



Figure 48 - An artwork from the Constitutional court collection,  
Johannesburg, South Africa (Photograph by author, 2016)

*Chapter 6:*  
POSTULATIONS

## 6.1. Democracy is Liminality

Aldo van Eyck (1968) defined liminality as an interrelationship between two phenomena rather than their opposition. The term originated in anthropology to refer to the in-between stage during specific cultural rites of passage, the stage after someone is removed from society and before they are reintroduced (La Shure, n.d.). In architecture, as the writing of Van Eyck suggests, liminality refers to the spaces that are neither of one place nor of another. The etymology of the word is ascribed to the latin word *limen*:

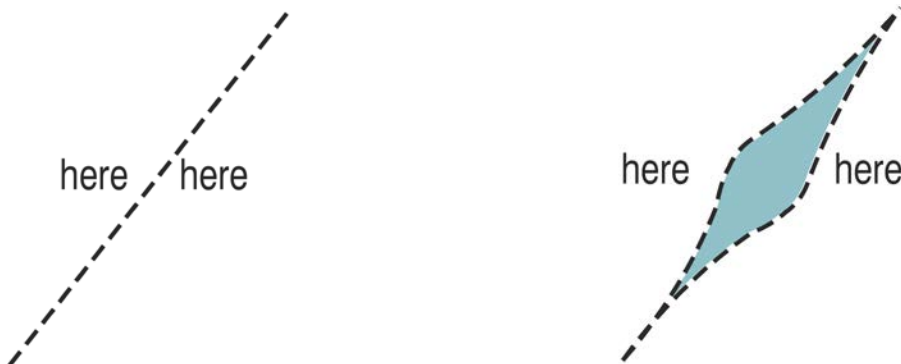
*Of or pertaining to the threshold or initial stage of a process. Both liminal and liminality are derived from the Latin “limen,” which means “threshold”—that is, the bottom part of a doorway that must be crossed when entering a building (La Shure, n.d.).*

Liminality can therefore be described as the state of physically occupying the threshold, being within it. This definition can prove more useful than expected in the pending discussion. The basis for this document is largely found on the concept of liminality although not always stated in so many words. It should, therefore, be noted that;

*As a consequence of the multi-faceted nature of liminality, I constantly shift between different dimensions of liminality including the zone between; the physical and the conceptual; people and space; the artist and the audience; one practice and its marginal alternative (Smith, n.d.).*

Much can be said about liminality but for the purpose of this investigation a specific point needs to be made. A study that claims, as this has, that truly public spaces are the most democratic spaces in the city does so on the very basis that truly public space is inherently liminal. Sidewalks become the threshold between office building and private vehicle. Parks become the pause point between taxi and home. The likelihood of encountering hundreds of fellow citizens practicing an array of different activities in the same space is the assumed definition of liminality in space.

The reality is that public space and liminal spaces in buildings (passages, corridors etc), though marking the transitional zone between two other spaces of perhaps more programmed nature, become spaces in themselves, this is possibly easier to understand in reference to public space and relates to Aldo Van Eyck's conception of the *Third Space* (Van Eyck 1968); the occupied threshold. This becomes the space where one can do both nothing and everything at once.



As Grattan's description of politicians' inability to escape one another and the press in the original Australian parliamentary building (1988: 13 in Dovey 1999: 91) the democracy of liminal space lies in our exposure to others, their freedom to be there being corollary to ours.

The very nature of liminal space, or *loose space* (as termed by Franck and Stevens 2006:42) sits juxtaposed to both colonial and apartheid city planning strategies where control and discipline were the distinctly modernist rules applied to space. By contrast then, a democratic city is not necessarily one that is absent of formal public spaces but rather one that has public spaces that are connected by public streets designed to accommodate the *anything can happen* nature of democracy. In an essay berating Times Square for being pseudo public space Aaron Betsky suggests that;

*When it works, public space, in other words, has an element of danger. It eats away at your assumptions, confronts you with the possibility of violence or disease, or even more simply to rain, snow, and heat. To use a phrase from our therapeutic culture, it takes you out of your comfort zone* (Betsky 2015a).

In his celebration of the democracy and freedom of liminality Betsky appeals the following:

*...I would call for an architecture that does not delineate public and private space, does not articulate the common, and does not connect us in a prescribed manner. I would argue for a leaky, confusing, difficult to understand and perhaps even to use architecture that, somehow, somewhere and maybe even sometimes, creates the sense that we are only truly alive when we are part of a social construct in which we can act out the roles we believe or are proper to us.* (Betsky, 2015b)

The focus of the Urban Framework and this scheme on both democracy and public space as manifestation thereof is due to the liminality of both public space and of democracy.

This establishes certain concepts, namely;

- *Democracy takes place where there is little control and possibilities are open to all users to perform their daily and occasional rituals.*
- *Democracy occurs when our exposure to others and their activities is not within our control.*
- *This implies that the most democratic spaces in a democratic parliament building are in fact not those in which debates are housed and bills are drafted but in the in-between spaces where members, the public, staff and all alike are bound to interact, most likely by chance.*

## 6.2. Fire!

*You have to be logical. You know? If I know that in this hotel room they have food every day, and I'm knocking on the door every day to eat, and they open the door, let me see the party, let me see them throwing salami all over, I mean, just throwing food around, but they're telling me there's no food.*

*Every day, I'm standing outside trying to sing my way in: We are hungry, please let us in. We are hungry, please let us in. After about a week that song is gonna change to: We hungry, we need some food. After two, three weeks, it's like: Give me the food Or I'm breaking down the door. After a year you're just like: I'm picking the lock. Coming through the door blasting.*

*It's like, you hungry, you reached your level. We asked ten years ago. We was asking with the Panthers. We was asking with them, the Civil Rights Movement. We was asking. Those people that asked are dead and in jail. So now what do you think we're gonna do? Ask? (Shakur 1994)*



In both examples above, there is insight into the reason we see acts of political demonstration taking on a disruptive and often destructive nature. Political columnist, Bongwiwe Tshiqi (Tshiqi 2015) does not advocate for the destruction of property or the disruption of education but explains that the blame for such escalations can only be placed upon those who push citizens of the point of burning their own infrastructure to make a point. *We have to blame the guys who walk around making promises during election years and then turn around and ignore their voters after the celebratory parties are wrapped up... And we have to blame ourselves for not caring enough to listen to them before they start burning and destroying our cities* (Tshiqi 2015).

Figure 49 - Jason Nelson, a popular social media commentator outlines the psychology that drives people to acts of civil demonstration and protest (Nelson, n.d.).

The value of buildings as symbols of power lies in their embodiment of tacit control of those in power over those in submission. As outlined earlier, democracy, despite its definitions of freedom and self-rule, involves the submission of those electing officials to the rule of the officials in the name of a common good. We elect those we trust to represent us. This renders government buildings as symbols of this agreement. In his description of the different manifestations of power in built form, Dovey (1999: x) suggests that authority, being institutional and accepted renders government buildings as subtly enforcing their authority on their citizens. This is visible in Nazi architecture, for example, where scale was often used to imply dominance over the individual. This is because Authority, especially when it is contested, requires legitimization. It uses symbols to do so (Dovey 1999:13-16). Buildings make the nation state visible.

In democracy there is less need for monuments and parades and strutting of state power because there isn't a need to legitimize power if the interests of the people are really being served. Monuments and grand governmental buildings fool the powerful and powerless that the authority is legitimate. According Dovey (1999:14) often the erection of overt expressions of power tend to ward and inverse relation. The Union Buildings could be seen as this false legitimization of power, Smuts and Botha hoping to convince the British and themselves of the power of Pretoria, as can big modernist government buildings of the Nationalist government (Figure 27).

Buildings are used by governments to symbolize their power (as do monuments, street names, public spaces etc.). People assign power and meaning to symbols because symbols devoid of context are merely formal expressions. To destroy a symbol, despite the destruction of a practical use of something, is to antagonise the meaning assigned it.

Why then the method of fire? Apart from global mythologies and the association of fire with stories of destruction and rebirth the use of fire has been well-intertwined with political violence in South Africa. The prominence of *Necklacing* in South African townships during the peak of the anti-Apartheid struggle. The *Necklace* implies placing a petrol soaked tyre around the victim's neck and setting it alight (Ball 1994). Ball (1994) refers to Kertzner (1988) who argues that "*rituals are invented out of pre-existing symbols, and that they become established because of the social circumstances of the participants, and not because of the inventor*" (Ball 1994). The act of setting a person alight was not performed to kill the person, they were often already dead when the burning occurred. Instead, the burning of a human body implied utmost punishment. *Burning was seen to possibly symbolise a number of things. It may be associated with the destruction of the soul of the person, thus breaking the link with the ancestors, it may signify the destruction of evil or the purification of the society. Obviously, in the physical sense, the victim is unrecognisable after he/she has been burnt, there is a visual destruction of the person* (Ball 1994).

The burning of symbols of oppression is an instantaneous ritual against a symbol. It attracts attention as can often be seen in the columns of black smoke rising high into the sky during protests. The remnants of these fires often stand smoking during the lull after protests, when government finally listens and concedes.



Figure 50 - Keith Alexander's Black Eagle (Alexander 1991) is an example of his work depicting ruined structures surrounded by natural elements with an air of reverie in the relationship.

## 6.3. Memory: The monumentality of ruins

### 6.3.1. The intrigue of the ruin (Ruinenlust)

According to a webpage selling prints of his work, Keith Alexander's main theme was *the impermanence of man's work in the face of a relentless nature*, and this theme is evident in many of his paintings. () Perhaps it is the awe of nature that inspires awe in us when seeing ruins of once great structures.

In the first few lines of her book, *Pleasure of Ruins*, Rose Macaulay refers to herself as a *pleasurist* (1953: xv) with regards to the subject of ruins. Macaulay largely attributes her fascination, much like Keith Alexander, to the conquering of manmade objects by nature.

The German term *Ruinenlust* embodies this ephemeral fascination often associated with ruins. *Ruinenlust* refers to an interest in ruins, perhaps the alternate interpretation of *lust* can also lend itself to a *desire* for ruins. This desire may explain flocks of tourists in places like Machu Picchu and the ruin-littered city of Rome. Historically, sites of classical ruin inspired awe and were used by the likes of Mussolini to inspire a nation to achieving greatness (Holland 2013). The presence of classical ruins is largely used to substantiate the greatness of the civilizations that built them, an architectural legacy for their successors. It could also testify to the power of their conquerors.

There are, however, modern ruins as well. These often carry less reverie because of their youth (as ruins); *new ruins are for a time stark and bare, vegetationless and creatureless; blackened and torn, they smell of fire and mortality. It will not be for long.* (Macaulay 1953:453) As insinuated by Macaulay, modern ruins are more often sites of war and contestation that have left buildings destroyed. Their decay is thus instantaneous at first and only then are they further degraded by nature. Despite the apparent lack of history of modern ruins in comparison to ancient ruins, modern ruins caused by deliberate destruction hold their own stories that often inspire recollections more directly accessible by the observer.

Ruins possess the ability to locate us (the observers) and themselves (the ruins) in the continuum of human existence. Buildings are intrinsically linked to culture and history and the reciprocal nature of locating self and building in time (in relation to one another) allows buildings to crystallise a specific epoch, "*ementing the very fabric of time and culture* (Trigg 2010: 8). This way, an old building serves to tell of a time gone by and our occupation of its story telling locates us in relation to the story. However, the *ruin never presents a complete narrative* (Trigg 2010:6). Certain aspects of the historic events are lost due to decay. Where building is history, ruin is memory. Through the voided space of the ruin, history and memory are visible in terms of the *felt experience of what is now absent*.

*Still, there is a tougher, more critical edge to the acceptance of the decay of buildings and their inevitable ruin that places architecture in a unique position to inform our understanding of the human condition and enhance its experience* (Woods 2012).



### 6.3.2. Memory and identity

The importance of memory discourse has become the occupation of the post-modern world where the rational recital of historic events is given less prominence and the recollection thereof, naturally tainted with interpretation and emotion, is favoured. This is perhaps because of the impact it has on the human condition. Huyssen (2003) suggests that it is essential in regaining a “strong temporal and spatial grounding of life and the imagination” (ibid: 6). This would imply that the act of remembering, as an individual or a collective, becomes a part of the coming to terms with events in history. Factual recordings of events do not tell of the human reactions they inspired – they serve merely as triggers from which we establish our interpretations and understandings. Our memory of events shape our perceptions of the events and thus our perceptions of ourselves.

Huyssen further hypothesizes that the obsession with memory may go hand in hand with mankind’s fear of oblivion. The increasing expanses of knowledge has left mankind feeling very small and it is only natural to cling to our memories when we fear ourselves slipping into insignificance. Our memories become integral to our identity. (ibid: 24-26)

In his musings about memory, Lebbeus Woods speculates that memory of events is not stored at all, that our recollections of events are constructed when we retrieve them (Woods 2012). This idea can be clarified by the writings of psychologist, Daniel Schacter who has dedicated his life to the study of memory. Schacter refers to the work of Ulric Neisser and speculates that memories are not encoded in their whole form but are stored using smaller, critical facts that trigger the recollection of the full memory (Schacter, 1996:40). In his study on the brain, David Eagleman explains how the creation of memory works and also the recollection thereof. Eagleman reiterates the concept of breadcrumbs triggering memories of events but also emphasises the role our emotions play in how memories of events are stored. For example, when we experience a moment of danger, our fear and consequent adrenalin allows our brains to collect more data than usual, providing us with a far richer memory of the event (which Eagleman describes as the reason we feel like time moves slower during these moments). The added information serves us in future fearful situations providing us with more information to predict and deal with danger. This way, traumatic events become learning opportunities to be used as future reference.

Often a focus on traumatic events governs the collective memory of a group of people. Huyssen argues that this is necessary because trauma lies on the threshold of remembering and forgetting (Huyssen 2003:8). However, an overt focus on trauma can lead to regression and repetition of trauma. Valid, collective discourse regarding human rights (e.g. the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission) may lead to collective understanding and an ability to progress from trauma. As another alternative, which is far more suited to the role of the architect, Huyssen suggests the creation of *objects, artworks, memorial or public spaces of commemoration* (ibid.: 9).

### 6.3.3. Memorials as mediators of collective memory

Young (1994) cites Arthur Danto as having said *we erect monuments so that we shall always remember and build monuments so that we may never forget.* (1994: 3) which Young then elaborates on to mean that *monuments commemorate the memorable and embody the myths of beginnings. Memorials ritualize remembrance and mark the reality of ends.* From Young's writing, monuments can both monumentalize triumphs while commemorating deaths in the path towards triumph. Memorials are thus sites of remembrance of events, devices that trigger recollection and contemplation of events and their effect on human beings.

During the lifetime of memorialisation of events there have been numerous significant changes in thinking. Initially monuments were mostly freestanding objects in open space. These can still be seen in many old cities today and are still fond tourist destinations. Over time, these objects became mediated by the creation of space around them. Benches and landscaping began to frame the objects (Stevens & Franck 2016: 11).

There was also a shift from the notion of free standing monuments to those of memorials. Not only were triumphs regarded as memorable, but hardship and loss was now remembered to inspire thought and contemplation in observers (ibid.). There was also a drastic adjustment to the scale of monuments, where the size was used to commemorate greatness, a sensitive, human scale began becoming the focus of memorials (ibid.). This could be due to the fact that human stories are being conveyed, and should thus be ore appropriate to human listeners. A change from memorials/monuments to be viewed occurred when a focus on engagement and interaction took place. This can be achieved by introducing functional aspects to memorials, not only by theme-park type installations.

Because memory is not static and requires contemplation upon each recollection it *is not achieved by simply viewing a sculpture but is instead an active, engaged process requiring people to look within themselves for memory* (Young 200:19 cited in Stevens & Franck 2016: 34).

## Case Study – Vietnam Veteran’s Memorial, by Maya Lin (National Mall, Washington DC)

With regards to subtlety of scale, the Vietnam Memorial comes to mind where Maya Lin constructed what is in essence a counter monument (this because of its refusal to occupy space in a manner that other monuments in the precinct do. The subtly and abstracted nature of the memorial allows for contemplation in the space and becomes very personal for some visitors, who recognize names of loved ones along the wall. For others, the act of decent and the presence of so many names of killed soldiers becomes an overwhelming commentary on the effects of war. There is limited interactive displays other than the engraved marble that is used to take rubbings of the names of fallen soldiers – and yet this interaction of the act of witnessing a fellow visitors taking a rubbing of the name of a loved one, becomes an emotional experience nonetheless. There is a quietness about the memorial- it does not scream for attention and demand remembrance. It quietly enters the thoughts of visitors and leaves an impression long after they leave the site. (Mock 1994)

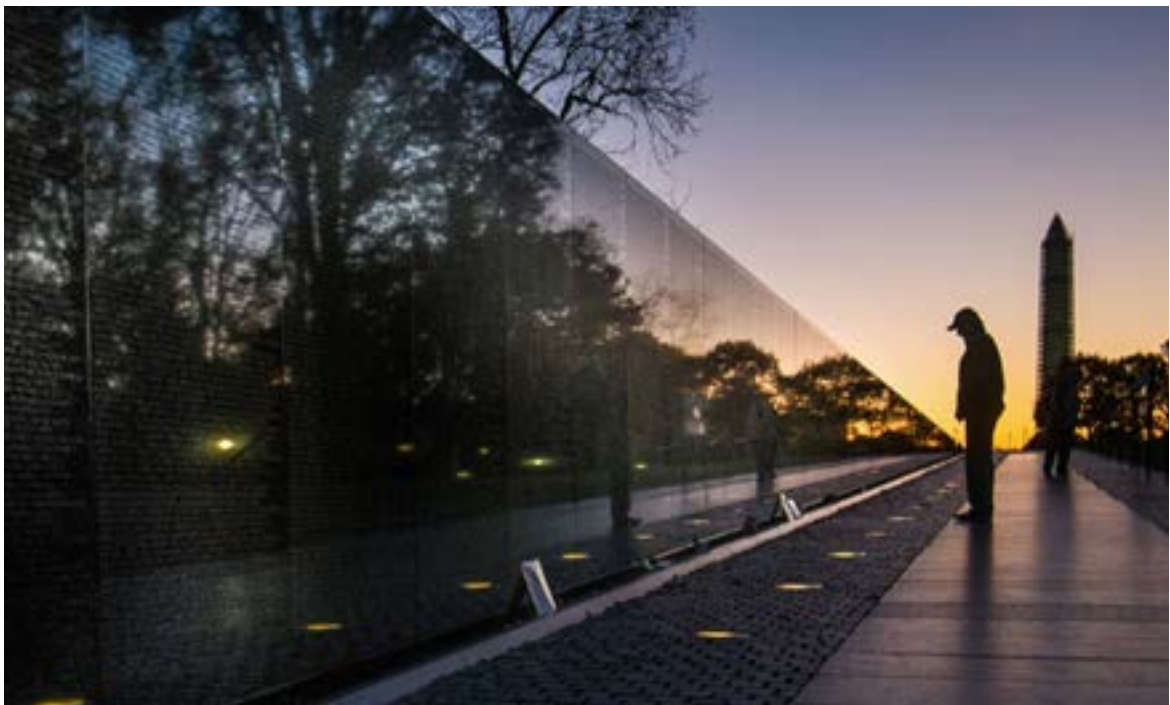


Figure 51 - (top) The Vietnam Veterans memorial is cut into the landscape, and its total height never leaves users feeling towered over (National Park Service, n.d.)

Figure 52 - (above) The Vietnam Veterans memorial is made of highly reflective marble, adding to its subtlety (Ake, 2013)

## Case Study – Diana Memorial by Kathryn Gustafson (Hyde Park, London)

The Diana Memorial Fountain exemplifies an interactive memorial that occupies and improves public space. Designed as accessible and interactive, the concept was derived from Princess Diana's kind, accessible persona as Princess of Wales. The memorial creates a thriving public space where children play and sunbathers spend summer days relaxing near the water. The fountain also has quieter spaces along it, where visitors can quietly contemplate and meditate (Gustafson Porter n.d.).



Top, then bottom:

Figure 53 - A playful portion of the fountain (Grey, 2005)

Figure 54 - A slower portion of the Diana Memorial Fountain (Royalparks, n.d.)



### 6.3.4. The value of ruins as tool for remembrance

The very nature of ruin is liminality – “in the ruin, porousness of borders prevails” (Trigg, 2010:3). Trigg compares Bachelard’s Poetics of Space which discusses the inherent protection a dwelling implies over an occupant to the ruin. In a ruin all accounts that it once implied protection over an occupant are damaged and very obviously in the process of decay (Trigg, 2010:4). If everything is decaying, nothing is still. One is not in a state of protection, nor in a state of desolation. One simultaneously occupies the present and the past and this status is constantly in flux; there is little sympathy from a ruin on those hoping to grasp their locality in its continuum, it continues to be in flux despite our occupation. When faced with a ruin we confront ourselves and those who once occupied it (and in the event of deliberate ruination, those who destroyed it). We also confront its initial reason for being constructed, its value as object and its value as ruin. The ruin discloses that the permanence assigned is a value of place and not of object (Ibid.).

In his seminal work *The Modern Cult of Monuments*, Alois Riegl discusses the point of historical value and why we assign it to objects of the past. Riegl suggests that historical value (the value inscribed on ruins for which they are protected) lies in its marking of a critical point in human development (Riegl, 1996:69-70)

*...in other words: everything that succeeds was conditioned by what came before and would not have occurred in the manner in which it did if not for those precedents. The cause of every modern historical perception is precisely the idea of development (Riegl 1996:70)*

The intrigue around ruins lies in their ability to allow us to occupy multiple realities simultaneously, this stands in opposition to well preserved old buildings which leave little room for interpretation. Ruin inspires creative remembering and leaves room for imprinting the of self on the recollection of events. The majesty of decay lies also in its embodiment of the intrinsic fragility of our buildings and, by implication, of ourselves.

Ruins of objects destroyed specifically during moments of contestation inspire a collective memory of events and can serve as a reminder of past trauma and an inspiration against allowing atrocities to ever take place again. Ruins as memorials become the trigger points of a social order, ingrained in society as a whole.

The wall itself has no value as object; it serves only to symbolize a far greater period of trauma for the German people. It thus, despite only having been used as a device separating the East and West of Germany, an atrocity in its own right, symbolizes to the residents of Berlin, and the world at large, the entire holocaust and the infringement on human rights at a mass scale.

## Case Study – The Berlin Wall

An object such as the Berlin wall becomes a trigger of a far larger collective memory that instills a spirit of *never again* in German citizens, and the world (Huysen 2003:13-14). The memory is not necessarily personal to many individuals. Often, people who had no connection to the holocaust or the World Wars are still moved by the ruins of the wall. We participate in a collective memory of pain that inspires a collective valuing of, above all, human rights. It is this lesson in humanity that ruins can inspire in us.

Two specific schools of thought and attitudes come to mind, neither having more merit than the other. The Berlin wall stands partially in ruins, partially still erect marred with graffiti from its time as a reminder to the people of Germany, and the world. This illustrates two strategies with relation to a single object. In some parts, the ruin of the wall was used as the basis for construction of new objects that serve as memorials. In others, it was left in decay, the rubble serving as memorial in itself. A large number of the different treatments of the wall were citizen-led initiatives and occurred when the ruin of the wall, a symbol of a traumatic collective memory, was left to be appropriated by those affected by its memory.

At certain points the wall has been completely removed on the surface, the line marking its position has been incorporated into the paving and is dated with intermittent plaques. These spaces allow the memorial of a ruin to enter into the daily life of people using the walkways paved around the subtle marker of the past.

In another instance, that of the Peter Fechter Memorial there was originally a cross erected along the wall at the location of his death (a very public, brutal case of mutual fear between parties that led to his very slow, inhumane death) (Brecht n.d.). Once the wall was removed and all traces of it erased in the area, a simple, small obelisk was erected in the place of his death, now a bustling commercial sidewalk.



Figure 55 - Marking the Berlin wall's location (Johnston 2012)

The third case involves the careful preservation of a portion of the wall (and watchtowers etc.) in combination with various installations and interactive exhibits that serve to educate visitors on the events of the wall. The Berlin Wall Memorial is a formal institution of remembrance where ruin was preserved to accurately convey facts and inspire contemplation upon them.

Another formal, albeit more abstract, institution of remembrance is that of the East Side gallery. A number of artists were commissioned to paint murals on the wall. This public art exhibit became a marker of public space and served to give commentary on events in a manner that inspires the public to interpret their meanings for themselves. The murals have also, at times, been the site of vandalism and graffiti, which could perhaps be even more apt for public site of interpretation than a policed exhibit of immaculate artworks.

In less popular parts of the city, however, the wall was often only partially broken down. Daily, residents walk past these remnants and the memory of events becomes a part of their daily lives. Many of these sites, and those no longer in existence, were places where the public, tourists and locals, once chiseled away pieces of the wall to keep as totems of memory.

The ruin, translated into many forms, became the instigation point for the collective memory of the people. It became public property and its destiny was in the hands of those who passed it every day, or visited on occasion. Ruins as devices for memory serve the role of collective memory in an apt manner because they are surrendered to the environment they are in, both the natural and the human context. This allows for individual and collective interpretations and appropriations of memory, which sculpts identity as individuals or a collective.

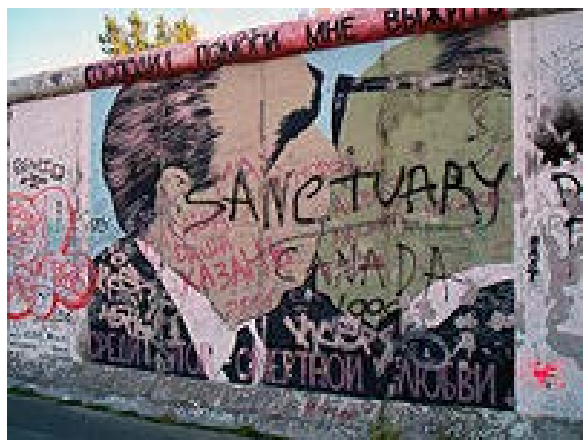


Figure 56 - The Peter Fechter Memorial (Ives 2015)

Figure 57 - An installation at the Berlin Wall Memorial (Beier 2010),

Figure 58 - A vandalised portion of the East Side Gallery (Thurn 1995)

Opposite Page:

Figure 59 - A portion of the Berlin wall left after demolition (N.A. 2010)

