotions, making it a perfect example for our study.

Main Body:

Narrator: Let's kick things off with a quote: *"Everyone has a memory associated with 9/11, whether it's watching the TV, hearing about it on the radio or receiving the news from someone else. Visiting the memorial brings you back to that moment while allowing you to reflect. The symbols throughout will take you on a journey, both emotional and narrative. And your guide is there to help along the way."*

While researching details about the 9/11 Memorial and Museum, we came across this text passage on its official website. This serves us as a great entry point, as it points to the reflective and emotional side of one's visit to Ground Zero. It also creates a sense of community by saying that everyone, and let's

add a “who was old enough to fully understand the extent of the event at the time” to that, has a distinct memory linked to 9/11. Bringing that up in a promotional text about the location has the function of letting the visitors know that there is a whole community out there that has already lived through the experience. Additionally, the text mentions guides who specialized in accompanying you along your journey at Ground Zero, reiterating the existence of a collective approach to memorializing 9/11.

Interview:

Narrator: The quote also alludes to a very close connection to the past which will ultimately make the experience that much more tangible. But how is it possible to establish such a close connection to past events? After all, time machines have yet to be invented. The main strategy behind this can also be detected in the passage: symbolism. There are countless symbols present, both at the memorial and the museum respectively. Since we ourselves were surprised by how hidden of a meaning most of these symbols possess, we decided to bring it up in a part of our interview. Thanks to the international relations we were able to establish during the seminar, we had the amazing opportunity of interviewing a US-born student from Flagler College. We were curious to find out, if Annabelle would be able to decode the symbols more easily due to her American citizenship. As we all know, it is not uncommon for memorials to use well-known symbols within a culture to facilitate the process of decoding for its members. Let's take a look at the interview now:

Interviewer/ Question 1: First, let's take a virtual trip to 9/11 Memorial and Museum. Although we all know what happened on the 11th of September 2001, the monuments at Ground Zero tend to have hidden meanings. Look at the following pictures and take a guess at what each monument symbolizes. If you know their meaning already, try to find an explanation as to why their symbolism isn't recognizable right away.

Narrator: Quick side note here: We showed Annabelle two pictures. You can see them both on the screen. One of them shows an art piece called King's Sphere, and the other one features the trees (more precisely one tree in particular). Both of them can be found at the memorial.

Interviewee/ Answer 1: King's Sphere: I honestly cannot tell much about this monument. I looked up more pictures to see it from a different angle and still do not really understand what it is. From some angles I think it kind of looks like a hand holding a broken globe, but I may just be making something out of nothing. Trees: I think that trees usually symbolize growth, so I think this monument was meant to symbolize growing out of the ashes of the tragedy and creating something beautiful in its wake.

Interviewer/ Question 1': I don't have a picture for the last one, so you have to use your imagination a bit. What could ramps have to do with remembering 9/11? With the help of a ramp, visitors are able to access the main exhibition inside the museum.

Interviewee/ Answer 1': Ramps: I believe this would be for those who did not die in 9/11 but were permanently injured or handicapped following the events. With the ramps at the museum, those who survived are able to easily visit.

Interviewer/ Question 2: Now look at the "solutions". You can find them in the other word-document I've added to the e-mail. Were you surprised? If so, what surprised you the most?

Narrator: Before moving on to Annabelle's answer, let me read out what the word document said about the monuments: First up, King's Sphere: This one is commonly referred to as "Koenig's Sphere" after its creator. This statue survived the attacks, remaining mostly intact. It originally stood at World Trade Center Plaza which was located right between the Twin Towers. It is meant to remind visitors that the peaceful atmosphere at the memorial isn't the only way to remember 9/11. The damage that the sphere has taken symbolizes the violent side of the attacks and keeps it present at the memorial. Next up, the tree (or trees, plural): This is the "Survivor Tree". It was found in the rubble of Ground Zero and miraculously brought back to life. Seemingly indestructible, it symbolizes the resilience and strength of the city and that NYC will always recover, even from the most horrible tragedies. Additionally, each year its seeds are donated to three communities that have gone through difficult times recently. Last, but not least, the ramps: Ramps played an important role both during the construction of the original complex and the removal of its remains. The ramp going down to the main exhibition therefore symbolizes the Twin Towers' entire story in a way. Before you get a glimpse of the main exhibition, you basically walk a mile in the Towers' shoes to retrace their history symbolically.

Interviewee/ Answer 2: Wow. I was way off. As for the sphere, no wonder I couldn't tell anything discernable; because it was damaged. I think it is amazing, just like the tree, that something actually survived the attacks. Everything I have heard since a child is that the entire block was completely destroyed. I think it is important to remember what remained and survived. I also found the history of the ramps very interesting and surprising. I think it is cool that before you even enter the museum there is already history you have to walk through.

Narrator: As you might have noticed, the first one, King's Sphere, gave Annabelle the most trouble in terms of decoding its symbolism. This didn't come as a surprise to us since the interpretation of an art piece is highly individual and can vary from person to person. Her guess at what the tree could stand for was pretty spot on, as the so-called Survivor Tree actually seeks to portray the resilience of the city, so "rising from the ashes" was a great metaphor to use here. Annabelle also tried to relate the ramps inside

the museum to the past by supposing that they are meant to make the exhibition accessible to the people who came out of 9/11 permanently injured. However, in reality, they basically symbolize the entire story of the Twin Towers, from the beginning to the very end. Annabelle herself was surprised when she was confronted with the “solutions” (quick side note here: each feature has an intended meaning, yes, but as was already mentioned, the individual interpretation varies from person to person.).

Interviewer/ Question 3: As far as I know, there are no inscriptions that tell us about the monuments’ meanings. Anna Burnley talked to us about the significance of language to make sense of monuments. Do you think it was an intentional choice not to include inscriptions? Why or why not?

Interviewee/ Answer 3: I think so. Like we learned in her [Anna Burnley’s] lecture this is done so that we can make our own interpretations. I think what you had me do earlier with trying to discern meaning from the monuments without you telling me was a great example of this. Although I have not been to the museum or memorials since they were built, I was able to come up with my own meaning for them.

Interviewer/ Question 4: Mike Butler highlighted the fact that the context provides monuments with their meaning, putting them up somewhere else would therefore also change what they stood for at their former location. Would this also hold true for the examples you reacted to in question one?

Interviewee/ Answer 4: Absolutely, having these monuments where the Twin Towers once stood makes a huge impact when viewing them. It forces the viewers to think about the history of not just the event but of the whole block.

Narrator: We then proceeded to further questions which also included more remarks made by the teaching staff during the semester. For instance, Annabelle thought that it was an intentional choice to not provide each monument with an inscription, so that we can come up with our own meaning for them. Furthermore, she also considers the placement of monuments to be crucial and agrees that they would change their meaning if transferred to other places.

Interviewer/ Question 5: Finally, would you say that monuments with hidden symbols contribute to adding a more personal and emotional side to collective memory? Why or why not?

Interviewee/ Answer 5: I think this is true as well. I think you think a lot more about the meaning behind these symbols than you would if there was an inscription telling you what they are meant to symbolize. Even if what you think about is not the intended meaning, it is still a meaning.

Narrator: We concluded the interview by asking Annabelle’s opinion on the contribution of hidden symbols to a more personal and emotional side to collective memory. She came to the conclusion that they

do, mainly because of a spectator's tendency to think more about the meaning of a monument when there's no inscription there to tell them what to make of it.

Conclusion (preliminary):

Naturally, our selection of questions sought to allude to some of our own observations on the matter. On the official website of 9/11 Memorial and Museum I mentioned earlier, we were able to detect an underlying structure that dissects the experience at Ground Zero into three to four parts: Visit – Learn – Connect – and Support. What is so intriguing about this simple chain of words is that it progressively gets more and more personal. In our opinion, the process of LEARNING about 9/11 in more detail is clearly the most important step of this chain, as LEARNING about something ultimately leads to KNOWING about something. When it comes to tragic events, understanding the full extent of the incident is crucial for being able to connect with others in the community, especially with the ones that were affected by it the most. The last step of offering your support requires you to have gotten emotionally involved in one of the earlier stages of your experience with memory.

As a preliminary conclusion we can definitely confirm that emotionality plays a significant role when it comes to remembering 9/11. It enables the visitor to connect with the events on a much deeper level and therefore goes beyond the surface. Our analysis will now turn to an example that takes us much further back in time. Will we still encounter the same form of memory? Let's see...

2. Videocast: Local Witch Memorial + Overall Conclusion

Introduction:

To explore the individuality of remembering it is quite useful not only to think about great monuments like the 9/11 memorial, but also to look at small and unobtrusive monuments. The local witch memorial in the small city of Erlenbach am Main serves a perfect example for this study.

In the year 1676, Diether Diepolt instructed the erection of a three-meter-high crucifix, made from sandstone, to remember the tragedy of his family. In 1632, Diepolt's children died due to the pestilence, and in 1629 his wife Margarete Diepolt was accused of so-called magical activities. Margarete shared the fate of many women who were blamed for witchery and was beheaded only two months after the accusations.

The story of Margarete and Diether Diepolt is a highly personal one and only, if at all, known regionally. Diether Diepolt earned his living as a wine grower, a profession which is still very common and respected in Erlenbach am Main. Diether Diepolt's profession survived centuries in Erlenbach, but did the idea behind his crucifix survive as well?

Diepolt did not only establish a crucifix, but he also put an inscription on the pedestal of the monument. The inscription reads:

O you all, who pass by, notice and see, if there is a pain like my pain.

These words are a plea to remember the pain of Diether and his family. Diether Diepolt intended to leave an impression on everybody, who visits the statue. 400 years later, the monument still exists in the oldtown of Erlenbach am Main, just 100 meters away from the city hall. Close to street festivals, bakeries, public schools, and other places, frequently visited by the people of Erlenbach. But does the statue still fulfill its intended mission or did the impact of the crucifix and its inscription change over time?

Main body:

To see how the people of Erlenbach evaluate the monument of Diether Diepolt, we conducted a series of interviews with a variety of citizens of Erlenbach.

Question 1 –Fällt dir etwas an diesem Ort auf? (Do you notice something about this place?)

Most interviewee did not recognize the monument at first.

M: Explizit, Nein. (Explicitly, no.)

Only after a second look, most of them noticed something special about the intersection.

Ma: Das Kreuz, das Denkmal oder was es auch immer ist, relativ zugewachsen ist. (The cross, the monument or whatever it might be, is relatively overgrown.)

M: Jetzt beim zweiten Blick seh ich da, irgendwie ne Statue. (Now, at a second glance I see some sort of statue.)

Question 2 – Welche Gefühle erzeugt das Kreuz bei dir und was glaubst du, wofür es steht? (What do you feel while encountering the crucifix and what do you believe does it stand for?)

While some participants did not immediately connect a certain emotion to the monument,

M: Gefühle löst's in mir jetzt nicht wirklich aus. (No emotions get triggered inside me.)

N: Es löst in mir gar nichts aus. [It (the monument) does not spark anything in me.],

some older interviewees immediately recognized the main theme of the monument.

Ma: Also es hat zumindestens mal jemand, hingebaut, eh, oder bauen lassen, wo erfüllt war mit Schmerzen. (Well, it was definitely built or let built by someone, who was feeling pain.)

Not surprisingly, the only person who was aware about the story of Margarete Diepolt, felt the strongest emotional response while encountering the monument.

H: Ein Andenken an jemand, den man vermisst hat irgendwann. (A remembrance of someone, someone who was mourned about.)

After pointing towards the year on the pedestal, some citizens came up with more concrete ideas, what Diether Diepolt is mourning about.

M: Ich weiß auch ehrlich gesagt nicht, wann die Pest gewütet hat, aber vielleicht. (To be honest, I do not know when the pestilence raged, but maybe.)

Ma: Vielleicht Hexenverbrennung, weil Klingenberg hin und her, war ja auch so ein Drama. (Maybe the burning of witches, because Klingenberg, there was also this drama.)

Klingenberg is the neighboring town of Erlenbach, in which Margarete Diepolt was held captive and tortured.

Question 3 – The story of Margarete & Diether Diepolt gets explained before the next question – Wie hat sich deine Wahrnehmung des Monumentes verändert, nachdem du nun über den Kontext Bescheid weißt? (How did your perception of the monument change after the contextualization of the statue?)

After I explained the story of Margarete & Diether Diepolt, all of the participants felt encouraged to engage more with the context of the monument and were interested in further elaborations. Some were more able to acknowledge Diether Diepolt's pain, while others expressed relief.

N: Gottseidank musste ich so ,nen Schmerz, ehm , nicht nachempfinden ehrlich gesagt, möchte ich auch niemals, ich wünsch das keinem. (Thank God, to be honest I never had to bear such a pain, and I don't never want to, I hope nobody has to.)

Ma: Ja, wenn man die Geschichte hinten dran kennt, eh, kommt schon ein gewisses, komisches Gefühl hoch. (I: Ok). Ja, definitiv, ja. [Ma: Well, if one knows the story behind the monument, eh, certain, strange feelings come up. (I:Ok). Yes, definitely, yes.]

Question 4 – Was hättest du benötigt, um den Kontext des Monumentes direkt zu verstehen? Findest du, die Stadt sollte mehr Maßnahmen veranlassen, um das Monument zugänglicher und verständlicher für seine Bewohner zu machen? (What would you have needed to understand the context of the monument immediately? Do you think the city of Erlenbach should put an effort into contextualizing and explaining the monument for its citizens?)

Every one of the interviewed, would acknowledge some sort of explanatory board.

M: Ich nenn's mal, so ne klassische Infotafel. (I'd call it a typical info-board.)

Ma: Infotafel wär, wär ok, dass man es erklärt bekommt, was es genau für einen Sinn hat. (Info-board, would be okay, so that people get an explanation, what the purpose behind it is.)

Also, many expressed displeasure about the condition of the monument.

H: Find ich überhaupt net gut, dass sich da keiner drum kümmert, ja, aber ich seh das jetzt das erste Mal, weil ich bewusst drauf guck, dass, dass es net sichtbar ist. (H: I do not like that no one cares about the statue, but it is the first time see that the statue is overgrown, because I consciously look at it.)

Others were skeptical about, whether a maintenance of the monument would make any difference to the people of Erlenbach.

N: Ich glaube tatsächlich nicht, weil sich die Menschen heute dafür nicht mehr interessieren. (N: I do not think it makes a difference, because the people of today do not really care about it.)

Conclusion:

While conducting the interviews, every single interviewee had their own interpretation for the monument itself. And while many did not know about Margarete & Diether Diepolt's story, everyone was able to get something personal out of the monument, even without the context. It is Diether Diepolt's personal words inscribed in the pedestal, which gained the most attention.

O you all, who pass by, notice and see, if there is a pain like my pain.

It is the timelessness of the quote, which made the monument approachable, almost 400 years after its establishment. Some compared the pain of Diether Diepolt with the pain bared by so many during the pandemic, others started to see an appeal in the words, an appeal to show empathy and to walk through the world with their eyes wide open. Diether Diepolt was in some way successful, with his monument he created something, which transforms his personal experience of pain into other personal experiences in the present. Or as one of the citizens of Erlenbach put it:

M: Kurzgefasst ja, ich glaube er hat sein Ziel erreicht. (In short, yes, I believe he accomplished his goal.)

Overall Conclusion

To wrap things up, we want to bring together our seemingly separated findings in one final conclusion. The following quotes from David Rieff's "In Praise of Forgetting" provide a fitting framework for this:

"[...] the historical importance of an event in its own time and in the decades that follow offers no guarantee that it will be remembered in the next century, let alone for many centuries after."

"[...] at some point in history even events as horrible as that conflict [King Philip's War] will be forgotten, if only, to put it starkly, to make room for the memory of other, less distant events, just as those alive today must sooner or later die to make room for those yet to be born."

[Quotes taken from "In Praise of Forgetting" by David Rieff (p. 17)]

Since we compared a fairly recent event with one dating back centuries, the quotes immediately present themselves as an explanation as to why spectators of monuments at Ground Zero readily try to establish a link between the monument and the tragedy, even if the symbolism of a statue like King's Sphere might be hard to make out at first. However, this is also what draws us to monuments in the first place and it encourages us to get emotionally involved because we get to interpret them in the way that makes most sense to us. Diether Diepolt's timeless, but highly emotional quote facilitates a deeper connection to the monument, as it can be implied to any difficulties we face as society. We can therefore confirm that a certain level of individuality is required to keep a monument relevant and alive when the event it refers to is so far back in the past. The same might happen to Ground Zero in the future, especially if you share Rieff's opinion on the matter. Even if it's necessary to also forget about horrible events like 9/11 to make room for new ones, this doesn't mean that the monuments become completely useless. Although there is a deeper meaning hidden deep within them, we don't consider the emotional side of memory to be in any danger because the spectator's interpretational freedom won't be lost.

Thus, we conclude that more recent tragedies and their respective monuments are characterized by an interpretation which uses the closer temporal link as a source of emotionality. Monuments of tragic events that took place centuries ago stay emotionally relevant when they allow for an interpretation that uses present events to make sense of them and also when they don't limit the spectator to certain deductions.

Thank you for watching our video. We hope you got some new insights into the function and perception of monuments.