Assignment 2 Option a)
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Date: April 25, 2021
Course: What in the Hell is Memory Studies?
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James E. Young's Analysis of the Process of Memorialization

In the study of memory and memorials, few academics are as prominent as James E. Young, a Professor Emeritus at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. There, he taught English and Judaic & Near Easter Studies and founded the Institute for Holocaust, Genocide, and Memory Studies. As a visiting professor, he taught at Harvard University and Princeton University among others ("James E. Young," n.d.). Young has written multiple books on the Holocaust and the nature of memory and he served on the jury for the German "Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe" (2020) in Berlin, the U.S.-American "National September 11 Memorial & Museum" (n.d.) in New York City ("James E. Young," n.d.), and most recently as a consultant for the Norwegian government following the Utøya mass shooting in 2011 (Ehrenpreis, 2018). Additionally, he curated an art exhibition in 1994-1995 titled "The Art of Memory: Holocaust Memorials in History" ("James E. Young," n.d.) which focused on memorials of the Holocaust and on the nature of memorials themselves. He possesses a plethora of both theoretical and practical experience concerning memorials and memorization.

In the chapter "The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials in History" from the book *Cultural Memory Studies* (Young, 2008), Young discusses the process of memorial creation, difficulties in representation, and problems with traditional monuments with a special focus on the Holocaust. He writes that memorials are dependent on their location, their creator, the history and life of their state and community, and even the current memory-artistic movements. Any Holocaust memorial has multifaceted meaning and its meanings may change over time, regardless of the original creator's intentions. While each country faces challenges remembering the Holocaust, Germany faces them in their most extreme. Redeeming the Holocaust through art, making shame part of a national memorial, and how a perpetrator can remember its victims are some of the issues that German memorial artists must face. Memorials that address these issues would require what Young calls a "breach in conventional

"memorial code"" (Young, 2008, p. 359). Recognizing this conundrum, German artists turned to "counter-monuments," which do not make the visitor a passive element of the memorial, do not attempt to replace the actual past, and often incorporate the above-mentioned issues into the monuments themselves. This shift resulted in memorials that fittingly commemorated events through analogies, for example commemorating the destruction of a people with the destruction of a building. In contrast to normal monuments, counter-monuments do not attempting to encapsulate or seal off the contended and evolving memory that they represent. The artists also recognized that the process of memorial creation is a central part of the memorial itself. Toward the end of the chapter, Young discusses the interaction between art-historical analysis and Holocaust memorials. He criticizes that such analysis often ignores the fact that memorials are made for the public (i.e. that mass appeal can be a good thing) and that critics apply the same criteria to memorial analysis that they apply to "high art". In doing that, they ignore the different purposes these art forms serve, and thus their analysis is not correct. Furthermore, the author advocates for the use of memory studies methods in memorial art critique by asking "how memorial representations of history may finally weave themselves into the course of ongoing events" (Young, 2008, p. 362). Central to Young's approach is the role of the monument in the present moment and how "[it] suggests itself as a basis for political and social action" (Young, 2008, p. 362). Studying the actions that monuments inspire and being aware of the process of their creation will produce a more complete picture of their influence and remind us of their changing meaning and dependence on visitors to give them meaning in the first place. Young argues against setting memory and memorials in stone and hopes that by incorporating the memorial process into the finished memorial we can save it from becoming disjointed from its process of creation. To summarize, Young argues for an art history and memorial critique that considers how a memorial shapes our understanding of an era, how this understanding, in turn, influences our view of the present, and how this process can ultimately lead to action.

In my opinion, Young's argument is very though out and reasonable. In considering not just the artistic aspect of the monument, but its meaning, its influence on peoples' actions, and process of its creation we will be able to judge or analyze it more completely. This

presupposes that we accept that a monument is more than just the physical object, i.e. that it has a memory dimension and that it can influence visitors' opinions and views. The focus on the memorial process as an addition to the finished memorial enables a better understanding of the meaning of the memorial and even its artistic form. Young talks about this in detail in a talk titled "The Stages of Memory: Reflections on Memorialisation and Global Commemoration" which is available on YouTube (British Association for Holocaust Studies, 2020). Starting at 46:50, he talks about the process of creating the "National September 11 Memorial & Museum" (n.d.) which he was involved in as a juror. For him, the memorial process started with the first news reports of the terror attacks, continued with spontaneous candlelight vigils and the posting of missing person flyers all over New York City. On the day of the six month anniversary of the attacks, two beams of light were shone into the sky, signifying the voids left behind by the towers. For the first anniversary, small pools of water were built in the center of the now cleared foundations, and the survivors and families of the deceased laid flowers onto the pools and read out the names of all the victims. The actual memorial design process consisted of choosing one design out of 5201 submitted designs. The winning design focused on two large, deep pools with waterfalls representing both the voids left behind by the towers and their fall. The pools are surrounded by trees that block out the city and invite people to perambulate, as Young puts it. The idea to make the process of memorial creation part of the memorial itself seems the only reasonable thing to do, as for the people with the closest ties to the commemorated event, the creation of a monument itself is part of the process or working through and understanding an event.

The above mentioned perambulation–leaving the visitor to find their way into and out of the monument–is an important feature for the author. He identifies the Vietnam War Memorial on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. as the forerunner of this trend in modern memorialization (British Association for Holocaust Studies, 2020). The memorial was revolutionary in many other ways, too. Young describes it as being a monument to a war with few remaining supporters–one people might have wanted to forget. As such, the memorial does not glorify its subject (unlike many of the other memorials on the National Mall), but as Young explains in the talk, it is cut into the landscape like a wound that will never heal; it thus

presents a "breach of memorial code." This "cut" or negative space is also used to signify the loss the monument represents. Besides being cut into the landscape, the monument only shows the names of the fallen of the Vietnam War on a slightly glossy surface. This reflective surface puts the focus on the visitors because they can see themselves in the memorial and thus become a part of the memorial (British Association for Holocaust Studies, 2020). In Young's view, this memorial influenced many following memorials, including the 9/11 memorial discussed above and the "Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe" (2020).

The arc of the memorial tradition starting with the Vietnam War memorial in Washington, D.C., touching Holocaust memorials in Germany, and culminating in the 9/11 memorial in New York City is a very interesting theory. I had never made this connection or in all honesty given it any thought. This "movement" that Young describes is intriguing and something I am glad I learned a little bit more about. I can say that I agree with Young's argument and his approach which incorporates this movement into memorial analysis. By incorporating the memorialization process, the meaning memorials generate, and the consequences of this meaning into the analysis of memorials, we can increase its depth. The recent focus on commemorating loss and not trying to impose false memories or grandeur through memorials is a movement that I can support; it fits with a more self-reflexive approach to memory and memorialization.

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