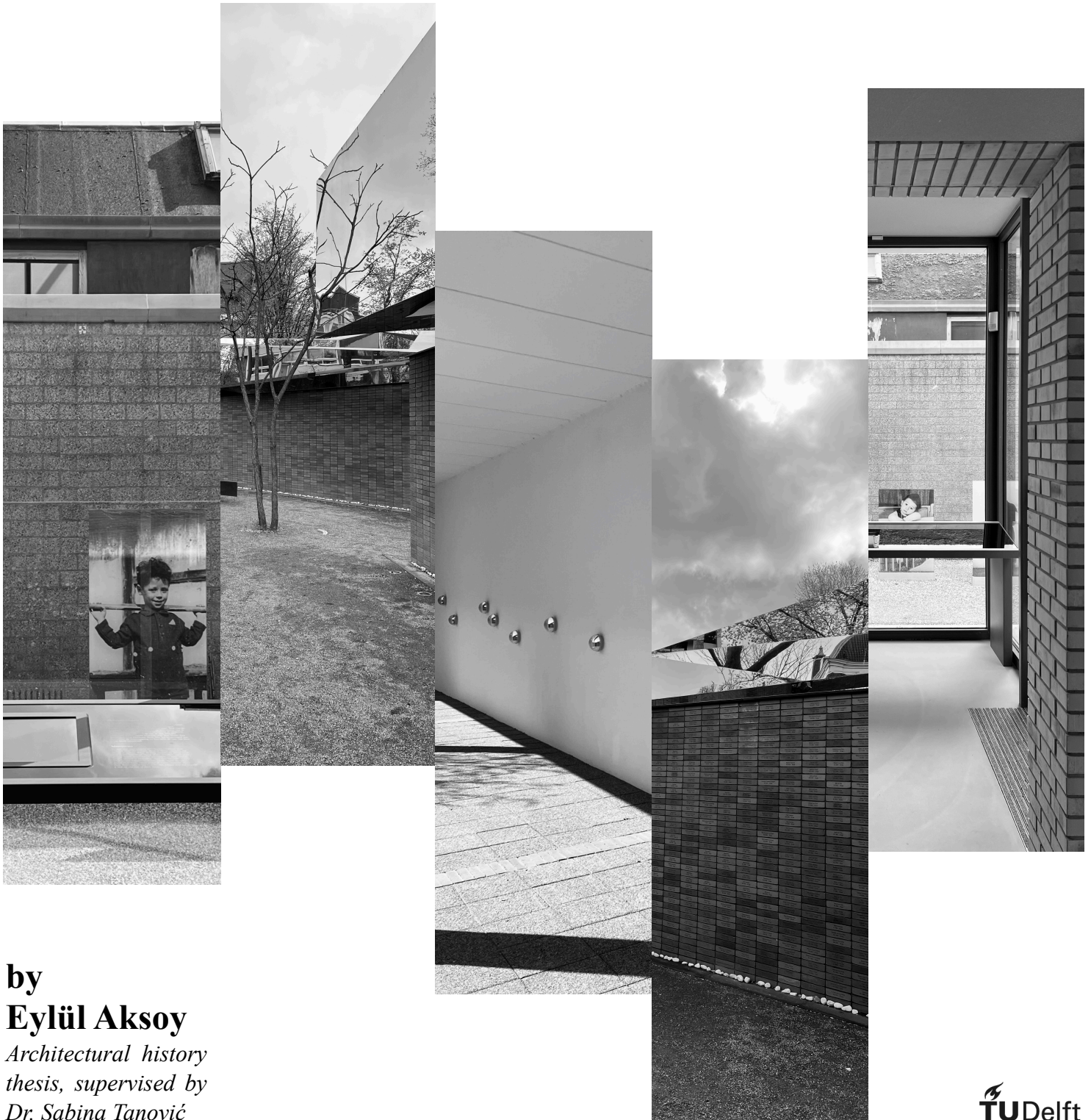


# Amsterdam's National Memorial of Names:

*The Meaning and Importance of Scale, and Community Participation, in the Architecture of Commemoration*



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# **Table of Contents**

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 Part of the Cityscape
- 1.2 Public Participation
- 1.3 Scale
- 1.4 Thesis

## **2. Chapter I**

- 2.1 Amsterdam's History of Remembrance
- 2.2 The Public Reclaim Their Park
- 2.3 Non-acceptance in the Neighbourhood

## **3. Chapter II**

- 3.1 Libeskind

## **4. Chapter III**

- 4.1 The Planning Process

## **5. Chapter IV**

- 5.1 The Hollandsche Schouwburg & National Holocaust Museum

## **6. Chapter V**

- 6.1 The National Names Memorial

## **7. Conclusion**

## **8. Bibliography**

# Introduction

## *Infusion vs Intrusion in Public Space*

### 1.1 Part of the Cityscape

Embedding an architectural project in its context exceeds the mere use of materials and spatial devices. Rather, those are simply the tools used to convey a message, and to reflect certain values. Any piece of architecture with an urban, residential location, has the potential to impact the daily lives of citizens. This is especially the case when it comes to a typology concerned with highly personal and sensitive matters, such as the architecture of commemoration. Since the early twentieth century, an increased level of importance has been placed on the experiential qualities offered by commemorative architecture.<sup>1</sup> There has been a willingness to move away from standalone objects, which symbolise or represent past events or memories, and do not, in principle, possess spatial characteristics.

The term *memorial* has gradually come to replace the term *monument*.<sup>2</sup> As with monuments, memorials can still be single objects of various sizes, placed in specific configurations. In essence, the terminology shift refers to the need for individuals to be liberated from the role of the mere observer, to the active participant. Consequently, the concept of integrating a memorial into public space, and the urban fabric of a city, has been on the rise.

Over the late nineteenth century, into the twenty-first, memorial designs in Europe, North America and Australia have articulated the multitude of ways designs can address senses other than the visual alone, allowing for the interpretation of space in a *bodily manner*.<sup>3</sup> Visitors can be fully immersed in a space by occupying, touching and hearing, as well as engaging in “acts of commemoration”. In their book, architectural researchers Quentin Stevens, and Karen A. Franck, note that the increase in independent and informal memorials pursued by the public, demonstrate,

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<sup>1</sup> Quentin Stevens and Karen A. Franck. *Memorials as Spaces of Engagement*. (Routledge, 2016), 11.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

“another mode of engaging with memorials — by making them.”<sup>4</sup> This emphasises the imperative notion that a substantial part of the meaning and value behind a memorial lies within its making process. With this new way of approaching the design of memorials, where they are becoming more and more prominent parts of public spaces, and cities, public involvement in their planning is all the more crucial.

## **1.2 Public Participation**

The participation, and presence of citizens in architectural projects, are advocated by scholars in the fields of architecture, urban planning and heritage, specifically in typologies involved with emotionally charged matters, such as memorial architecture.<sup>5</sup> In recent years, the concept of public participation in the planning and interpretation of memorials and monuments, has been gaining increasing prominence. There is a common belief, among researchers, that the active engagement of residents, can lead to solutions that are responsive to citizens’ needs, with a sustainable long-term management of heritage.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, consensus can be achieved, avoiding planning delays, as well as potential legal conflicts. With that being said, parties involved in memorial planning tend to possess differing views of how the past should be remembered, as well as varying levels of authority in decision-making. According to theorist and professor Chantal Mouffe, civil society is not, “harmonious or unitary, but rather characterised by pluralism of values and conflicts.”<sup>7</sup>

Memories, as well as the making of memorials, are often characterised by emotional claims, that are often seen as an obstacle to dialogue, or to a mutual solution, according to certain literature.<sup>8</sup> Though the sensitivity of the debate’s content impacts the possibility to reach an agreement, arguably, the environment and way in which it is carried out, as well as the power dynamics throughout the process, have an equal, if not larger influence on the overall outcome.

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<sup>4</sup> Quentin Stevens and Karen A. Franck. *Memorials as Spaces of Engagement*. (Routledge, 2016), 11.

<sup>5</sup> Alana Castro de Azevedo. *Calling on the Community*. (Berghahn Books, 2023), 162.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 162.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 163.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*.

Some scholars also believe participatory approaches do not guarantee that, “either democracy, legitimacy, effectiveness or efficiency will be achieved — let alone all of them.”<sup>9</sup> While this is a true statement, it must be asserted that cases of pseudo-participation, where the community is physically present, and seemingly in engagement, lead to this assumption. In other words, meetings held where there is no true intention to ask for the people’s opinion or input, should not be a basis for turning away from true public participation. Researchers claim that, “planners and decision-makers tend to favour forms of communication based on reason.”<sup>10</sup> While this logic can apply in certain instances, when both opposing sides provide emotional arguments, a more nuanced result can occur. The interpretation of “reason” must be more closely examined, as it can easily be manipulated by those with a higher level of authority.

During the lengthy designing and making procedure of the recently completed National Memorial of Names in Amsterdam, the public, as well as prominent intellectuals and artists, expressed a strong disapproval for the way in which the process was handled. “The creation of the monument,” artists Marien Schouten and Roos Theuws expressed, was a, “completely closed and undemocratic process,” in which, “all decision-making power over the content and form of the monument [rested] with a small committee, the DAC [Dutch Auschwitz Committee], while the government bore the majority of the costs.”<sup>11</sup>

### **1.3 Scale**

In academia, memorials and monuments are often categorised based on their content, and the specific events which they symbolise.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, not a great deal of research has been made where such projects are classified based on their immediate context, levels of public accessibility, and the extent to which they are locally influenced and accepted. Professors Ebru Gurler and Basak Ozer mention in their publications that commemorative projects tend to either be

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<sup>9</sup> Alana Castro de Azevedo. *Calling on the Community*. (Berghahn Books, 2023), 163.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Thijs Niemantsverdriet. *Jacques Grishaver Fought for the Holocaust Memorial for Fifteen Years*. (NRC, 2021).

<sup>12</sup> Ebru Gurler and Basak Ozer. *The Effects of Public Memorials on Social Memory and Urban Identity*. (Elsevier, 2013), 859.

located away from the city centre, where their scale can be grand, or within the city, in the forms of smaller gestures, such as monumental statues.<sup>13</sup>

The National Memorial of Names does not exactly fall into one of the two categories, and hence is a rather unique type, which has not been the subject of extensive research in the past. The scale of the project exceeds that of a mere set of objects, yet is still placed within a city centre, among urban dwellers, and within daily life. Although it is not a very large memorial when considered in relation to memorials in general, it is large relative to its precedents in the city. In order to illustrate this, the example of Ground Zero in New York can be taken. Here, the absolute size of the memorial is very large, however New York is also a big city. Therefore, it does not feel intrusive in the bustling, fast-paced rhythm of the place.

On the other hand, in the case of the National Memorial of Names, a project much larger in scale compared to its predecessors in the city, was implemented, provoking a high level of controversy. Again, the issue at hand was not so much its absolute size, but its relative size in the city of Amsterdam, and in the specific neighbourhood. Such a project in the centre of a larger city might not have caused such a debate, however Amsterdam is a city which possesses a quiet, humble, and small-scale, community-based way of living, even in centrally located neighbourhoods. Hence, community participation takes on a whole new meaning in this project.

With the project's fairly recent completion, in 2021, there is a lack of precedent research surrounding its design process and the extent of citizen participation. Nevertheless, researcher Alana Castro de Azevedo, who has interviewed the relevant parties, compiling and analysing information, believes that such projects require a change from a "politics of antagonism" to a "politics of agonism".<sup>14</sup> The opponent must be seen not as enemy, but as adversary, creating an environment where constructive debates can occur.

There is often the preconception that, the more physical space a project occupies, the more present, and confrontational it is, the more impactful it will be. Yet, this approach can prove to be rather oblivious to the way in which a memorial actually generates emotional value, and connects with

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<sup>13</sup> Ebru Gurler and Basak Ozer. *The Effects of Public Memorials on Social Memory and Urban Identity*. (Elsevier, 2013), 859.

<sup>14</sup> Alana Castro de Azevedo. *Calling on the Community*. (Berghahn Books, 2023), 164.

people. Local journalists have been criticising this mindset in relation to the National Memorial of Names since its conception. Sociologist and journalist Herman Vuijsje addressed this issue in his article, noting, “what a primitive idea it is that the scale of the crime should be commemorated in an equally megalomaniac language. As if those shapes could even remotely do justice to that.”<sup>15</sup> Another local journalist, Auke Kok, pointed out the numerous existent Holocaust memorials in the city, of much smaller scale. He mentioned that, one thing these exemplars have in common, is that you have to “seek them out”. “Apparently,” Kok commented, “[that] bothered the Auschwitz Committee.”<sup>16</sup> There is a recurring theme of scale, which seems to have been a tool used by the developers of the project. Yet, this deliberate move did not sit well with the neighbourhood community.

#### **1.4 Thesis**

This paper aims to explore the role of the National Memorial of Names in the remembrance of Amsterdam’s traumatic past, questioning whether it aids the mourning of the city. It aims to unravel the meaning and importance of community participation in memorial architecture, arguing that, the value of such structures often emerges through the making process itself, and through the way in which it infuses into the city fabric, into neighbourhoods and communities. The paper will address the significance of scale, revealing the way in which it can become a major factor in the rise of controversy surrounding a proposal. The interrelated concepts of public involvement, proportion, and boundaries, will be dealt with. More than with any other typology, commemorative spaces deal with the tension between every-day life and occasion, between the mundane and the spiritual. The text will explore what it means to create site-specific architecture, in terms not only of material and spatial realms, but those related to the people of its context.

As mentioned, the National Memorial of Names falls into a rather specific typology within memorial architecture. It is neither a large, distant memorial, nor a small, more central one, but seems to fall somewhere in the middle. There is therefore, not a great deal of writing on similar cases, or on this specific case. Yet, as a highly controversial project, and as a materialised

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<sup>15</sup> Herman Vuijsje. *The Holocaust Memorial: Big, Bigger, Grotesque*. (NRC, 2016).

<sup>16</sup> Auke Kok. *The Holocaust Names Monument Confronts Like Crazy*. (NRC, 2021).

interpretation of a new way of remembering, with a high degree of influential potential, there is a lot to be extracted from the memorial. The thesis will aim to bridge this gap, through taking the project as a case study, and questioning its role in the remembrance of Amsterdam's WWII past. It will explore the meaning and significance of public participation, not only in the architecture of commemoration, but in projects dealing specifically with the tension between the spiritual, and the every-day.

Initially, the overall process and execution of the project, will be critically reviewed, in relation to the central topics. To continue, studies of Libeskind's philosophies and approaches to architecture, and to the particular case study, will be made. Next, the timeline of council meetings, and the involvement of participants will be will be looked at in further detail. Footage of municipality meetings with the residents of the site and the public, showcasing the unscripted and spontaneous evolution of events, will be reviewed. Similarly, reports containing direct quotations from both parties involved will be examined. The articles of local journalists will be evaluated. A series of documentaries, including interviews, which follow the process of the monument's proposal, through to its execution, will be studied. A site visit to the National Memorial of Names will be conducted, as well as to other memorials in the city, in order to analyse and document the architectural qualities and experience offered by the spaces.

## Chapter I

### *Public Participation, Architectural Scale & Spatial Boundaries*

#### **2.1 Amsterdam's History of Remembrance**

“What is that bizarre colossus doing here?” an elderly woman asks a journalist, as she watches the workers in the making of a new Holocaust memorial in Weesperstraat. “Everything had to give way for this,” she remarks, “Nothing has been asked of us residents.”<sup>17</sup> An actress and animal rights activist takes to social media to express her frustration, “I am angry! Why not create a monument while preserving the old trees that are already there?”<sup>18</sup> The recently completed National Names Memorial (2021) in Amsterdam was perhaps the most controversial piece of commemorative architecture in the last couple of years, both in the city, and in its field. Over the course of its lengthy implementation process, inhabitants, critics, artists, as well as public figures alike, opposed the top-down manner in which they felt the planning and making process was being carried out.

The city of Amsterdam has a complex relationship with its World War II past. Over the years, there have been several attempts to articulate the experienced trauma and the need for remembrance, materialised in the forms of monuments and memorials scattered around the city. Some of these structures became the subject of controversy themselves, and seemed to contribute to the tension, as opposed to relieving it. Needless to say, the introduction of Holocaust monuments into the urban fabric of Amsterdam has always been a sensitive debate, with a need for extremely careful planning.

By the end of the German occupation in 1945, only 35,000 of the 140,000 Jews in The Netherlands had survived.<sup>19</sup> The first monument dedicated to the Holocaust, The Monument of Jewish Gratitude, was completed in 1950, and displayed the message, “protected by your love”. The stone structure was widely criticised for addressing Jewish gratefulness, as opposed to commemorating the thousands of victims. It was seen as portraying the war as a “unifying tragedy”, and hence raised

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<sup>17</sup> Auke Kok. *The Holocaust Names Monument Confronts Like Crazy*. (NRC, 2021).

<sup>18</sup> Miryanna van Reeden. (X, 2019).

<sup>19</sup> Jeroen Dewulf. *Amsterdam Memorials, Multiculturalism, and the Debate on Dutch Identity*. (Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 243.

questions on the role of Dutch society in the deportation of Jews.<sup>20</sup> Their reputation as a “nation of culprits”, as opposed to a “nation of heroes”, resurfaced.

In 1960, the Hollandsche Schouwburg (Dutch Theatre) was opened as a memorial, and became the first building to commemorate the Holocaust. The structure was first established in 1892, and served as a theatre until 1942.<sup>21</sup> (Fig. 1) During the early German occupation, one of the measures taken against Jews was prohibiting them from attending the same theatres and concert-halls as non-Jews. The Hollandsche Schouwburg was renamed the Joodsche Schouwburg (Jewish Theatre), and became the main venue for Jewish performers, who were forced out of their orchestras and theatre groups.<sup>22</sup> When the mass deportation of Jews began in 1942, deportees would need to register at an “assembly center”, where they would await their transfer to the transit camp in the north of the country, before being deported to Eastern Europe. For a sixteen-month period, the Hollandsche Schouwburg was used for the registration and deportation of more than forty-six thousand Jews from different parts of the country.<sup>23</sup> The Hollandsche Schouwburg memorial, recently underwent a renovation, and Reformed Nursery School across the street was transformed into the National Holocaust Museum.<sup>24</sup> Due to its historical backstory and significance, the memorial fosters a direct connection with the events and individuals it commemorates. Chapter IV will examine these two buildings in further detail, in order to provide a parallel insight into the ways in which other projects in the city are being carried out.



Figure 1: Hollandsche Schouwburg during World War II with Nazi guards (1942), 2024, (Office Winhov), <https://www.winhov.nl>.



Figure 2: Jan Wolkers, Spiegelmonument voor Auschwitz, (Traces of War), <https://www.tracesofwar.nl>.

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<sup>20</sup> Jeroen Dewulf. *Amsterdam Memorials, Multiculturalism, and the Debate on Dutch Identity*. (Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 244.

<sup>21</sup> D. A. Duindam. *Signs of the Shoah: The Hollandsche Schouwburg as a Site of Memory*. (Amsterdam University Press, 2016), 3.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>24</sup> Hollandsche Schouwburg & National Holocaust Museum. (Office Winhov, 2024).

The Anne Frank House was another building which opened to the public in 1960, providing a parallel insight into the Holocaust, through the lens of a specific family, and a specific individual. In the following years, several monuments were placed throughout Amsterdam, including the Spiegelmonument (Mirror Monument) (1977) (Fig. 2), and the Monument to Jewish Resistance (1988). In 1992, Stolpersteine (Stumbling Stones) started to appear throughout the city, and the Schaduwkade (Shadow Quay) was realised in 2013.<sup>25</sup>

The temporary Levenslicht (Light of Life) installation, materialised in 2020, was perhaps the first “contemporary” memorial in the city, where 104,000 luminescent stones were put in place to remember 104,000 victims, shared across 170 municipalities affected by the Holocaust.<sup>26</sup> (Fig. 3) Levenslicht moved away from the “traditional” idea of a monument or memorial, by adopting neither a standalone sculpture, nor a building, but rather the Jewish ritual of placing stones for the deceased. Yet, arguably, the project was able to achieve a sense of space, and spatiality, through the way in which it influenced individuals to collectively commemorate.



Figure 3: Levenslicht, 2020, (Studio Roosegaarde), <https://www.studio Roosegaarde>.

## 2.2 The Public Reclaim Their Park

The idea for the National Memorial of Names emerged from an intention to individualise and name each victim one by one, where each name could be approached and touched. Since 2006, there had been initiatives led by the Dutch Auschwitz Committee (hereafter the “initiators”), to introduce such a monument to the city.<sup>27</sup> The journey from then, to the completion of the project in 2021, was a

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<sup>25</sup> Gemeente Amsterdam.

<sup>26</sup> Studio Roosegaarde. Levenslicht. (2020).

<sup>27</sup> Alana Castro de Azevedo. *Calling on the Community*. (Berghahn Books, 2023), 164.

tumultuous one, consisting of a series of legal battles with residents of the site, followed by a change in location and design.<sup>28</sup>

The 102,000 Dutch Holocaust victims, including Jews, Roma and Sinti groups, would be individually named. The initiators approached renowned architect, Daniel Libeskind, for the creation of the memorial. Jacques Grishaver, the chairman of the Dutch Auschwitz Committee, was a Jewish Holocaust survivor who lost numerous family members in the war. After visiting Libeskind's Ground Zero in New York, where the names of the victims are inscribed in large bronze panels, and can be touched, he wanted to create the same haptic experience in Amsterdam.<sup>29</sup>

After six years of lobbying the city council for the implementation of a public memorial, the initiators managed to secure a site in Amsterdam's Jewish neighbourhood, among other symbolic buildings, such as the Jewish Historical Museum, the Portuguese Synagogue, the Hollandsche Schouwburg, and the National Holocaust Museum. The memorial would be placed in the Wertheimpark, adjacent to the Spiegelmonument.<sup>30</sup>

Despite, and arguably because of, the initiator's eagerness to move forward with the proposal, and the council's support and promise of funding, the memorial quickly became a topic of heavy debate, and controversy. Critics and local residents questioned the expenditure of public funds on yet another memorial, directly next to an existent monument.<sup>31</sup> The neighbourhood community was especially concerned with the potential disruption the memorial would bring to their park, and the trees that would have to be removed to make way for the project. They argued that the proposal was too large for the park, and that they had no intention to let go of their green spaces.<sup>32</sup>

Perhaps even more importantly, a major cause for concern was the way in which the project had been commissioned. The local inhabitants had not been consulted or involved in the development of the project, and were simply being informed of the critical changes that would be taking place right

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<sup>28</sup> Alana Castro de Azevedo. *Calling on the Community*. (Berghahn Books, 2023), 164.

<sup>29</sup> Joram Bolle. *Er is gewoon geen alternatief*. Holocaust Namenmonument. (2015)

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Alana Castro de Azevedo. *Calling on the Community*. (Berghahn Books, 2023), 165.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

outside of their homes. Moreover, when expressing concerns and objections to the proposed memorial, there was a tendency to dismiss individuals by referring to them as NIMBYs (Not in my Backyard), and to even go as far as calling objectors “anti-Semites”, and “Holocaust deniers”.<sup>33</sup> The public, on the other hand, accused the initiators of merely pursuing their personal interest.<sup>34</sup> Protests took place, with the local community hanging banners across the Wertheimpark, refusing to surrender their open space.

Following the outrage from the public, the municipality decided to search for an alternative location. Their aim was to ensure a more careful selection. Yet, this time the initiators insisted on Weesperplantsoen, another green area also in the Jewish quarter, close to the previous plot.<sup>35</sup> In fact, The Monument of Jewish Gratitude already lay amongst the trees of the site, and would be removed along with the nature. The decision once again sparked a public outcry, with many intellectuals and public figures showing support for the public and the local residents. Following the grant of building permits, a lawsuit was launched against the municipality.<sup>36</sup>

Following the residents’ objections, Grishaver claimed, “The people who took us to court, a lot of them live in houses stolen from Jews.”<sup>37</sup> Such accusatory remarks by the head of the committee in charge, raise serious questions about the competency of the initiators in fulfilling their responsibility to carry out a fair and democratic planning process. There seems to have been an overly defensive attitude towards the public, which clearly only fuelled further conflict, and in a counter-productive manner, introduced uncertainty on the authority’s capability. Moreover, it is clear to see that the citizens were very much viewed as the “opponents” as opposed to “collaborators”. Backed by the municipality, the initiators do not seem to have felt the need to discuss, or provide explanations to the residents.

“Grishaver’s central role is symptomatic of a failing and absent government” noted Petra Catz, a resident, “[the municipality] has completely blocked any form of discussion about the monument

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<sup>33</sup> Alana Castro de Azevedo. *Calling on the Community*. (Berghahn Books, 2023), 165.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Matt Lebovic. Dutch Holocaust Survivor, Memorial Founder Jacques Grishaver to Address UN. (The Times of Israel, 2023).

due to the charged nature of the subject. Jacques Grishaver made clever use of this and dismissed objectors as anti-Semites, which the municipality left unchallenged.”<sup>38</sup> One of the many aims of the Holocaust memorial, is to fight against discrimination of any kind, warning future generations of its horrific consequences. A social media user expressed their concern on the potential counter-productive nature of the memorial: “It doesn't seem like this monument will help do anything against anti-Semitism. There are reasons to believe that it will work the other way around, unfortunately.”<sup>39</sup>

In response to the outrage from the public regarding the felling of twenty-five trees in the second site, Grishaver replied, “The trees were far more important than 100,000 people.”<sup>40</sup> The committee’s view of what a monument should respond to, was clearly quite independent of its immediate environment, and the people of its context. Time after time, the community expressed the utmost importance of the preservation of trees and nature in their neighbourhood. Instead of utilising this value in the making of the monument, the authorities went ahead with removing all of Weesperplantsoen’s trees, and implementing their existent design.<sup>41</sup> This is especially difficult to comprehend in regards to the architecture of commemoration, which is a typology with the capacity and liberty to adapt and infuse according to a given site, and is free from many constraints that a lot of other buildings must comply with. Hence, there is all the necessary space to create a piece of architecture which speaks to its surroundings, the ground condition, the existent nature, and the people it is surrounded by on a daily basis.

## **2.3 Non-acceptance in the Neighbourhood**

It is clear that the interrelated factors of public participation, scale, and boundaries, all accumulated, resulting in the extent of the public outrage. This becomes even more apparent when studying precedent Holocaust memorials in the city. Critics and residents alike, have pointed out the numerous existent initiatives, one of which is the aforementioned Schaduwkade, just around the

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<sup>38</sup> Thijs Niemantsverdriet. Jacques Grishaver vocht vijftien jaar voor het Holocaust-monument. (NRC, 2021).

<sup>39</sup> Auke Kok. The Holocaust Names Monument Confronts Like Crazy. (NRC, 2021).

<sup>40</sup> Matt Lebovic. Dutch Holocaust Survivor, Memorial Founder Jacques Grishaver to Address UN. (The Times of Israel, 2023).

<sup>41</sup> Alana Castro de Azevedo. Calling on the Community. (Berghahn Books, 2023), 165.

corner from Weesperstraat.<sup>42</sup> (Fig. 4) The project consist of two-hundred metal plates placed along the periphery of the Nieuwe Keizersgracht canal. Each plate names a victim who was deported and murdered, and the plates are grouped according to the house number where they lived, right across the water. Each resident's age, date, and place of death is noted on their plate. The memorial was initiated by twelve of the neighbourhood's current residents.<sup>43</sup>



Figure 4: Monument Schaduwkade, 2017, (Gemeente Amsterdam), <https://amsterdam.kunstwacht.nl>.

The project is extremely well-integrated into the urban fabric in numerous ways. First of all, it forms a direct connection with the historical context, thought the placement of the names across from what used to be their homes. Standing in front of the plaques, one's eyes linger across the water and up towards the row of houses ahead, and back to the names. It is almost as if, after everything, they are brought back home. Secondly, it established a strong relationship with the physical context, by becoming a part of the ground, along the threshold between the street, and the canal. It quite literally is a part of the city, a mark of remembrance engraved into the earth. It speaks in the language of Amsterdam — it feels natural. It makes sense in the city, and to its citizens. There is a certain weight that it possesses, there is something deep in its apparent simplicity.

As briefly mentioned before, there is often the preconception that memorial projects which occupy a greater amount of space, are more confrontational, and create a more dramatic and lasting impression on the visitor. Another common belief is that memorials must be composed of volumes, and posses three-dimensionality, in order to create spatiality, and a sense of *space*. Yet, the Schaduwkade stands as a noteworthy example which disproves this mentality. Through its subtle, yet assertive presence, the memorial undoubtedly creates space. Approaching the site, one can already sense a distinctive zone, where individuals face in a specific direction, and act in a specific way. They approach the plates, but never walk too close. They lay stones and flowers around the names, they touch the names. The memorial is both a part of a normal street, and of something significant — the project infuses into daily life. Additionally, the boundaries of the memorial are

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<sup>42</sup> Herman Vuijsje. *The Holocaust Memorial: Big, Bigger, Grotesque*. (NRC, 2016).

<sup>43</sup> Gemeente Amsterdam.

blurred. It is unclear exactly where the memorial ends, and the sidewalk begins. It is powerful in its humbleness and modesty.

Readdressing the National Memorial of Names, in the light of this precedent, the contrast it poses to the way of remembering in the city, becomes all the more clear. To begin with, it is not a subtraction, or an embedment, but rather an addition, and as with any addition to a preexistent context, its proportion is critical. This is especially the case in a city like Amsterdam, which is used small gestures, as opposed to bold moves. “With its colossal proportions, it would detonate anywhere in the city center of Amsterdam” Vuijsje remarks.<sup>44</sup> This simplistic mentality is present in the fields of architecture and urban planning, but is also a cultural mindset — there is a clear refrain from exaggeration. It is important to also note that the National Memorial of Names is very much a memorial in the traditional sense of the word, where a message is conveyed in stone, or in this case bricks, possesses mass, is permanent, and there to stay. The most recent Holocaust structure prior to it, the aforementioned Levenslicht memorial, seemed to pave the way for a new kind of remembrance in the city, which still spoke in the local language. It did not replace any public or green space, but rather became a subtle addition.

There is also a large emphasis placed on the preservation of green spaces, and a preference for projects which compliment the city’s nature. A vast majority of the time, the replacement of greenery is simply out of the question. A design which is replacing a green space is already more prone to harsh critique, and every design move must be made with the utmost consideration. The terrain of the Weesperplantsoen was completely remade. Along with the felled trees, the grass, which covered the whole plot, was also removed, and replaced with fine, crushed stones, which form the base for the brick walls. This seemingly small gesture alone immediately detaches the project from the rest of the city, and defines clear boundaries around it. Of course, this sensation is strengthened by the gates which surround the whole structure. The fencing-off of what is deemed to be “public space” has always been a large debate, as it always implies the introduction of invisible barriers which monitor society. It risks the potential of almost taking away a part of the city that used to belong to its people. In turn, it becomes much more likely for this to provoke the intuitive reaction of reclamation. To the residents, depriving them of their lush, peaceful, quiet pocket of green space was already outrageous, and on top of that, the introduction of such large structures,

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<sup>44</sup> Herman Vuijsje. *The Holocaust Memorial: Big, Bigger, Grotesque*. (NRC, 2016).

with the potential of turning their neighbourhood into a busy tourist attraction, was simply unacceptable.

Taking a closer look at this seemingly “architectural” project, designed by one of the most prominent architects in the field of commemoration, seems to reveal a lack of the very thing that architecture is supposed to be — “a civic art” according to Libeskind himself, which, “requires public participation.” He further elaborates that they, “have to work very closely with everyone” and that, “It’s not just a whim of fancy — it is a public project.” This notion raises several questions in the way in which Amsterdam remembers, and whether or not its commemorative structures aid its mourning. Should the Schaduwkade then not be considered architecture, simply because it is not comprised of volumes? Even though it arguably exudes a stronger spatiality than several three-dimensional memorials? These questions remain relevant, as they shape the future of memorial architecture. Amsterdam’s Dutch Auschwitz Committee felt that the precedent cases in the city did not “confront” sufficiently. Yet, it is clear that the scale of the memorial defines neither the scale of confrontation, nor the level of solidarity. Rather, it can prevent the sense of intimacy, and introduce a feeling of hostility, fostering local rejection.

## Chapter II

### *Memory in Architecture*

#### 3.1 Libeskind

Reviewing Libeskind's background, ideologies, and architectural philosophies, provides an insight into his thinking process during a project. The Polish-American architect was born in 1946, in Lodz, Poland, following the end of the war.<sup>45</sup> His parents are survivors of the Holocaust, to which many of his family members fell victim. As a young boy, Libeskind was a musician, and he explained his shift to the field of architecture as having played the "wrong instrument" beforehand.<sup>46</sup> To him, music and architecture share many common traits, and to this day, his background in the aural arts influences the projects he works on.

Libeskind approaches the concept of memory from a very specific angle. He sees memory as a point of reference and orientation in the world, asking, "What do we remember in our lives? Do we remember complex ideas? We just remember something very, very real, like a brook, or a window, or a tree, or a tower. When I'm designing something, I think of it not just as an object, a functional presentation, a technological, cultural invention, but as something that has to do with memory. Because that's what we are. We are oriented because we can remember."<sup>47</sup>

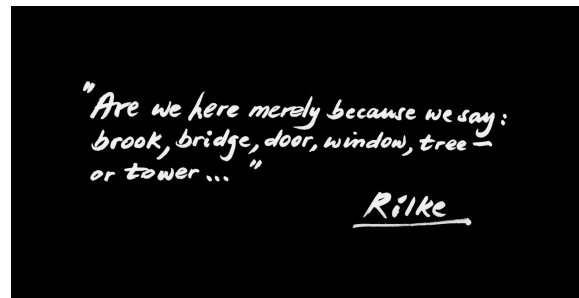


Figure 5: Daniel Libeskind, *Architecture is a Language*, quote from Rilke, 2013, (TEDxDublin), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vEkDosanxGk>.

In his designs, the architect questions the manner in which the components of the built environment are often categorised. "Between the notion of a drawing, of a house, of a museum, of a neighbourhood, of a city, I erase the lines," he notes, continuing, "Because a city is a museum, a museum is a drawing, a drawing is a neighbourhood, a neighbourhood is a house. The old

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<sup>45</sup> John Zukowsky. Daniel Libeskind. (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2024).

<sup>46</sup> Alison Beard. Life's Work: An Interview with Daniel Libeskind. (Harvard Business Review, 2018).

<sup>47</sup> Daniel Libeskind. *Architecture is a Language*. (TEDxDublin, 2013).

categories of what we have always considered separate entities, in my view, coexist together as a singular world.”<sup>48</sup> Additionally, he mentions that his “working-class background” influences his attitude towards the kind of projects he works on, emphasising that architectural design is about “responding to people’s needs”.<sup>49</sup> Libeskind discusses the close attention which must be paid to the context, mentioning that, “You start by immersing yourself in the site, putting your head into the earth... listening to and looking at what is there but also the less visible and inaudible aspects: history, tradition.”<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, Libeskind describes his openness to collaboration: “You have to want to involve others. And when you approach in a spirit of camaraderie, there’s no conflict.”<sup>51</sup>

On a similar note, in regards to the National Memorial of Names, he states that, “Architecture is a collaborative art.”<sup>52</sup> He continues, “It’s not a solitary art. It’s not like a composer in a room composing, or a writer. It’s a collaborative field. It’s a social field. It’s a civic art, which means it’s an art that requires public participation. And it requires many experts that are local. Of course, we have to work very closely with everyone, and I think that’s what gives it also the strength. It’s not just a whim of fancy, it is a public project.”<sup>53</sup>

“To me, looking at this, you have to really have a... almost a design for a park” he comments, during his initial meetings with Grishaver, as he studies the photographs and maps of the initial site. “It has to be done in such a way that it is... the correct word is sustainable... it is not expensive to

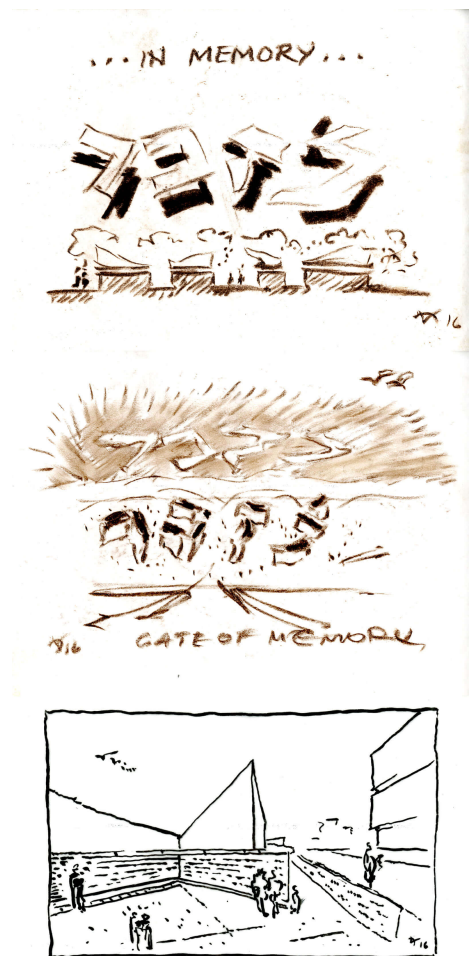


Figure 6: Daniel Libeskind, Dutch Holocaust Memorial of Names initial sketches, (ArchDaily), <https://www.archdaily.com>.

<sup>48</sup> Daniel Libeskind. *Architecture is a Language*. (TEDxDublin, 2013).

<sup>49</sup> Alison Beard. *Life’s Work: An Interview with Daniel Libeskind*. (Harvard Business Review, 2018).

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Deborah van der Starre. *Lezecher: De Lange Strijd voor een Holocaustmonument*. (NPO 2, 2021).

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

maintain, [and is] vandal-proof.”<sup>54</sup> The architect claims that the integration of the project within its urban context is of utmost importance to him, as he explains, “The easiest part is to draw something, in a way. Because it’s the intellectual, it’s the idea, it’s the emotion that goes into it. But the true project is really its realisation... every detail, the pebble on the ground, the brick with a name, the positioning of the memorial on this urban, interesting street. How is it accessed? How is it physically created? How is it made? It’s a material thing. Strange — it’s like the human soul, we don’t see it. But we have a body. We have to build the body of the memorial, in order to see the spirit.”<sup>55</sup>

It is intriguing to examine the mindset and ideologies which Libeskind claims to approach his projects with. In his writing, talks, and interviews, he is a strong advocate for site-specific, sustainable architecture, planned and executed through collaborative means. He notes on the importance of quality architecture, not just upon completion, but over time, in specific weather conditions, through inexpensive maintenance. Yet, there are reasonable grounds to argue that, the way some of his projects are carried out, demonstrate otherwise. In particular, the making of Amsterdam’s National Memorial of Names, the focal case study of this paper, was marked by a strong opposition from the people of its context, who relentlessly condemned its top-down making-process. Following its completion, the memorial seems to be in a state of alienation from its environment, requiring costly and frequent maintenance. The following chapter will review the lengthy planning and execution of the memorial, questioning in further detail whether the values and ethics set out by Libeskind himself are manifested within the project. The successive chapter will provide a critical take on the current experience of the memorial.

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<sup>54</sup> 102,000 Namen; Een Bittere Amsterdamse Affaire (NPO 2, 2015).

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter III

### *Making of a Memorial*

#### 4.1 The Planning Process

It is useful to take a closer look into the planning process of the National Memorial of Names, and the series of interactions between the initiators, the municipality, the residents, and the public, in order to gain a more in-depth understanding of the opportunities for participation, or lack thereof, that the citizens were offered. The timeframe reviewed will be from 2013 to 2016, which mark the beginning and end of formal meetings between the parties. After 2016, residents continued to object the plans for the monument in the form of informal actions, such as protests, outside the scope of the ‘participation process’ as deemed by the government.

On 9 September 2013, Grishaver visited Libeskind’s office in New York, in order to discuss the implementation of a monument in the potential site of the Wertheimpark.<sup>56</sup> Libeskind emphasised his willingness to work on and realise the project. Shortly afterwards, on 19 September, a consultation meeting was held in Amsterdam, between the initiators, the mayor and civil servants. Representatives from various research and remembrance organisations, such as the Netherlands Institute for War Documentation (NIOD), the Anne Frank Foundation, the Hollandsche Schouwburg and the Sinti and Roma working group, also joined the meeting. Though the accounts of this meeting are rather vague, there was a general consensus that building a completely new monument was quite unnecessary, especially since the Hollandsche Schouwburg already housed a wall with 6,700 surnames. Additionally, at the time, the committee of the Hollandsche Schouwburg were in the process of planning the National Holocaust Museum, which sparked a certain level of competition between the two initiatives; both wished to obtain public attention, and resources. In the end, a cooperative attitude between the two boards was reached.

The first discussion on the memorial where residents were present, took place on 26 June 2013, after the city council had already agreed to cooperating with the initiators. However, the main topic of this meeting was regarding ongoing renovations in the Plantage Middenlaan street, and the plans

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<sup>56</sup> Alana Castro de Azevedo. *Calling on the Community*. (Berghahn Books, 2023), 168.

for a potential memorial in Wertheimpark surfaced as a secondary topic, where participants were asked to form a Working Group, which would pose recommendations to the municipality. Hence, a Working Group was composed, comprised of six residents, as well as district civil servants. They met several times between August and November 2013, with the initiators also joining some meetings. Through these meetings, a feedback report was produced, containing both criticisms of the proposed memorial, and recommendations. At this point in time, there were no apparent conflicts, and the residents were willing to make contributions. For example, although their main concern was the location of the memorial, they made several alternative site recommendations, and believed that these issues could be solved through open dialogue. They requested a joint consultation to balance the interests of all parties involved.

On 16 April 2014, a month after the municipality had decided on the Wertheimpark as the memorial's location, a second meeting with residents was held.<sup>57</sup> The goal of the meeting was to allow the neighbourhood, as well as interested groups, to voice their opinions, and provide contributions to the planning process. The attendees consisted of approximately forty individuals, representing various organisations across the area. The plans were presented to the audience, before the participants engaged in discussions. The inhabitants expressed a strong concern on the potential change that the park would have to go through spatially, socially, and visually. They also expressed their discontent with the timing of the meeting itself; the decision to locate the memorial in the Wertheimpark had seemingly already been made. According to them this was irrational, as at the time, neither they, nor the government, were informed of what the architect's vision would even look like.

On 10 June 2014, Libeskind visited Amsterdam, attending several interviews, and a press conference.<sup>58</sup> Firstly, along with Grishaver, he headed to the Wertheimpark, where they were met by interviewers, and also confronted by Karina Wolkers, the widow of Jan Wolkers, who was the artist of the Spiegelmonument in the park. Karina Wolkers, who had previously been in touch with Grishaver, reiterated her frustration at the disruption that the memorial would bring to the park, stating that she wished for the park to remain, "intact". She also expressed her concern on the potential overshadowing of her husband's work. Libeskind emphasised that he did not wish to

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<sup>57</sup> Alana Castro de Azevedo. *Calling on the Community*. (Berghahn Books, 2023), 168.

<sup>58</sup> Deborah van der Starre. *Lezecher: De Lange Strijd voor een Holocaustmonument*. (NPO 2, 2021).

debate, diverting his attention to the interviewers who were waiting for him. When the interviewer asked a question regarding Karina Wolkers' argument, he replied: "It's kind of a cornerstone, at the entrance. It was built at its time... But I think — time moves on... We need to have more than what is here."<sup>59</sup>

When asked whether he was aware of the protests from the neighbourhood, he responded: "Of course. People like to walk their dogs. They like to have what they've had. But I think it's important to assert that this is not about a game, it's not about some development. This is about asserting the importance of those who perished in the Holocaust from Holland." He continued by addressing the "Nooit Meer Auschwitz" (Never Again Auschwitz) sign of the Spiegelmonument: "'Never again' is just a slogan... It's necessary to create... a monument that contains hundreds of thousands of names of Jews, Roma and Sinti."<sup>60</sup>

Later that day, a press conference was held at the city hall, where Libeskind, Grishaver, and the mayor presented the proposed monument. When a member of the press raised a question regarding the selection of the Wertheimpark as the location for the memorial, Libeskind remarked that the Holocaust did not happen, "some faraway place. It happened here. The deportations were right in the centre of the city." He claimed that building Holocaust monuments faraway, in "monumentalised places" is ironic, and that, "it is about everyday life... people can be having lunch on the beautiful waterfront, they can take their dog in the park, they can go and play tennis." He emphasised that the names are, "a part of this place."<sup>61</sup>

Following the press conference, another presentation was given, this time to the residents. Neither Libeskind, nor the mayor were present at this meeting. Grishaver presented the project himself, and Stefan Blach, a partner at Studio Libeskind, and the manager of the project, was present to answer questions. Grishaver commenced the presentation by claiming that the park would in fact appear larger and more spacious after the implementation of the memorial, at which the audience members audibly expressed their scepticism. A similar reaction from the crowd was triggered after Grishaver stated that the memorial would bring colour to the park, and proceeded to showcase the set of grey

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<sup>59</sup> Deborah van der Starre. Lezecher: De Lange Strijd voor een Holocaustmonument. (NPO 2, 2021).

<sup>60</sup> 102,000 Namen; Een Bittere Amsterdamse Affaire (NPO 2, 2015).

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

concrete walls. After a member from the audience asserted his mistrust in the project, and left the room, a member of the municipality began a speech on the attitude of the public, where he told a woman with her hand raised, “No madam, you can ask your question in a bit.” This escalated the already tense situation, with another audience member exclaiming, “You are not in front of a kindergarten class!”<sup>62</sup> It is evident that the neighbourhood community did not feel like a part of a collaborative process; rather, there was a strong sense that they were simply being informed of how things would proceed, and any sort of criticism towards the project was immediately rejected in an overly defensive manner.

After the presentation, a neighbour from the audience asked Blach whether he had seen Daniël Meijerplein, a square just around the corner from Wertheimpark, and whether he had been there in person. The square, located along the canal, consists of a mostly empty plot of land. The audience member emphasised that a smaller memorial could be implemented in such a spot. Blach replied that he was not aware of the square, and that, that was not a, “part of [their] task.” He continued, “our task was to design a memorial for 102,000 names in the location of Wertheimpark.”<sup>63</sup> This response was not received well by the audience, who made it clear that they believed this mentality to be negligent, and rather ignorant to the context.



Figure 7: Protest banners on initial location of Wertheimpark, 102,000 Namen; Een Bittere Amsterdamse Affaire, 2015, (NPO 2), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MqnNuAMti2E>.



Figure 8: Protest banners on initial location of Wertheimpark, 102,000 Namen; Een Bittere Amsterdamse Affaire, 2015, (NPO 2), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MqnNuAMti2E>.



Figure 9: Community calling for inclusion, 102,000 Namen; Een Bittere Amsterdamse Affaire, 2015, (NPO 2), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MqnNuAMti2E>.

<sup>62</sup> 102,000 Namen; Een Bittere Amsterdamse Affaire (NPO 2, 2015).

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

Arguably, Studio Libeskind's position as a nonlocal architecture firm, makes it much more likely for the neighbours to feel that the context is being overlooked, by designers who do not possess adequate knowledge about it. This makes thorough site research and community participation all the more important. Another resident stressed that, they were not against the commemoration of names, but against the, "extravagant ideas" of Libeskind, "dominating" the place. A few days after this meeting, on 17 June 2014, a decision-making meeting was held, where the authorities sat at a round table, and the public sat behind, in rows. The public were not allowed to interrupt the discussions; several held protest banners, which read various statements including, "more green, more participation" and, "better place for monument". (Fig. 9)

Simultaneously, the public had begun to protest by hanging large banners around the Wertheimpark, with statements such as, "moNOment", "we want neighbours", and "nonsense".<sup>64</sup> (Figs. 7, 8)

Following the stern resistance of the neighbourhood community, the municipality began the search for an alternative site, deciding on Weesperplantsoen, a pocket of green space nearby the previous site, already home to The Monument of Jewish Gratitude.<sup>65</sup> Rather unsurprisingly, this selection sparked another public outrage, prompting similar arguments which were raised for the Wertheimpark. The public's temper was fuelled by the fact that twenty-five trees would need to be felled to make way for the memorial. Furthermore, this site consisted of a complex underground network of transportation systems, cables and pipes, which would significantly increase the overall costs of the project.



Figure 10: Poster placed on trees calling for support, Erna Kok, 2018, (X), <https://twitter.com>.

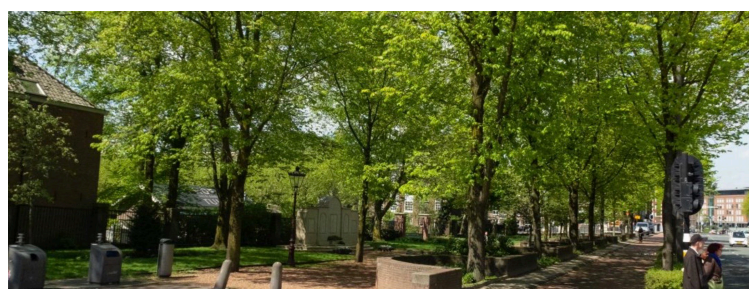
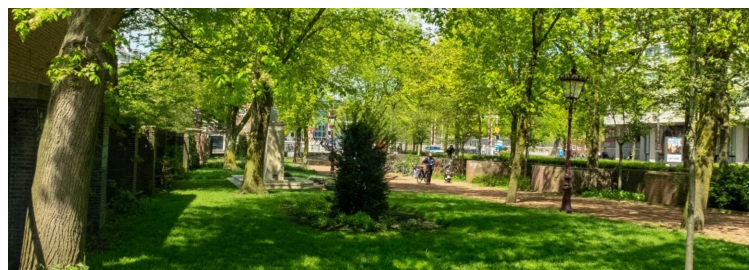


Figure 11: Weesperplantsoen before and after tree felling, Miryanna van Reeden, 2019, (X), <https://twitter.com>.

<sup>64</sup> 102,000 Namen; Een Bittere Amsterdamse Affaire (NPO 2, 2015).

<sup>65</sup> Alana Castro de Azevedo. *Calling on the Community*. (Berghahn Books, 2023), 169.

The final meeting with the residents was conducted on 31 May 2016. The results of several studies were presented to the audience, including preparatory studies for construction, such as soil testing at the Weesperplantsoen, as well as speculative studies on managing future tourist flows. The presentation included a report published by the Royal HaskoningDHV, which displayed the Weesperplantsoen as the optimal location, following the studies which were executed. A number of issues were put forward by the residents, such as the removal of trees, social unsafety, boundaries and integration. It was even suggested that an opinion poll should be utilised, in order to determine whether or not the memorial should be built altogether. The municipality asserted that these topics were not, “open to discussion.”



Figures 12, 13, 14: Weesperplantsoen prior to removal of twenty-five trees, Erna Kok, 2018, (X), <https://twitter.com>.

Proceeding the finalisation of the formal ‘participation process’, the public continued to engage in informal acts of objection. Banners and posters were hung on the trees of the Weesperplantsoen,

which read, “Help, we are going to be cut!” (Figs. 12, 13, 14) Art historian Erna Kok, shared a photograph of the trees with the posters on social media, on 9 May 2018, with the caption, “Did you know that Weesperstraat is becoming greyer instead of greener? The municipality will cut down 25 healthy trees at the Weesperplantsoen for a monument with walls 8 meters high. Let the Weesperplantsoen stay green.”<sup>66</sup> (Fig. 10) Even after the trees were felled for the commencement of the construction process, the public continued to express their dismay. Actress and animal rights activist Miryanna van Reeden, shared before-and-after images of the site, prior to, and following the removal of greenery, on 10 Aug 2019, and wrote, “I am angry! Why not create a monument while preserving the old trees that are already there? Instead of cold, white walls that are way too high, with a fence around them due to insecurity in the evening/dark. No one is against a monument, but against the size, and the cutting down of trees.”<sup>67</sup> (Fig. 11)

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<sup>66</sup> Erna Kok. (X, 2018).

<sup>67</sup> Miryanna van Reeden. (X, 2019).



Figure 15: National Holocaust Museum, photograph by author, 2024.

## Chapter IV

### *Remembrance, Humanisation & Healing*

#### 5.1 The Hollandsche Schouwburg & National Holocaust Museum

In Chapter I, several Holocaust memorials within Amsterdam, which provide alternative approaches to remembrance, were briefly mentioned. These were exemplars which are widely accepted and appreciated by the public. In this chapter, one of the city's main sites of commemoration, will be reviewed in further detail. The experience of the memorial, as well as the levels of community integration in its making process, will be evaluated.

The renovation of the Hollandsche Schouwburg memorial, and the transformation of the Reformed Nursery School across the street, into the National Holocaust Museum, were recently completed by Office Winhov. (Fig. 16) The architects aimed to emphasise the complimentary nature of the two buildings, and hence approached them in a very similar manner.<sup>68</sup> The Hollandsche Schouwburg was initially transformed into a memorial after the war in 1962, designed by Jan Leupen.<sup>69</sup> The architect stripped the remains of the theatre, leaving behind traces of the original stage and hall. Concrete arcades were constructed on both sides of what used to be the hall, connecting the outside space with the front building. An obelisk, rising from a Star of David, was placed on the former site of the stage.

Approaching the building today, following Office Winhov's modifications, the first noticeable feature is its facade, painted in varying tones of green, in accordance with Leupen's original colour scheme. The dark, brownish green



Figure 16: Hollandsche Schouwburg facade, photograph by author, 2024.



Figure 17: Hollandsche Schouwburg entrance, 2024, (Office Winhov), <https://www.winhov.nl>.

<sup>68</sup> Hollandsche Schouwburg & National Holocaust Museum. (Office Winhov, 2024).

<sup>69</sup> Bernard Leupen. Local Heroes #15. (Office Winhov, 2017).

on the street level gradually gives way to a light green, and finally a pale yellow towards the top of the facade. While the darker tones below fuse in with the earthy coloured surroundings, such as the trees and pavement, the lighter colours above prevent the facade from becoming overbearing. After passing through the doors, the entrance space appears unexpectedly spacious, with the brick walls painted white, despite the large crowd of visitors within it. (Fig. 17) This is a transitional zone between the street, and the outside space facing the inner courtyard. There is a setback within the ceiling, which lowers towards the back. Within this setback, to the left, is a quote by Holocaust survivor Primo Levi, written in black, “It happened, therefore it can happen again; this is the essence of what we have to say.”

Directly ahead, the exterior space is exposed through a series of glass doors. To the left is a small, dark, semi-enclosed space with a seating area, lit by a large screen where a short documentary plays on repeat, narrating the story of the Hollandsche Schouwburg through the years. To the right is the front desk, where staff hand out handheld audio guide devices, which can be used by visitors to listen individually to the documentary. Continuing to the exterior space, the obelisk stands tall in the center of the prior stage, towards the back. There is a sign on the left wall which indicates to visitors that they are standing in what used to be the theatre space, as well as a physical model of the building, cut through its center.

The visitors can follow a path towards the left or right, walking through the arcades, which have also been painted white. It is apparent that very minimal changes have been made by the office. The essence of the original design remains, yet there is a sense of airiness and tranquility brought forward by the use of light colours, and subtle gestures. Perhaps some of the most moving features of the space, are the small “drops” scattered along the two side walls. (Figs. 18, 19, 20) At first glance from a distance, these glass semi-spheres resemble raindrops, glittering in the sunlight. The drops reflect their surroundings, and it is only when the viewer stands directly in front of a drop, that the photograph of a victim is revealed. Then, as one



Figure 18: Hollandsche Schouwburg “drops”, photograph by author, 2024.



Figure 19: Hollandsche Schouwburg “drop”, photograph by author, 2024.

moves on, the photograph once again becomes a drop. The victim momentarily appears, before once again disappearing. The visitor's perception in this space depends very much on their point of view, and movement.

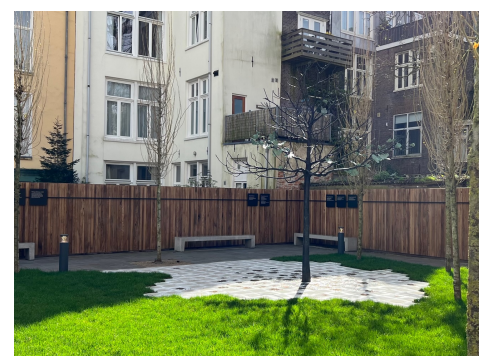
Humanising victims can be materialised both individually, and collectively, and the drops are a strong testament to this. Each victim is individualised through their photograph and name, yet each victim is also a drop — a part of something larger. There is a sense of strength conveyed through the idea of being part of a larger whole. They all went through this alone, yet they all went through this together; that is how we must remember them. The drops connote water, and thus life, purity, and innocence. They remind the viewer of the fragility of life.

As I continue through the arcades, the original brick ruin walls are approached, which provide a passage through the stage, and into a small back garden. (Figs 21, 22) The visitor is led around the perimeter of this garden, and can read the names of the residents of the block who were deported, as they pass through. Towards the left of this garden is a fig tree, an interpretation of the Biblical tree of life, cast in bronze, by artist Gabriel Lester. Most of its leaves have fallen, and only a few remain. Beneath it, golden leaves are embedded within the porcelain tiles of the floor. The artist aimed to portray the scarcity of survival for Jews in the Holocaust: “a small ray of hope in a very bitter reality.”<sup>70</sup>

Just as I am about to exit the garden, and walk back towards the stage space, a photograph catches my eye. Taken by a



Figure 20: Hollandsche Schouwburg “drop”, photograph by author, 2024.



Figures 21, 22: Hollandsche Schouwburg back garden, photograph by author, 2024.

<sup>70</sup> Kunstwerk erbij in Hollandsche Schouwburg. (Jonet, 2022).

non-Jewish resident who lived in a house facing the Hollandsche Schouwburg's courtyard, the image depicts a girl smiling and waving at the camera. (Fig. 23) The description beneath the image explains that the Jewish girl within the picture, Greetje Velleman, and the resident, Lydia Riezouw, were both seventeen years old, became friends, and would talk over the fence.<sup>71</sup> However a few days after this photograph was taken, Greetje was gone. She was deported via Westerbork to Auschwitz. It is interesting to see that the local neighbours were able to contribute to the project in such direct and significant ways, such as providing a photograph of a very personal memory, which took place exactly where visitors stand today. The Hollandsche Schouwburg humanises the victims of the Holocaust through both allegorical means, such as the tree of life and the drops, and literal, tangible means, such as the photographs, names and stories of individual people.

Walking back out onto the busy street, I am momentarily brought back to the noisy, lively city, before crossing the road towards the National Holocaust Museum. This building is split into two main parts: an exhibition of the current structure, and the museum which takes visitors through the Holocaust in the Netherlands. While the exhibition, located on the ground floor, informs visitors on the concepts and design processes behind the renovation, the museum on the upper two levels showcases a display of archival images, documents, and artifacts. Once again, visitors are provided with a handheld audio guide device which they can activate at specific locations to listen to the narrator.



Figure 23: Lydia Riezouw, Girl Next Door (1942), 2024, (Hollandsche Schouwburg).

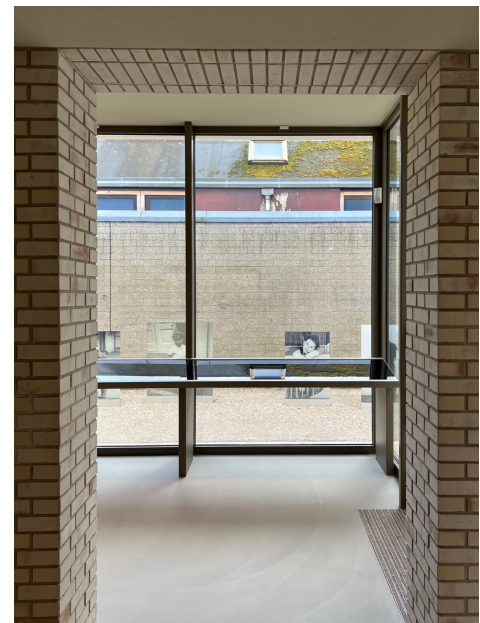


Figure 24: National Holocaust Museum children photographs, photograph by author, 2024.



Figure 25: National Holocaust Museum children photographs, photograph by author, 2024.

<sup>71</sup> Girl Next Door. (Hollandsche Schouwburg, 2024).

The humanisation of victims already begins on the ground floor, within the building's exhibition. After the visitor passes the entrance hall with the front desk, and turns left, they enter a small space with a sitting area, facing a glass facade, behind which the exterior space can be seen. A black stand provides the viewers with information, such as the names of victims and events that took place at this particular location in the building. It reflects the sky, and the trees outside. This part of the building was the former nursery school and garden, from which several children were rescued and managed to escape.<sup>72</sup>

Behind the glass, life-size photographs of children are printed on glass plates which are secured to the ground, arranged in an organic, nonlinear configuration. (Figs. 24, 25) Unlike the common display of small photographs of people, hung on walls, this way of exhibiting victims places them *within* space, making them become a part of the place, just like the visitors, and humanises them. It prevents the reduction of these individuals to mere images on a surface. The glass facade with its metal frames gives an uninterrupted view of the images, while at the same time framing them and placing a subtle distance between the viewer and the display. Visitors can not get too close to the images or obstruct their viewing. Even though they are humanised, there is a sense that they are no longer within reach, which is quite impactful.

The trees in this exterior space, were planted by survivors themselves, together with their grandchildren, and are named in the exhibition. (Figs. 26, 27) The integration of the community, and the public, in the making-process of a



Figure 26: National Holocaust Museum, survivors planting trees with their grandchildren, 2024, (National Holocaust Museum).



Figure 27: National Holocaust Museum, survivors planting trees with their grandchildren, 2024, (National Holocaust Museum).



Figure 28: National Holocaust Museum, meeting with survivors, 2024, (National Holocaust Museum).

<sup>72</sup> (Amsterdam National Holocaust Museum, 2024.)

commemorative space, can be materialised in such seemingly small, and subtle gestures. Yet these subtle acts of contribution can carry immense meanings for those involved, making them feel seen. In this example, the intergenerational activity of planting together, signifies not only the commemoration of the past, but also hope, for the future.

Throughout the making process of the museum, meetings were held with the community, including survivors. The plans of how, where, and which information would be displayed, were shared with the community, on site. In the photograph shown, the survivors can be seen viewing the proposals. (Fig. 28) In fact, Jacques Grishaver can be seen among the participants. Since the timeframes of the museum's making, and the making of the National Memorial of Names coincided, the lack of community involvement in the latter becomes all the more questionable. Grishaver himself attended the meetings of the National Holocaust Museum, witnessing the approaches implemented, yet showed reluctance to creating similar platforms in his own proposal.

Another powerful way in which the public could contribute to the creation of the museum, was through donating artifacts, such as personal belongings. One such donor was Margriet Bouscher-Snapper, who donated the wedding dress of her mother Leny Snapper-Sondervan, a Holocaust survivor. (Fig. 29) Snapper-Sondervan wore the dress at her wedding, on 12 March 1940, a few months prior to the Nazi invasion. Moreover, several survivors who were rescued from the former nursery, were interviewed. Salo Muller, was a survivor whose parents were arrested and deported. He was rescued from the nursery, and had to move between several different hiding places. (Fig. 31)



Figure 29: Margriet Bouscher-Snapper, who donated the wedding dress of her mother Leny Snapper-Sondervan, a Holocaust survivor, 2024, (National Holocaust Museum).



Figure 30: National Holocaust Museum, photograph and bracelet of little Jewish girl, 2024, (National Holocaust Museum).



Figure 31: National Holocaust Museum, interview with Salo Muller, 2024, (National Holocaust Museum).

The museum of the Holocaust itself begins on the second level, and ends on the first floor. Visitors are guided through the space via large numbers, along with a new title for each new section. In contrast to the light-filled, airy spatiality of the building's exhibition, and the Hollandsche Schouwburg, and the exhibition of the Holocaust takes viewers through dimly-lit rooms, lit by screens and spotlights on artifacts. The Jewish victims are humanised in numerous ways — through the display of their photographs, names, families, clothes, children's toys, personal belongings and stories.

On the other hand, the perpetrators are represented through similar media. The visitor is confronted with the perpetrators quite early on. On a large screen, almost covering a wall from the ground to the ceiling, a series of videos play on repeat. The Nazi forces are shown parading in cities through cheering crowds, spreading propaganda, marching with bands playing, and saluting Hitler. Swastika banners are hung throughout cities. Recordings of Hitler addressing his supporters, as well as Nazi soldiers laughing together are shown. Section 5, which solely depicts them, is entitled “Perpetrators”. (Fig. 32) The street sign “Euterpestraat” hangs above. This was a street in which several former schools were used as German police units. After the war, the street was renamed after a resistance fighter who was held there.<sup>73</sup>



Figure 32: National Holocaust Museum, Section 5: Perpetrators, 2024, (National Holocaust Museum).

Up until this section, with the exception of Hitler, the exact identities of the perpetrators are not disclosed. Here, six screens with six questions are presented, moving down the Nazi hierarchy: “Who gives the order? Who organises? Who executes the order? Who collaborates? Who profits? Who murders?” After the question has been displayed for several seconds, each screen shifts to a photograph of a specific individual who is an answer to the related question. Their names, as well as their exact roles are stated. Quite often, officials are depicted with their friends and families, celebrating, laughing, smiling, and embracing their small children.

<sup>73</sup> Euterpestraat. (Amsterdam Jewish Monument, 2009),

At this particular location, the narrator from the handheld audio guide device asks, “Is there a human being capable of harming others? Take a good look at these people. It’s disturbing isn’t it? How ordinary they look. It makes you wonder why they collaborated. Was it fanaticism? A thirst for power? Group pressure? Or following orders without question? The perpetrators do not regard Jews as people. They do not see Jews as being like themselves. This is perhaps the dangerous first step from ordinary human being to mass murderer: that you don’t regard someone else as being like yourself.” On display in this section, are several artifacts, such as posters with Nazi propaganda in the Netherlands, Nazi flags, and Swastika cups and cutlery used by the Nazis. It is clear that at the National Holocaust Museum, there is an aim to humanise perpetrators as a way of educating the public. They are not represented simply as a force of evil, but as individual, seemingly normal people, with names, friends, families, and children. The exhibition questions the point at which these normal people become mass killers, noting that prejudice and discrimination, are actually the seemingly subtle points of transition.



Figure 33: National Memorial of Names, photograph by author, 2024.

## Chapter V

### *The Realised Memorial, and its Experience*

#### 6.1 The National Names Memorial

Approaching the National Memorial of Names from the street level, on a typically rainy Amsterdam day, the first thing that catches my eye are the large, reflective mirrors above the brick walls. The project definitely stands out of the context, not only due to its dramatic fragmentation, and sharp angles, but also because it is the only structure in the nearby area that is so shiny and large. One's eyes are immediately drawn to it before one even notices. It is also inherently dynamic in nature, as the reflections constantly change based on one's point of view and movement; the reflected images appear to be in constant motion. Walking up, or down the stairs, depending on the chosen entrance, there is a clear distinction between the outside, and the inside of the memorial. The ground material immediately changes from the brown brick pavement, to the grey, crushed stones. Unlike on the street, I can hear every step I take, as the stones crash against one another beneath my feet. Another way in which the project stands out from its surroundings, is the obvious contrast in colour. While the nearby brick walls are a muted, reddish brown, the walls of the memorial are varying shades of bright orange.

Spatially, the series of walls differ in proximity to one another, creating a varying experience for the visitor. There are times of opening, of relief, and there are points where the walls feel like they are closing in on me, creating a sense of entrapment. This characteristic of the space is impactful in its own way, and is a signature approach followed by Libeskind in many of his projects. Yet the question remains whether the project makes sense in a plot of this size and in this location, or whether Libeskind followed a one-size-fits-all method.

There are also several points within the memorial, where the positioning of the walls create rather odd spaces, in a seemingly



Figure 34: National Memorial of Names, tight corner, photograph by author, 2024.

unintentional way. One such example is shown in figure 34, where a tight space appears from two walls intersecting at a very small angle. Since this is a dead-end, and the visitor can not pass through these two walls, there is a sense of confusion on how far one must actually approach the end, and since the names do not go all the way into this angle, most visitors avoid the corner altogether. Of course, it would not make sense for the names to actually continue all the way, however this in turn raises the question of whether this type of space makes sense in the first place. Even though most of the inner bricks here have been left blank, the names which are furthest inwards already feel too far, and visitors tend not to approach them. This creates the impression that these names have been neglected as a compromise for the design, which reads “in memoriam” in Hebrew letters, in plan view. Visitors do not go that far into the tight corner, unless they are searching for a specific name which lies there. Hence, even if the tight corner is justified by the notion of creating a sense of disorientation, or entrapment, very few visitors experience this anyway.

Another thing I can not help but notice, are the rather obvious, white stains covering large portions of several walls, seemingly due to weathering and abrasion. (Figs. 35, 36) In fact, there are several instances where the stains are so large that they covered a letter or number. On a similar note, there are numerous points where the lower part of the wall, where it meets the ground, and where white stones are placed by visitors, moss has started covering the ground, stones, and lower bricks. After a light rain, this results in a greenish, wet appearance. (Fig. 38) Additional, the rain turns the ground material from sand-like, to soggy. Furthermore, there are certain places, where two brick walls meet, however there is no mortar filling the gap, which creates a space for insects to hide. (Fig. 37)



Figure 35: National Memorial of Names, weathering, photograph by author, 2024.



Figure 36: National Memorial of Names, weathering, photograph by author, 2024.



Figure 37: National Memorial of Names, insects in gap, photograph by author, 2024.

Undoubtedly, the aforementioned issues bring to light the stark contrast between the polished images which promote the memorial online, versus the real-life experience of the place. Most images online showcase the project on a sunny day, presumably right after completion, or maintenance. However, such days are notoriously rare in the city, with rainy, wet and cold weather comprising the majority of its climate. As Stevens and Frank note, the adequate maintenance and repair of memorials are imperative, as, “wear and tear and deterioration undermine the sacred qualities of the site.”<sup>74</sup> This is a particularly significant issue considering the costly, frequent, and time-consuming maintenance of the National Memorial of Names. The cleaning of the steel superstructure, which is a specialist task, is carried out multiple times a year. The floor is also frequently maintained, and a team of masons carry out multiple rounds of name corrections, where names are adjusted, or added.<sup>75</sup> Again, this triggers questions as to whether the design of the project is suitable to its context, or whether it creates excessive requirements for its care.

One of the major concerns the locals had, was regarding the removal of twenty-five, healthy, luscious, mature trees from the site. (Figs. 12, 13, 14) The public voiced their disappointment in the design’s inability to work with, and around the existing greenery. Hence, it was quite appalling to witness the trees’ replacements — four small, young trees, bearing no leaves. (Fig. 39, 40) Although they would presumably appear greener in the warmer months, these



Figure 38: National Memorial of Names, moss beginning to grow over stones and ground, photograph by author, 2024.



Figures 39, 40: National Memorial of Names, original trees’ replacements, photograph by author, 2024.

<sup>74</sup> Quentin Stevens and Karen A. Franck. *Memorials as Spaces of Engagement*. (Routledge, 2016), 167.

<sup>75</sup> Onderhoud aan het Namenmonument. (Holocaust Namenmonument Nederland, 2024).

small trees demonstrate a rather failed attempt at restoring the plot's wildlife.

In the center of the memorial, across the central entrance, lies a pool of small, white rocks, within an angular plot, from which visitors can take a rock to place by a brick wall. (Fig. 41) Upon seeing it, I could not help but question whether such a design alone would not have worked better in the

original, green site. The aforementioned Levenslicht installation worked with this idea, of the Jewish stone-placing ritual. It was a nonintrusive, effective project which was poignant in its simplicity. Subtle architectural tools and gestures were implemented, such as the use of coloured light. Such an approach might have been better integrated within the existing plot, amongst the grass. There is something somber about observing such a large number of rocks all lying together, which was a quality utilised at Levenslicht: each stone represented a victim. In essence, this is a similar initiative to what Libeskind intended to do with the bricks, yet perhaps more subtle, and suiting.



Figure 41: National Memorial of Names, stones, photograph by author, 2024.

## Conclusion

### *Commemoration, and the Gradual Emergence of Meaning*

The value of memorials are materialised throughout their making processes; they gradually emerge as a result of effort, intricate care, and attention to detail. This makes their emotional value and meaning all the more immense. Public participation can take on numerous forms, and the unique nature in which people are involved in the making process of a specific memorial, distinguishes the project from its predecessors. In this paper, Amsterdam's recently completed National Memorial of Names was taken as a specific case, in order to examine contemporary memorial production.

The theoretical principles which Libeskind publicly lauds, were studied, and compared to his practice, revealing noticeable contradictions. Through conducting an in-depth analysis of the National Memorial of Names' making process, in regards to the level of participation opportunities given to residents and the public, a lack of collaborative means was identified. In his ideologies, he claims to be a strong believer in the civic nature of the profession, and the importance of involving the public. Yet, it became evident that not only were the people of the neighbourhood, and their views disregarded, but Libeskind himself opted to refrain from attending meetings with the public, on the same day which he attended a press conference at the same place. When confronted by members of the community, such as Karina Wolkers, he expressed his unwillingness to engage in dialogue. While it could be argued that he left this role to his partners, there seemed to be a general impression that the office, as well as the initiators, felt no need to convince the public, especially after having received permission for the site.

A major concern of the locals, was the potential turning of a quiet, green park, into an artificial tourist attraction. One of the first remarks Libeskind himself made upon being presented with the site maps and photographs, was that this would need to be a design for a park. Yet, when the public raised concerns regarding the intrusive nature of both the initial, and the final plans, their points were neglected. Rather than working with the existing terrain and site conditions, the final design proposed a complete removal of the plot's trees and greenery, and the introduction of a memorial from scratch. Moreover, despite having stressed the importance of creating a sustainable design himself, the completed memorial requires regular, costly maintenance.

The essence of the project, according to Libeskind, was to commemorate those who “perished through horrible events.”<sup>76</sup> This requires the humanisation of victims, in order to convey the sense of immense tragedy, and loss. Yet, the tumultuous nature of the making-process itself, is an indicator of a failure to humanise. After all, how can a widely unwanted memorial do justice to the representation of the harrowing events that took place? Additionally, despite the regular maintenance works, several bricks have undergone weathering, damaging the inscriptions of names. Some names appear to be in rather neglected positions in the first place. Despite the relentless calls from the community for public participation, and for a design which respects the existent topology, the memorial exudes the essence of a victory against its very own context.

On the other hand, other examples of commemorative architecture in the city, such as the Hollandsche Schouwburg, and the National Holocaust Museum, have humanised the victims through a close collaboration with the community. People of the neighbourhood were able to contribute to the memorial’s narrative, through providing archival photographs, artifacts, and stories. The project manages to become a part of daily life, through the use of everyday spaces, such as a garden. It is subtle, yet impactful in its commemorative purpose.

Often, the most striking or memorable part of an experience lies within its most subtle qualities. A name, a photograph, a story, a moment of darkness, of light, or even a tree, can leave emotional imprints on the mind. The meaning is not entirely predetermined; it emerges during the realisation. The citizens become familiar to it, they accept and appreciate it, they value it. It is not a foreign object that suddenly appears — it gradually integrates itself into the street, the neighbourhood, the city. *How* a certain gesture is made, is as important as *what* the gesture is, if not more. People connect when there is a narrative behind a certain design move. When the narrative of loss, trauma, caring, healing, and hoping, drives not only the design, but the actual, physical making process of a memorial, it is materialised within the architecture. In the end, what remains is the heartbreaking fate of those who disappeared during the Holocaust, yet the heartfelt resilience of those who were left behind.

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<sup>76</sup> Deborah van der Starre. Lezecher: De Lange Strijd voor een Holocaustmonument. (NPO 2, 2021).

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