

Time Is Haptic

*Exploring a Tactile
Connection to
Forgotten Histories
in Utrecht's Domplein*

by

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Master Architecture, Urbanism and Building Sciences

AR2A011
Architectural History Thesis
2022/23

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ASTRACT

Current approaches of abstraction and conceptuality in the discourse of memorialisation can be useful to commemorate contemporary events, but the inherent flaws and shortcomings in the misuse of abstraction are insufficient in the quest of establishing a connection with the distant past. This thesis acts as a call for a different direction for the crystallisation of memory. By looking beyond contemporary history, we can understand more about our spiritual connection with our ancestors from bygone eras. To aid the strengthening of our spiritual ties to history I have diagnosed a new spatial typology of memory; the encounter-monument. The encounter-monument is the accidental monument; the fossilised memory; the physical and spiritual encounter with history. The encounter-monument is the scar tissue etched into stone that has survived, morphed and re-moulded over the centuries. The encounter-monument is the relic that we may come across in our day-to-day lives that jolts us back through history. They are the encounter with a stranger's signature and date in the cover of a book that has been lying in the attic for decades. They are the slowly dissolving names on forgotten gravestones. Encounter-monuments are the sense of histories both recent and distant, passing before our very eyes. They plug us into the timeline of existence. This thesis explores the Domplein in Utrecht as a case study for the ineffective use of abstraction to commemorate its profound history, and through the use of various artistic media, propose a new direction for its focus. Through photographs, plaster casts and frottage drawings, I present a spiritual argument for tactility as a method of commemoration.

Introduction

Our emotional connection to history is fragile. Abstraction versus archaeology, banality versus boisterousness and conceptuality versus conservation all contribute to the dicta and declarations forming the pursuit of crystallising memory.

Global traumas throughout the 20th and 21st centuries have led to a rise in the use of artistic abstraction as a commemorative device, rejecting traditional visual notions of monumentalism which typically prioritise the grandiose, scale, ritual, architectural seduction and an inherent sense of cultural pride (Mitchell, 2003). Young (2006, p.4) argues that “in the last century, the very idea of the memorial-monument and its place in modern culture...has nearly [been relegated] to the margins of modern discourse”. The 20th century saw Europe in the aftermath of two world wars, the Holocaust and the Cold War - the need for remembrance was more potent than ever and in a Zeitgeist of artistic critique and historical inquiry, the contentiousness of the self-serving monument begged a new discourse. The complexity and profundity of these collective traumas coincided with “...the emergence of a history of history, the awakening... of a historiographical consciousness” (Nora, 1989, p.9). Thus emerged the popularity of abstraction as a design tool for public art commemorating world-changing events. Many people, or their close descendents are still alive today to perpetuate these memories and keep the stories strong. This study puts forward the notion that the temporal accessibility of these events enables abstraction as a highly effective process for the spatialisation of memory. But what happens when we go further back in history? My exploration expands beyond contemporary history to times which, in this light, might seem utterly alien to us: antiquity, the Middle Ages and the mediaeval period are emotionally lost to the annals of history. Stories surrounding these times feature prominently today but to construct an empathetic connection with bygone eras is profoundly difficult. To consider life in these times is comparable to experiencing life in an alien civilization. Customs, language, day-to-day life can be

studied but to emotionally connect is a truly difficult task. This thesis proposes a new physical, spatial and textural method of commemoration which enables us to bridge this gap, connecting our forgotten histories. I argue that current approaches of abstraction and conceptuality in the discourse of memorialisation can be useful to commemorate contemporary events, but their inherent flaws and shortcomings - which will be explicated in Part I - are insufficient in the quest of establishing a connection with the distant past. In order to strengthen our spiritual ties it is necessary to explore a new typology of memory; the encounter-monument. The encounter-monument is the accidental monument; the fossilised memory; the physical and spiritual encounter with history. It is Riegl's "age-value" (1903, p.4) that defines the beauty of the involuntary monument. Riegl distinguishes this from the didactic historic value alone, which "...does not exhaust the interest and influence that artworks from the past arouse in us" (1903, p.3). Some of the most powerful emotional responses to the intangible past arise through touching the traces of history held within seemingly impenetrable materials; the sculptural bowing of the steps at Wells Cathedral whose robust stone has, over time, become a fluid, clay-like stream; the Western Wall, whose mammoth stone blocks have been eroded by the wind over the milenia, making them smooth and waxy to the touch; the limestone masonry of mediaeval churches, whose surfaces are pockmarked by the builders' runish signatures. Distant histories are suddenly bridged through such bursts of physical tactility. These natural, seemingly ever-lasting construction materials express "...[their] age and history as well as the tale of [their] birth and human use. The patina of wear adds the enriching experience of time; matter exists in the continuum of time" (Pallasmaa, 1994, p.41). Time becomes physical through patina, whose most visceral language is touch. The emotional value of this historic patina transcends typical notions of architectural beauty, endowing "...even the slag heap with a nostalgic aura" (Lowenthal, 1965, p.206). We do not seek these patinated relics, rather we stumble across them in our day-to-day lives.

Stone's capacity for memory forms a vessel through which we connect ourselves to forgotten eras. These unintentional historic residues are where we can find the authentic "aura" (1935, p.4) that Walter Benjamin attributes to art still bearing the marks of the artist's hands (Christensen, 1978). It is John Ruskin's search for "what their hands have handled...their eyes beheld...all the days of their life" (1909, p.224) in his memorialisation of Gothic churches. Written history conveys memory as facts and data; exhibitions typically transfer memory as objects within vitrines or behind an alarmed boundary; memorials provide second-hand memories as something to be found within the viewer's own self. I will argue that exploring a physical, tactile relationship with history is crucial in the quest to establish an emotional connection with times long forgotten.

For the encounter-monument, it is crucial to note its etymons and its grounding in the discourse of spatialised memory through defining the monument and the counter monument (a notion which will be explored in Part I). The traditional notion of a monument is to remind us of the "...location, form, site, design and inscriptions aid the recall of persons, things, events or values" (Stevens et al., 2018, p.1). Such traditional monuments exist to remind but its reliance on design, mass, volume and prominence in space inevitably creates a deliberate and purposefully subjective method of commemoration. The memory invoked is carefully curated by those commissioning the monument. The counter-monument, as described by James E. Young in his seminal book *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (2006) arose in the second half of the 20th century to reject the political and propagandistic connotations of previous methods of memory-preservation through abstraction and perception. An analysis of Jochen and Esther-Shalev Gerz's Harburg monument in Part I is a glimpse into the importance and successes of counter monuments. Also analysed in Part I is where the counter-monument fails - precedence of the designer's/artist's abstractive abilities over the potency of the commemorative force, as explored

through Peter Eisenman's 2005 work, *The Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe* in Berlin.

A wealth of understanding surrounding the encounter-monuments can be uncovered within religious contexts. Looking to religious understandings of history can further elucidate our conceptions of what it means to be in touch with the past. The entrenched ritualism and tradition in religion lends itself to a deep spiritual connection; feeling what it means to sing the same songs that have been sung for thousands of years, recite the same prayers, eat the same food and walk through the same buildings forms the bedrock of an empathetic connection to our ancestors. Mediaeval churches and cathedrals exist as gargantuan repositories of encounter-monuments. Over centuries the continuous religious emphasis on restoration and preservation leaves endless patinated relics, fossils and traces of forgotten histories. The existence and prosperity of churches relied heavily on the act of touch. Europe in the Middle Ages was saturated with churches and religious institutions announcing new religious relics. They were both deeply spiritual objects and formidable political tools, attracting pilgrims from all over the continent to pay to see the new relic that had been uncovered (Classen, 2012). Touch was believed to bring somebody in direct physical contact with God. It was through touching these relics that a knight, nobleman or peasant could receive a blessing from God; "In an age where tangible signs meant more to most people than written texts, relics provided an essential material link to the power of the Divine" (Classen, 2012, p.36). I posit that this spiritual connection between tactility and God can be extrapolated atheistically to tactility and time, exponentially enhancing the phenomenological potency of architecture. Expanding on this pre-existing ecclesiastical framework of encounter-monuments I will use this thesis to examine Saint Martin's Cathedral in Utrecht, or as it is more commonly known, Domkerk.

The majority of European cathedrals have accrued their own individual stories over the centuries but Domkerk is particularly special in its architectural

evolution. Consecrated in the year 630AD by the Frankish clergy, the next 400 years saw its repeated destruction and rebirth until the foundations of the current gothic cathedral as we know it were laid in 1254 (Weissman, 1905). It remained plagued by financial, political and religious disputes, until its most significant architectural disfigurement came with an almighty tornado in 1674. The entirety of the nave lay devastated, razed to the ground, where, due to ecclesiastical turmoil the ruins remained untouched for the subsequent 150 years. Today the ruins are cleared and in their place sits an open square which came to be known as the Domplein. Bookended by the Netherlands' tallest church spire to the West and the severed choir and transept to the East, the Domplein exists as a fractured void brimming with historical beauty. But something is missing. Through this thesis I will argue that its current design is inadequate as a monument to its profound history and that the true potential of the Domplein as a sight of contemplation, commemoration and architecturally patinated poetry has not been reached. Part I will diagnose a trend in contemporary memorial design and describe an over-reliance on abstraction in its discourse. Although abstraction can be a phenomenally powerful tool for commemorative design I will demonstrate how its misuse and poor execution can lead to a profound weakening of the memory intended to be crystallised. This critique forms the basis of my search and examination of new ways of spatially interpreting and communicating history. This search grows through Part II, which elucidates the encounter-monument as a deeply spiritual method of connecting with our forgotten histories. Its power will be broken down into constituent parts - time, touch and serendipity - the analyses of which will form the framework of Part III, where I will call for a new direction for the commemorative design and architectural interpretation of the Domplein with an emphasis on the encounter-monument and patinated relics. The Domplein acts as a case study where both abstraction and encounter-monuments are highly present. Its contemporary redesign is highly reliant on abstraction



Introduction

- I argue that this is the reason for its diluted potency as a monumental site. Surrounding it is an infinite wealth of encounter-monuments, communicated throughout this thesis as photographs, drawings and plaster casts. This choice of media and methods of transposing these historic traces will be discussed within Part III; much of what characterises such a monument is best conveyed visually and through touch. This is a spiritual topic which relies heavily on emotional connection and instinct; drawings, models and photographs have the ability to capture that which words can't. Visual methods of communicating these ideas are equally important in this thesis as the text through which they are interwoven. They establish a tone and character, influencing the way these words are read. They enable a clear understanding of the physicality of history. A photograph series is interwoven throughout the thesis, laying the foundations for the atmosphere in which this thesis can be read. Rather than putting the photographs together into one series, their effects can be experienced alongside the text. Part III will elucidate my research with two sets of artefacts; a series of frottage drawings, taken from the walls and floors of the cathedral and a series of plaster casts, taken from clay pressing of certain encounter-monuments throughout the site. I will introduce them with statements of their process and their value, after which I will let the work speak for itself. In essence, this thesis intends to highlight the shortcomings of abstraction as a design tool within contemporary commemorative architectural practices and highlight a new, more spiritual connection to the past - the immeasurable connection between tactility and time.



Part I

Memory Abstracted

Abstraction as human expression is immeasurably powerful. Nevertheless this part starts with a fundamental critique of certain methods of artistic and architectural abstraction, which then evolves into the foundation of my exploration into the encounter-monument.

I visited Berlin for the first time at fourteen - a short trip with a lasting impression. Even if I had not been the grandson of a Holocaust survivor, visiting Peter Eisenman's *The Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe* (2005) would probably have been high on my things-to-do-and-see-in-Berlin-if-you-only-have-72-hours list. Its scale, fame and photogenicity attracts half a million visitors every year (Cole, 2015). At that age I was enchanted by the sculpture, but the chinks in its aesthetic armour started to appear six years later. A fellow undergraduate architecture student with an appetite for deconstructivist architecture returned from Berlin, eager to discuss Peter Eisenman's *Holocaust Memorial*. The views he presented were engaging but I could have sworn it had a different name. The following critique of Peter Eisenman's Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe starts with its name: as it turned out, most people I discussed the topic with knew it as The Holocaust Memorial. The persecution and murdering of Jews in Europe can be traced back as far back as the Visigothic rule of Hispania in the 6th century (Bachrach, 1977), followed by centuries of pogroms, blood-libels and physically enforced urbanistic segregation across the continent. And so, in a memorial for the murdered Jews of Europe it must be asked "...which murdered Jews? When? Where? Does the list include Rosa Luxemburg, who was killed in Berlin by rightist thugs in 1919, or the foreign minister Walther Rathenau, also killed here by rightist thugs, in 1922?" (Brody, 2012, para.2). Officially it is called The Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe. The book produced by Eisenman Architects to document the project is titled Holocaust Memorial Berlin (2005). The lack of specificity in its official name in contrast with its colloquial name is an expression of its ambiguity; "...the vagueness is disturbing...The reduction of responsibility to an embarrassing, tacit

fact that “everybody knows” is the first step on the road to forgetting” (Brody, 2012, para.3).

Comprising 2700 concrete blocks, or stelae, *The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* finds its theoretical grounding in the dialectic typology of meaning through abstraction. To didactically define the public sculpture, three small engravings were placed around the perimeter of the 19,000 square metre complex. The abstraction is primarily rooted in the notion that this method of memory is “...experience-based, insofar as it aims to create a particular emotional experience among visitors walking through the vast field of stelae” (Harjes, 2005, p.142). Although visually striking and bearing inherent visual similarities to a cemetery filled with crooked headstones, for Eisenman the stelae are “...a series of objects in space, no more” (Ahr, 2005, p.284). It seems interesting that, for a memorial whose strength lies in its abstractive qualities, the principal designer would “...[resist] describing the memorial as abstract” (Tanović, 2015, p.54). Eisenman goes on to announce that the memorial “...has nothing to do with Jewishness per se...it is not about memory...Am I thinking about the Holocaust when I got to the memorial? Not me!” (Ahr, 2005, p.284). Its vagueness enables it to remain entirely open to interpretation and arguably appeals to a larger crowd than it otherwise would if it prioritised a concrete meaning. Such a perspective may hold up theoretically, but Harjes (2005) argues “Those with little knowledge about or interest in the Holocaust...are unlikely to have the intended emotional experience” (p.143); an experience grounded in feelings of spatial and psychological compression, inner contemplation, amazement and bewilderment. Such experiential strengths and abstracted notions of design function at their best in public sculptures and artworks. Memorials differ in function to public art for art’s sake; memorials require a highly specific educational dimension. Eisenman’s memorial attempts to address this through *The Ort* - a sequence of four subterranean rooms directly beneath the monument which were not in the original design but put in place by the minister of culture after realising the pedagogical

dimension of the memorial was largely overlooked (Godfrey, 2007). In the first room the artefacts are displayed as a grid of illuminated panels mirroring the stelae above, in the second the stelae protrude from the ceiling and are made of a thin metal. In the third and fourth rooms there is an open grid ceiling and then a seemingly random pattern of columns. All the rooms are about the Holocaust (Godfrey, 2007). Freudenheim (2005) argues that this subterranean gallery is an afterthought which “...whips the patient visitor through yet another version of the Holocaust museums that seem to be everywhere” (para. 8). This artwork acts as a promise that Berlin will remember. The general confusion in its title and the histrionic stelae blur the subject of remembrance. It is not made clear who or what the visitors should remember, only that they should remember; a failure that arises through the prioritisation of abstraction over collective-memory. As stated earlier, abstraction holds a profound power, but its misuse results in confusion and misinformation. This is the primary reason for the emergence of ‘Yolocaust’ - a term for the instagrammification of Eisenman’s memorial and how people see it as an obstacle course, playground and photo opportunity (Gunter, 2017). Yolocaust was coined to combat and publicly shame those who treat it as such, but the reality is not so clear-cut. The general public is called out for clambering, jumping and climbing over the monument since, for some, it is a representation of a graveyard with the concrete blocks denoting headstones. Eisenman has made it explicitly clear that the stelae are not metaphorical, adding: “This is not sacred ground...kids can jump on the stones...I like the fact that people go lunch there...make love” (Ahr, 2005, p.286). At no point are the viewers told that it is representative of a graveyard. Its abstraction is being confused for metaphor; it might resemble a graveyard but abstraction enables no strict meaning as individual interpretation is encouraged. Who has the right to say how people should and should not use it?

Harjes (2005) argues that a memorial has three functions; to mourn and commemorate; to educate



Memory Abstracted

new audiences; and to politically and socially represent the contemporary citizens. I believe another exists: repentance. The inherent need for the government to openly display its atonement for what has happened. This is what I argue *The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* to be; a symbolic, abstract metaphor for repentance rather than a call for remembrance. The prioritisation of open-interpretation rather than historical and emotional specificity contributes to it being “...more a monumental abstract installation piece than a memorial” (Freudenheim, 2005, para.12). The potency of memory within *The Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe* grows into subjective interpretations of history due to the design’s over-reliance on abstraction. Emotional connections with history are difficult. To curb this challenge the contemporary memorial discourse often allows abstraction to act as a veil for self-interpretation.

Abstraction in itself is not something which I am fundamentally discrediting. It can be done highly effectively with profoundly honest poetry, however as Young (2006) states, “For many contemporary artists, the needs of art, not the public or memory, come first” (p.12). Although its misappropriation can lead to a dilution of a memorial’s propensity for commemoration, abstraction can be used as a way of spiritually reaching the intangible, but this must be done carefully and with correct intention. *Monument Against Fascism* (1986) by Jochen and Esther Shalev-Gerz manages to manoeuvre this slalom of controversy and critique thanks to a careful analysis by the artists of the reasons for its creation. Invited by the city of Hamburg to create a monument against “fascism, war and violence, peace and human rights” (Young, 2006, p.29), this abstract brief already lent itself to an abstract result. In contrast with *The Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe*, the intended memory was not directed towards specific people but a general city-wide acceptance of certain values. As a result of the profundity of the ideas intended to be held within this monument and its call for the rejection of fascism, the design was deeply theorised: “What we did not want was an enormous pedestal with something on it



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presuming to tell people what they ought to think”, argued Jochen Gerz (Young, 2006, p.29). For the artists, any pedagogical and intellectually dictatorial results of this monument would have clashed with the principles of the anti-fascist monument. They decided that “their monument against fascism, therefore, would amount to a monument against itself” (Young, 2006, p.29). At its tallest, the one-metre-squared lead-covered, aluminium column reached a height of twelve metres. The viewers were encouraged to carve, graffiti and inscribe their names, messages and thoughts into this monument. As this process would go on, the column would sink lower and lower into the floor beneath, until finally only the very top would sit flush with the ground forever, with no way of seeing the words beneath. This interactive method of communicating with the viewers was a vessel for them to impart their literal and psychological messages onto the space. The openness of the monument meant the viewers could choose to direct their memory wherever they wanted, whether it be a family member, a philosophical concept or just an awe of the incredulity of life and history. The beauty of abstraction is most visceral when it accepts that “...to some extent, all any monument can do is provide a trace of its makers, not of the memory itself” (Young, 2006, p.34).

Abstraction can be beautiful when self-aware, but when memorials tell stories that must never be forgotten, specificity in emotion is crucial. Abstraction as a design tool for memorials is not in itself harmful, but its efficacy in communicating the act of remembrance with public art must be critiqued and questioned. This is the framework through which I will proceed in my exploration of encounter-monuments. Abstraction in memorials is often tied to those commemorating contemporary history. So how do we treat our connection to much older, more fragile memories, and what can we learn from this connection for new methods of memorialisation?



Part II

Time is Haptic

Perhaps there is something noteworthy about the brevity of weekend trips that encourage intense attentiveness, since this part also begins with a three day visit to Norwich, England.

I naturally gravitate towards the art and architecture nook of intimate bookshops and my first day in Norwich was no different. Among the usual suspects (tomes of traditional timber construction methods of Tudor housing and literary descriptions of the 18th century English picturesque) sat Jean Gimpel's *The Cathedral Builders* (1983). If the anthropology and economics of mediaeval cathedral construction is of little interest to you, I might find it hard to recommend, however if, like me, there is even a mild curiosity around this theme, or tomorrow you plan on visiting Norwich Cathedral, you could do worse than having a flick through this book. I could argue that without this book I may have written this thesis on a very different theme. One story in *The Cathedral Builders* stood out among the rest. To build a cathedral was a gargantuan logistical challenge. Realising the banality behind a cathedral's majesty bridges a profound understanding of time. Gimpel wrote about the way in which the stonemasons were paid (the concept that a stonemason was paid was already gripping, instantly humanising the cathedral). A cathedral's construction typically spanned centuries, depending on its funding and sources of income. As a result the stonemasons were not able to be regular employees. To manage the challenge of such contract-less jobs, the stonemasons were not paid by the year, month or even day, but by the block. To keep track of how many blocks were cut by each mason they would carve their personal signatures (runes) into them, and at the end of the day the contractor would count the blocks and pay the masons accordingly. Today, with careful investigation, these runes can be seen all over the churches and cathedrals of Europe - logistically bureaucratic graffiti spanning centuries. The power of this story lies in its banality. The image of an individual from the 13th century was arguably stronger than it had ever been in my mind, purely as a result of its didacticism. The next day in Norwich Cathedral, it



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took less than five minutes before I spotted one of these runes - my perception of the space was permanently changed. The beauty, majesty and spirituality of a cathedral is so overwhelming it dissolves our comprehension of the human hands that assembled the blocks, one by one. But now this perception was realised stronger than ever. To touch these carvings is to emotionally traverse 800 years into the past. To touch the stains, the accidental blemishes, the unintentional fossils that humans have unknowingly left behind over the centuries is to place yourself in the sublime continuum of time. The power that came with touching that rune and for the first time being able to comprehend the humanity of a cathedral was invigorating. It was a beautiful relic, a fingerprint of a lost memory; somebody whose existence had previously been swallowed by the annals of time was electrified and resuscitated. I don't know their name or anything about them - but I know, and now feel that they existed. I touched what their hands touched. The hands that proved to the contractors that they should be paid their fair share 800 years ago exposed themselves. I was touching time itself. This physical interaction became the spark which influenced my analysis of the encounter-monument.

The encounter-monument removes the artistic and conceptual flourishes of an individual and positions itself purely in truth. To truly preserve a memory is to see the physical timestamp left by its existence. It is the *encounter* with the flow of time that generates its power. The encounter governs its authority. There is no curatorial approach, no conceptual blinders placed over the punters' eyes, no subjectivity from the author's gaze imposed upon the visitor. We encounter these artefacts as we stumble upon them in our lives - they present themselves to us. They monumentalise life through the randomness, mundanity and surprise of the encounter. Encounter-monuments are the sense of histories both recent and distant, passing before our very eyes. They plug us into the timeline of existence. They are the disused tramlines on the outskirts of a European city that have been abandoned and overgrown. They are the encounter

with a stranger's signature and date in the cover of a book that has been lying in the attic for decades. They are the slowly dissolving names on forgotten gravestones. To develop a theoretical framework that starts to explain the reasons for their potency I have designated three facets of the encounter-monument which can elucidate our understanding.

i.

time

Time is understood and analysed from myriad viewpoints, from the philosophical to the artistic; from the mathematical to the biological. To feel the passage of time is a highly subjective human experience. Rovelli (2019) goes so far as to abandon the idea that time flows, arguing that the concept of past and future, then and now is a humanistically cerebral interpretation and abstraction of unimaginable concepts. This concept places spatial commemorative practices in a unique position; they become physical manifestations of the anthropological desire to process what we imagine time to be. Bertrand Russell (1915) takes a philosophically and mathematically logical approach to the philosophy of the experience of time, highlighting the importance of time-relations between subject and object; "I conclude that...there must, in some cases, be immediate acquaintance with past objects given in a way which enables us to know that they are past..." (p.14). He posits that our acquaintance with objects of the past can not rely on images themselves but with their presence and physical existence. Russell positions himself in a highly objective point of view, as a mathematician might. For Russell time becomes an equation to be deciphered. On the other side of the same coin lies a more poetically and romantically-minded analysis of time. For this we can look to Weiskel's 1986 work *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence* in which he declares our perception of time as emblematic of the Romanticist

notions of the sublime; that which lies beyond our human comprehension. For the Romanticists, time is nature's dominion over humanity; it is the all-too-human realisation that we are passing through an existence whose secrets will never be understood. Time fits snugly into the Romantic notions of the sublime; we gaze in awe at its complexity and bow our heads to its authority. Gothic sublimity explores "...the unspeakable, the inconceivable, the unnameable..." For Weiskel, the Romantic sublime is born at the moment when the normal relations between signifier and signified suddenly break down" (Morris, 1985, p.299). When you come into physical contact with the effects of time the intensity of the sublime takes hold and our empathy with lost histories becomes slightly less diluted. This is one key distinction between the encounter-monument and the counter monument; the abstraction of the latter relies on concept to convey the power of time. Thus the subjectivity of the designer takes hold and, since the experience of time is so viciously subjective we are not experiencing time, we are experiencing another's experience of time. This is why the power of a counter monument lies in physical connection to place - abstraction and concept is purely image based, as a result something more is needed to tie it to the continuum of time. The encounter-monument exists only as an untampered, pure expression of the effects of time.

ii.

touch

To understand the intensity of the haptic dimension surrounding the encounter-monument we need look no further than Juhani Pallasmaa's brilliant work *The Eyes of the Skin* (1996). Early in the text Pallasmaa presents an important quote from Ashley Montagu (1978, p.3), which I shall echo here: "[The Skin] is the oldest and the most sensitive of our organs, our first medium of communication, and our most efficient protector [...]. Touch is the parent of our eyes, ears, nose and mouth.

It is the sense which became differentiated into the other, a fact that seems to be recognized in the age-old evaluation of touch as ‘the mother of the senses’” (p.12). This literal, physical connection between time and the sensitivity of our fingertips is profoundly spiritual - the microstructures of the stone that have eroded or dissolved with the elements holds secrets and stories that historical analyses can never share. On the physical level it has been demonstrated that human touch is so sensitive we can detect variations of height of one micron, roughly the width of a bacterial cell (Skedung, 2013). “The human eye, by contrast, can’t resolve anything much smaller than 100 microns” (Angier, 2008, para.2). This hypersensitivity may explain its dominance in our phenomenological experience of space. The depth of atmosphere grows exponentially with the stimulus of a tactile surface. It is the body-soul connection of our world which is so crucial in determining the strength of memory. To separate the physical from the spiritual is to permanently fracture the relationship. Gunter Demnig’s highly influential *Stumbling Stones* are laid in front of the houses from which Jews were taken to concentration camps. They provide us with the semantic knowledge of the historic occurrence in this place but grant us the ability to bridge the mental and visual gap and cross over to the haptic; you touch the door handle of the house, brushing your fingertips over the brickwork that bore witness to the atrocity. You might even share the same paving stones on which the people stood decades ago as they departed. Such is the effect that image can not provide. Effective memorials can be modest in terms of scale, mass and attention but the message conveyed is no less powerful. “Even visual perceptions are fused and integrated into the haptic continuum of the self; my body remembers who I am and how I am located in the world. My body is truly the navel of my world, not in the sense of the viewing point of the central perspective, but as the very locus of reference, memory, imagination and integration” posits Pallasmaa (1996, p.12). To walk into Norwich Cathedral and see the effects of time on the seemingly permanent materials and proceed to physically

interact with them is irreplicable. Thus lies the power of the encounter-monument; not in its destruction but in its story-telling abilities. The same way heat reveals messages written in invisible ink, stone reveals the stories lost to time. To touch these surfaces is to establish direct emotional contact with these stories. “The body is the physical fabric of the heritage site in its original state and setting. The soul, the spirit of the place, is the sum of the site’s history, traditions, memories, myths, associations and continuity of meanings connected with people and use over time” (Loh, 2007, p.32). The encounter-monument exists through the patina of time, transcending human experience - touch is the most valuable way we can plug ourselves into the sublimity of entropy and hear its secrets.

iii.

serendipity

The third and final facet through which the efficacy of the encounter-monument can be examined is in the nature of its existence: they are unintentional, accidental and sudden. I have previously emphasised the banality of the intention with which the masons’ marks were inscribed, but we now observe them with an intense aura of mystery and wonder. The gothicness of the angles and harsh lines of which they are composed trigger strong associations of mythology and legend. The serendipity of our interaction with the encounter-monument is a brief, sharp catalyst that breaks the spell of the present. “Just as a single dot is simply an interruption of a spatial uniformity and has no other structure except the sharp gradation of contrast between itself and its background, so a momentary stimulus is an interruption of a uniformity



Time is Haptic

of duration” (Pickford, 2012, p.4). As soon as they are curated, exhibited and presented the spell is broken; they stand fundamentally anti-museal in nature as their potency lives in their existence in everyday life. The previous two facets (time and touch) are so utterly subjective that the action and reaction of the encounter must also be entirely personal. They might be noticed walking down the street and they might suddenly be found in an already familiar place. The realisation that we spend each moment engulfed in archaeology left for us to discover incites a primitively instinctive excitement and wonder. Ruskin’s *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1900) describes the phenomenon of ‘parasitic sublimity’: “a sublimity dependent on the accidents, or on the least essential characters, of the object to which it belongs” (p.236). We are constantly privy to this parasitism (some may call it entropy) and the realisation that this phenomenon transcends all of human existence is truly humbling. To curate and exhibit this effect, however intelligently, is to distort the nature of the everyday. It is the authenticity of the serendipity of the encounter that grounds its commemorative ability. To put a masons mark hiding in the shadows of a corner of Norwich Cathedral behind a pane of glass, or to present it as a museal artefact would be to wipe away the magic of its access to the everyday.

Where a historic exhibition provides explicit knowledge, the encounter-monument brings forward a posteriori knowledge. It is the combination of these two modes of factual communication that bring about a deep anthropological connection to history. A city overflows with encounter-monuments and to understand how to connect to forgotten histories elucidates and informs our understanding of artistic commemorative practices as a society. To commemorate contemporary events I suggest looking at such histories and how we connect ourselves to these timelines, thus enabling a far more profound understanding of memory, history and experience.



Part III

Deconstructing the Domplein

In 1674 a summer storm passed through the Dutch city of Utrecht leaving a scar which has yet to heal. Lasting only around half an hour, the storm devastated the city but the biggest impact was to Utrecht's crown jewel: St Martin's Cathedral, or as it is more commonly known, the Domkerk. The tornado tore through the church, razing the entirety of the nave to the ground, severing the connection between the tallest church tower in the Netherlands and the choir. It was not just the urban fabric of Utrecht that lay in tatters - only two years prior the deeply protestant city was occupied by French catholic troops in a year that came to be known as 'het rampjaar', or the year of disaster (Nalmbantis, 2021). The devastating social and physical effects of the storm in conjunction with the socio-political zeitgeist lay the foundations for a new urbanistic core of Utrecht. With the entirety of the nave lying as rubble and ruins, questions of rebuilding, commemorating and evolution were sparked, with a debate persisting to this day. Today the space exists as an open central square named Domplein, beautifully bookended by the Domtoren and the remaining choir and transept of the Domkerk.

In Part I, I explored how ineffective abstraction or disconnecting a memorial from its historic context can be damaging to the essence of a memory; in Part II the unique effects of the encounter-monument were developed and its importance in conjuring the past were expanded. Part III delves into the encounter-monument as a tool for historic understanding and potential future interpretation of the Domplein. It will explore how the space where the nave of the Domkerk once stood is being treated spatially and commemoratively and what the encounter-monuments found on the site can teach us about a new direction for the Domplein. I intend to tell the story both factually and emotionally, arguing current methods of historicization and commemoration through simplistic abstraction in the Domplein are shallow and ineffective (the details of which will be expanded upon as this Part develops), failing in their primary purpose of connecting our present day to the beautifully profound history of the site. Words can only

go so far in communicating the nebulous ephemerality of the encounter-monuments I discovered in and around this space and thus I will lean on visual artistic methods to further translate these ideas.

The history of the Domkerk is as rocky as the foundations upon which it is built. The city of Utrecht was born around 50AD when the invading Romans decided to set up camp and build a fortress (Kam, 1982). In the year 630 the Frankish clergy founded the first chapel specifically dedicated to Saint Martin of Tour; the birth of the Domkerk. Over the coming centuries, the church would either burn down or get intentionally destroyed repeatedly. A stronger, more robust Romanesque-style church was consecrated on this site in 1023, but after a fire 230 years later which lay waste to swathes of Utrecht was partially destroyed. The current gothic structure as we now know it grew from 1254, with construction carrying on until the 16th century (Terlingen, 2011). Stone by stone, section by section, what remained of the Romanesque church was replaced and re-used. The ambulatory, choir, tower, transept and nave were constructed chronologically. As the centuries of construction went on, the flow of patronage became increasingly precarious, until, in the early 16th century, the money ran out. Diminishing enthusiasm succeeded by the tide of the Reformation had stark physical impacts on the construction of the cathedral. The nave never saw its completion as it was terminated not by sweeping brick and stone vaulting but by a levelled horizontal roof (Haslinghuis, 1965). Not only did its structural system not incorporate any flying buttresses but the buttressing system it did use was simply too small. Shortly after its “completion”, the Iconoclasts (which were steadily making their way across the Low Countries) had their way with the Domkerk, destroying many of the interior and exterior statues and ornaments (Kam, 1982). Such a palimpsestic history already provides a wealth of traces and stories even without considering the aforementioned storm. But finally the storm arrived, disfiguring the cathedral permanently.

The destruction left by the tornado changed the face

of Utrecht - the entire nave collapsed. The recent Reformation left the ruins in the hands of the Protestants, and, for reasons which can be widely debated, left the ruins lying there for the next 150 years (Halinghuis, 1965). The devastation was matched only by its poetry - to see the effects of one of the most biblically brutal natural disasters experienced by a city for 150 years in such a visceral manner would surely have been a sight to behold. The story is there for all to see for generations. You need only walk to the town centre to discover the history and the stories for yourself. To clamber over the shattered columns, to brush your fingertips over the crumbling stone, to take a piece of history home in your pocket is to experience the history. This patchwork history was aggressively physical in its manifestation - the evidence of these stories is right there, to touch and to see.

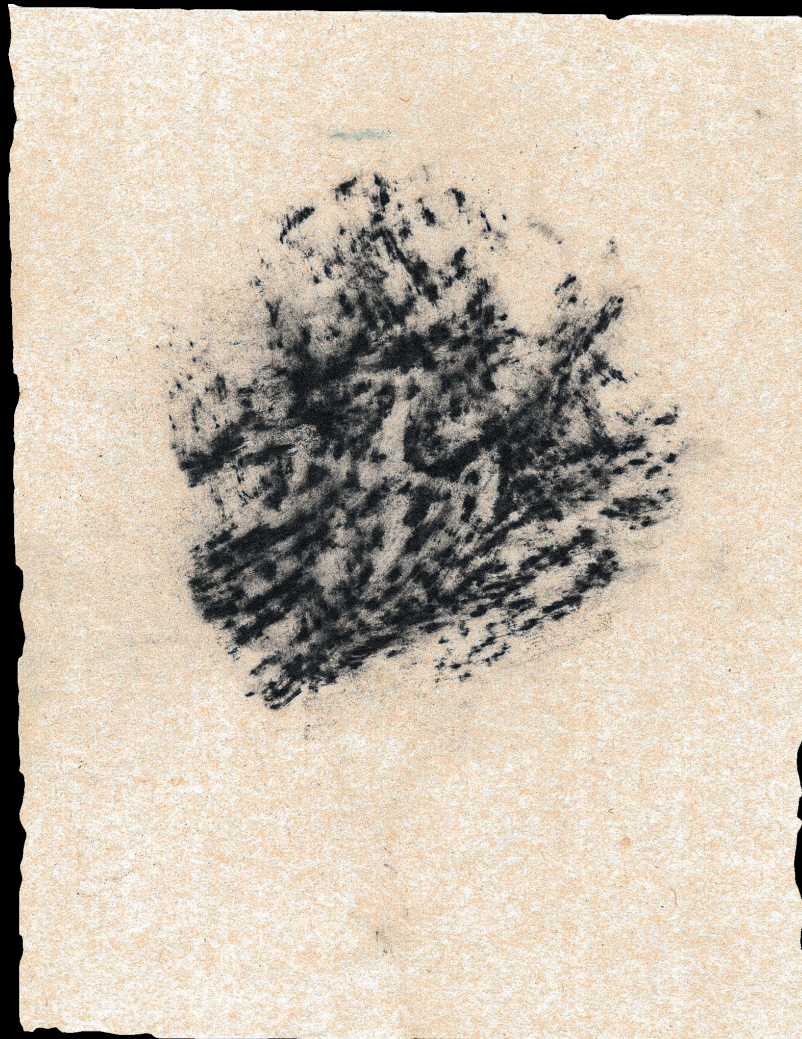
Eventually the rubble was swept away and the discussion over how the new space left by the shadow of the nave should be occupied began. How should this space exist? What is its purpose? Questions of conservation, restoration and rebuilding plagued the designers. Is it a commemorative space? What does a new public square with whispers of pre-existing beauty look like? The opportunity to present the beautiful, tragic, unfathomably complex history as a keystone in the urban fabric of Utrecht could be demonstrated through a wealth of methods.

Today the Damplein sits as a curious pocket of space whose historic beauty exists through what sits adjacent to it. Traces of its previous lives exist in the square itself, with the plan of the previous architectural occupants highlighted through different coloured pavings; where the columns of the nave used to stand tall and mighty, now sit a patch of grey bricks signifying only their shape. The existence of other, smaller churches are also emphasised by the grey brick. To translate this entire history through shapes of grey on a terracotta ground is a simple symptom of the pandemic of surface-level abstraction explored and critiqued in Part I. This thesis unfolds a concept of a new type of physical commemorative technique. The encounter-monuments surrounding the site

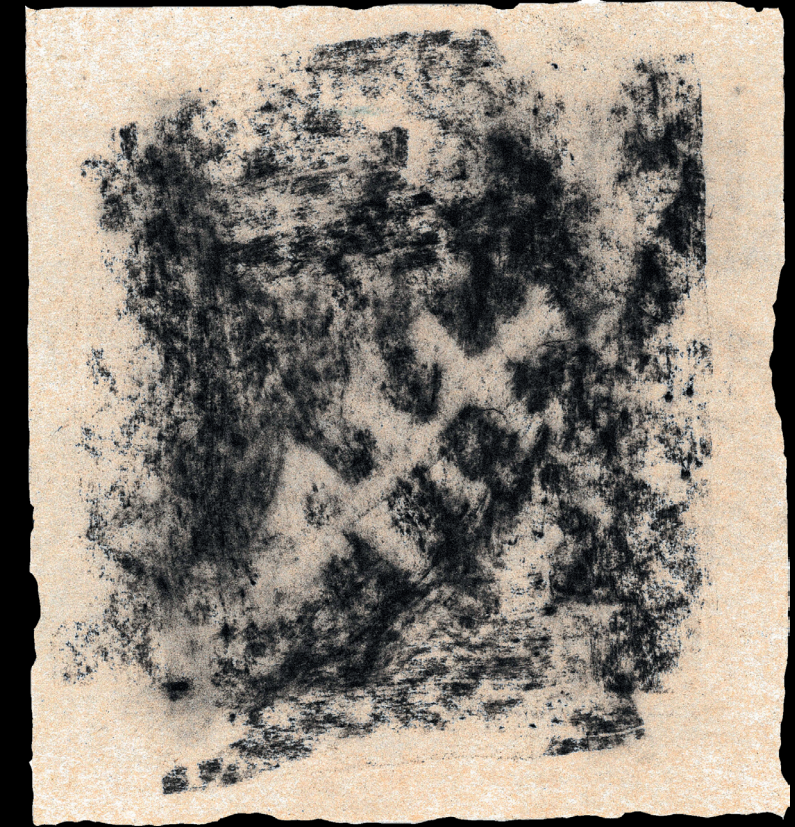
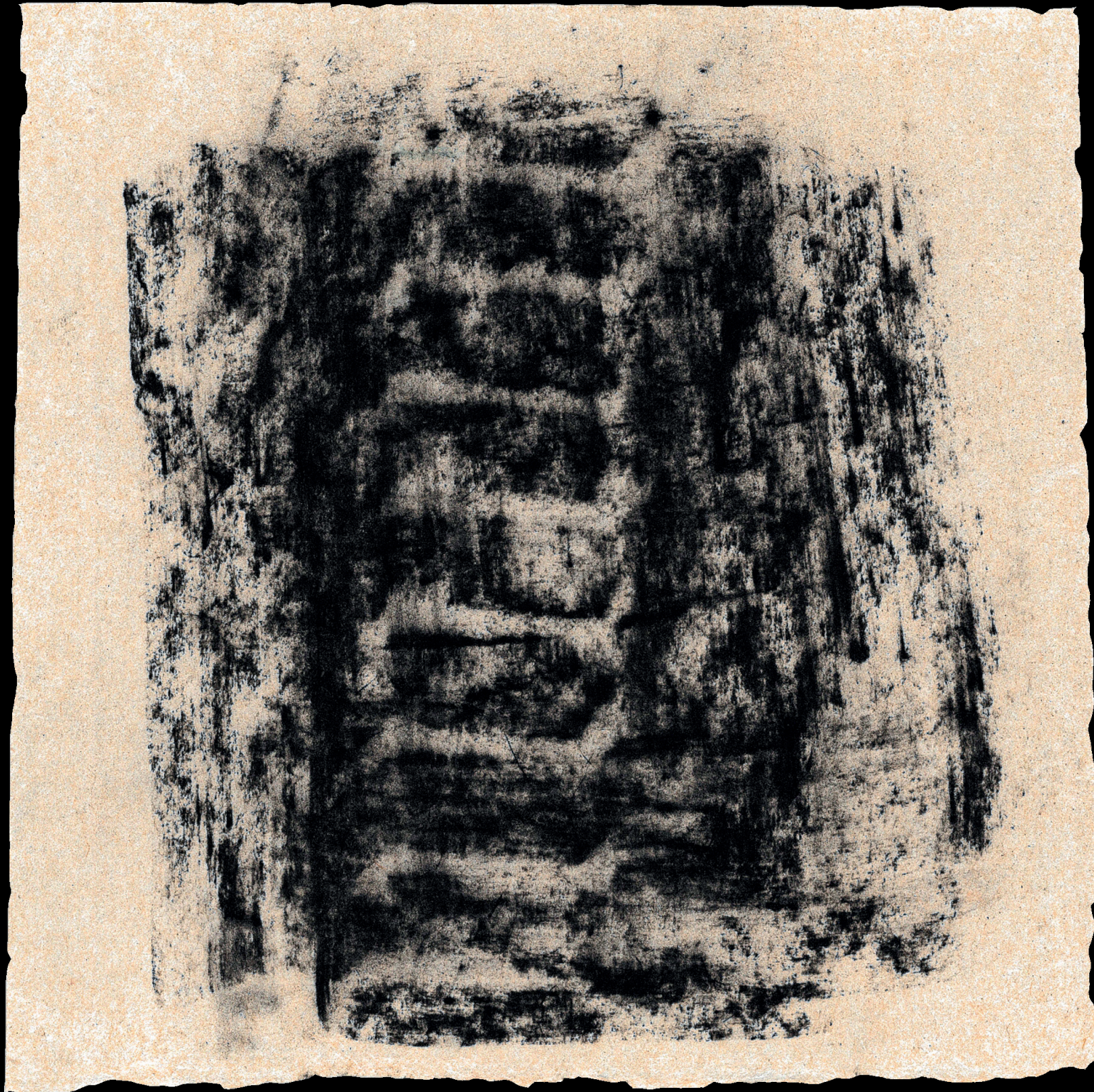
are plentiful. I went many times to the Domkerk for my research, and each time new scars and hints of time presented themselves to me. Throughout this thesis I have interwoven a photo series of encounter-monuments from the Domtoren and Domkerk. The following parts comprise two more methods of depicting these counter-monuments. The intention of these physical artefacts is to bring to light the beauty and the existing contextualism that can be obtained through a close examination of the material fabric of the church. These works shine a spotlight on the visual and tactile nature of the themes discussed in this thesis, describing stories that escape the power of the written word.



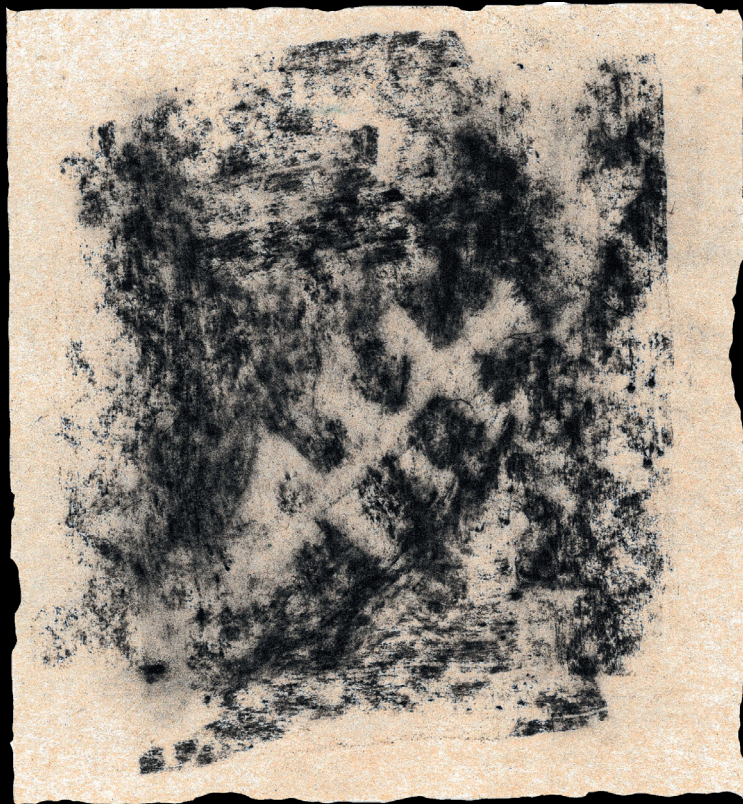
Deconstructing the Domplein: Tracing Time



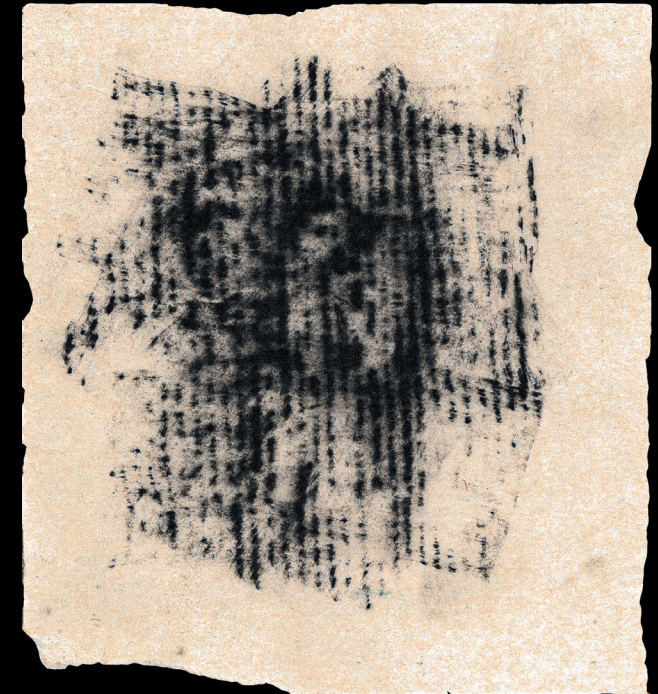
The atmosphere within the Domkerk runs parallel to many of Europe's cathedrals; a mutually agreed respectful quiet broken by a falling umbrella or a disinterested child. Occasionally someone might tinker on the keys of the grand organ overhead. Also following the tradition of grand European cathedrals, the entrance now holds an inconveniently heavy set of glass doors and an equally inconvenient two-way entrance and exit system. Once this threshold has been passed, a familiar feeling of spatial sanctity takes over. For my fifth visit to the church I had a very specific intention; the frottage method of illustrating the tactility of a surface had been an intention of mine since the conceptual framework of my thesis began to take shape. Laying a thin sheet of paper onto a surface and rubbing over it with a soft graphite or charcoal stick brings out the cracks, imperfections, kinks and fractures in its surface. Although deeply impressionist and artists, there is a fundamental truth that lies in this method. Although the outcome varies depending on the choice of drawing tool, paper weight and rubbing direction, the result revealed can also be considered as highly objective. The benefits of this technique enable certain imperfections to be viscerally exposed, which photographs may not have the fidelity or correct angle of light to pick up on. The results are equally objective and subjective, a tension through which the artworks thrive.



In the Domkerk my medium of choice for this process was a 15mm charcoal stick. I had previously experimented with graphite sticks as well as charcoal of various thicknesses but this tool gave me the depth of contrast and softness that I required from this series. The paper used was a 19gsm, semi-translucent Japanese Mitsumata fibre sheet, whose delicate softness was deceptively robust. Although often the result of what exactly is being illustrated is unclear, the intention is not to draw an image. The intention is to represent what our fingertips experience as we brush over the centuries old surfaces. Sometimes the drawings may distinguish letters, runes and shapes but often it is simply the rich nature of the stone surfaces that sings through. Many of these drawings take shape the longer they are stared at, but this can also abstract them further.



The history exposed in these drawings spans centuries. Typically, the less precise the image, the older it is - its age has worn away the sharp lines and distinct curves resulting in a seemingly soft and malleable form. Often the forms captured are sharp and distinct. I let the charcoal tell the story in these drawings. The results were usually outside of my control, which became their biggest strength. Each mark tells a story.

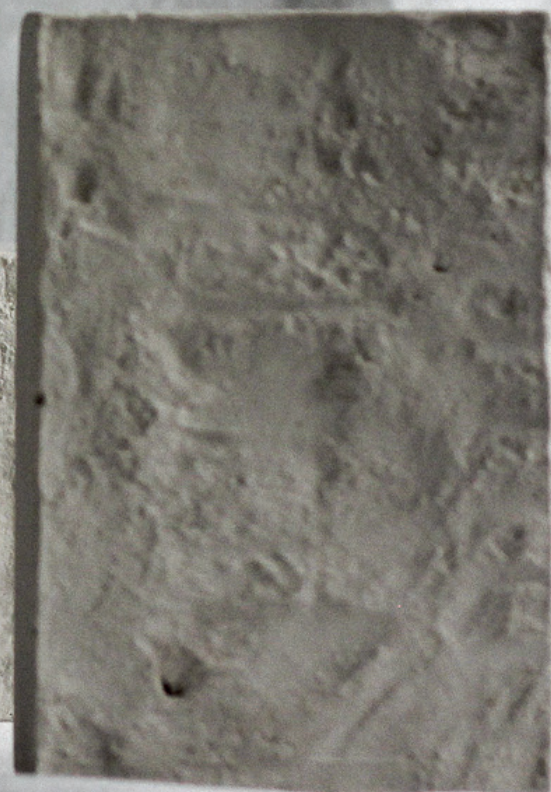
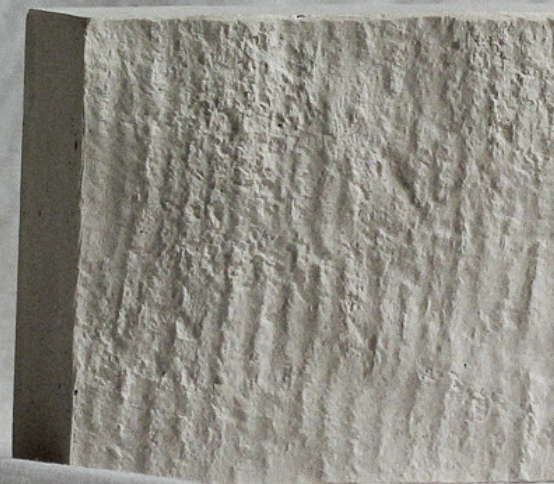


Deconstructing the Dimplein:

Casting Time



Out of the seven times I visited the Domkerk for my research, there was only one day in which the sun was shining. At 11am the Dimplein brimmed with a quiet but assertive hum of life. There were few people relaxing in the square - it merely became an urbanistic node for people to pass through. I was familiar with the church but its majesty never failed to wear thin. I came prepared with pre-made slabs of clay, intended to be pressed into the walls to then be recast in plaster. These artefacts came last in my exploration due to their unpredictability - there were many points of failure in the casting of clay negatives (getting a high-quality pressing of the clay, retaining its shape on the journey home and pouring the plaster into a perfectly-made mould). I had four slabs of clay and I knew exactly which fragments I wanted to capture. The masons' marks tell a powerful story in the cathedral's creation - there were two beautiful marks which I knew existed, one comprised a gothic 'X', capped with two angled serifs and the other a slightly more complex composition of a horizontal line with a cross on one end, mimicking an abstracted shooting star. The next cast was intended to show the highly expressive carving patterns of the stone: an endless array of angled horizontal lines used to carefully carve the vertical mullions of the cloister traceries. Finally the last, perhaps the most difficult to make out, is a pressing of a nearly entirely corroded mediaeval sign, high up on the eastern wall (Fig. X). The gothic can barely be discerned but the intentional carving colliding with the organically ruined rock creates a fascinating composition.





These casts comprise the most important outcome of this thesis; they are a physical recreation of the tactility of the church. I encourage people to pick them up and feel the materiality that has been recreated. Although not the originals, they pick up traces of the magic captured in the stone walls of the Domkerk. The history within the craggy faces of these plaster blocks is removed from its original setting but remains closely tied to its parent architecture. They are phenomenally site-specific as architectural representations - they exist only in those 110x140mm squares of that church yet they contain stories that span over 500 years.



Without these artefacts, I believe this text would be significantly less impactful, existing purely theoretically. When discussing physical atmosphere and tactility it can be highly beneficial to communicate such ideas physically. Using these elements I will move forward to my concluding statement; a call for a new direction for the design of the Domplein.



Conclusion

Through defining and illustrating the encounter-monuments my aim is not to formulate a new design for the Domplein but to illustrate how we might connect more closely to its beautiful history. In Part I, I analysed two 20th century memorials; Eisenman's 2005 Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe and Jochen and Esther Shalev-Gerz's 1986 Monument Against Fascism. The former acted as a framework for the pitfalls of abstraction as an artistic device for provoking collective-memory and latter highlights the successes of abstraction as a means of historic representation. The Domplein in Utrecht holds a wealth of potential as a monument to a vast and complex history, however it now stands as an awkward pocket of space with few indications of its stories. At most, the silhouettes of the pre-existing structures which were destroyed by the tornado in the 17th century are hinted at in plan through dark brick stones, tracing the plan of the columns of the nave. This thesis acts as a call for more - through a photo series, charcoal frottage drawings and plaster casts of the infinite encounter-monuments found within a 50-metre radius of this square, in and around the Domplein, I have demonstrated how there is great potential for this to become a key point of memory and temporal spirituality in Europe. The tactility and presence of the historic fabric of such sites is crucial in connecting with forgotten histories. Sensory devices for the connective membrane between humanity and time must not be limited to vision. The language of time is touch; the wear and tear of stone, the remoulding of seemingly impenetrable elements by uncontrollable elements. These ideas can be brought to the forefront of contemporary memorial design to influence a far more potent connection with history.



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Master Architecture, Urbanism and Building Sciences

**AR2A011
Architectural History Thesis
2022/23**

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