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*Memory's Home*

Wood panels, acrylic, metal piping, fabric, clay

My piece was inspired by the concept of memory, and memorialization through objects and spaces. My sculpture specifically addresses the manner in which our childhood homes can act as time capsules for memory and took the shape of a dollhouse.

Dollhouses are tangible in form, but ephemeral in use. The piece combines imagery of my childhood home with my father's. My piece's form was intended to act as an ode to childhood, and how the relics of childhood, while capsules of memory, become functionally useless over time.

Memory is molded and changed every time it is retrieved and interacted with; dollhouses—the manner in which they are played with, used, and enjoyed—change with each interaction and owner. Relative to memory, while the content in the dollhouse shifts and changes, its bones will stay the same.

My initial intention was to create something completely vibrant and full of life; however, I realized that creating something that, on the inside, looked aged, would better reference the retrieval and degradation of memory over time. Leaving it empty keeps the dollhouse's use subjective to the user, relative to the manner in which memory is subjective to the individual.

# Memorializing Memory



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*This paper revolves around the concept of memory, which creates the framework through which we understand and interact with the present. My research was guided by the manner in which monuments are able to shift public perceptions, allowing us to use history to frame our understanding of the present.*

My family has inhabited my home since the 1950s. It acts as a memorial for the ghosts and memories that haunt our halls, ceilings, walls; memories are the bones of my home—they trace the footsteps that echo across the floorboards.

My family is a blurred image, every narrative of which is distorted by repressed memories, attempts at preventing old wounds from ripping open, and efforts at controlling public perception. But my father's perspective is different, tinted by rose-colored hues, colored by childhood memories fondly retrieved.

His perspective encouraged my interest in the concept of memory: the types of memory that impress upon us throughout our lives, and the manner in which we can memorialize our pasts through objects that act as vessels for memory. I've witnessed these vessels created intentionally and unintentionally; my cousin's bed and my aunt's dolls—statues and plaques. Their stories resonate despite the intention behind their creation.

These vessels evoke emotion, an unconditional truth. One cannot deny the emotions of another person; individual perspectives can clash regarding stories and histories. However, they cannot quarrel over the emotions that those stories evoke because emotion and memory are subject to the individual. One person's half-truth is another person's whole. Events are erased by one person's subconscious mind while they brand another's.

I've grown up around this dynamic; the dynamic between the push and pull of one person's reality and another's falsity. It fractured my relationship with my uncle, changed my relationship with my cousins, erased my relationship with my aunt. Diversions in the collective narrative that split into the individual are what evoked my interest in personal versus collective memory, and the variables that have the potential to influence the collective.

This sense of memory evoked my interest in the connection between memory and the ability to memorialize, the impact of memorialization, and the structures with which we memorialize people and events.

How does the past frame our perceptions of the present?

How do memorials influence the repetition of history?

Memory is the faculty by which the brain encodes, stores, and retrieves information. There are many forms of memory that generally fall under the branches explicit<sup>1</sup>, individual<sup>2</sup>, implicit<sup>3</sup>. Under the branch of explicit memory falls semantic, autobiographical, spatial, and episodic memory. Under the branch of implicit memory falls procedural<sup>4</sup>, and perceptual. Memory is the retention of information over the course of our lives that allows us to use our past experiences to frame our actions within the context of the present.

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<sup>1</sup> Explicit memory includes autobiographical, semantic, and episodic memory; also known as declarative memory.

<sup>2</sup> Personal memory describes one's personal interpretation of an event from one's own life.

<sup>3</sup> Implicit memory includes procedural, priming, and perceptual memory.

<sup>4</sup> A type of long-term memory that refers to our knowledge of skills like riding a bike, tying one's shoes; processes that are remembered automatically.

## **I. Explicit Memory Types**

Explicit/Declarative memories are facts and memories of the past that are declared rather than performed (Coltheart).

**Semantic memory** refers to the memory of general information about the world “and other concept-based knowledge unrelated to specific experiences” (Maillard 2020). Semantic memory is associated with a “noetic” level of consciousness; it is dependent on the encoding of context, and thus relates more to the intellect and mental activity. Semantic memory frames our understanding about the factual: the ocean is blue because of the manner in which water absorbs light, leaving only colors in the blue part of the light spectrum to be seen, the blue of distance.

**Autobiographical memory** is a blend of memories of—single, recurring, and extended—events that are merged to form a coherent story of self that is created through societal practices. Autobiographical memories regulate emotion and help in defining one’s identity.

It is reliant on autobiographical conscience and “which emerges by the end of the preschool years” (Fivush and Graci). It is formed within societal interactions in which developing skills serve as the foundation for the formation of coherent stories related to self, and a narrative that emerges in adolescence: I am the way that I am because of the people and plays that took part in raising me.

**Spatial memory** is used to return to locations: home, foraging sites, etc. Landmarks, distances, directions and other cues form the basis of this kind of memory. It is critical for survival: Where I am now is 88 miles away from where I was.

**Episodic memory** refers to the memory of a personal experience that contains information regarding what and where the memory happened. It is subjective, relating to the personal experience of the person remembering. Because memories are not stored as perfect

records, retrieving episodic memories—as well as autobiographical memories—is reconstructive. New information that wasn't present in the memory when it was initially created can be added to the memory during the process of remembering. Where I am and where I was both feel like home; but one, I won't return to.

## **II. Implicit Memory Types**

Implicit memories are those remembered unconsciously and are expressed through our behavior.

**Procedural memory** involves recollections to which a person has no direct conscious awareness that can only be demonstrated indirectly through motor activities, like riding a bicycle. Procedural memory is responsible for knowing how to complete tasks. When I wake up in the morning I have a routine: I brush my teeth, wash my face, get dressed.

**Perceptual memory** addresses visual, auditory, and other perceptual information. Faces, voices, the appearances of buildings, melodies, flavors, etc., are all stored by perceptual memory. It differs from semantic memory because it is not encoded in words. It regards the manner in which we perceive the noises, people, places, and faces we encounter: anyone could forget my mother's face, but hers has been branded into my mind, warm, kind, unforgettable. Because of the nature of its functionality, memory is associated with the past. The places we were, the people we've loved, the things we've seen and done. In essence, memory is evoked in the present, references the past, and anticipates the future. It is called upon to frame our minds, behaviors, and actions in a manner that befits the present.

### **III. Memorializing Memory within the Context of Today**

Memories can be interpreted through the lenses of the individual and collective; the social groups that we belong to influence the memories that we retain and the perspectives that we take on the various events and issues of today.

Collective memories are what hold influence over the perspectives of the masses regarding events—the Vietnam War and 9/11, for example—as well as periods in time, such as the Reconstruction Era and the Great Depression. To understand collective memory is to understand its outlook and experience of the world—the collective’s identity at its core. These memories are internalized into our cultures and societies through a variety of mediums, including memorials, which hold a powerful hold on the collective’s perspective on and interaction with the past.

Through implementing memorials, societies are able to maintain collective memory. The Vietnam memorial in Washington D.C. depicts a large divide in the earth, creating “an initial violence and pain that in time would heal” Biography. The memorial encourages collective memory through the manner in which the design evokes the devastation created by the war, as well as the 58,000 names engraved into the stone walls of the memorials of those—both soldier and civilian—that died. The 9/11 memorial lies on the land on which the twin towers stood. Waterfalls flow along the sides, acting as a border for the deep void centered in it, evoking a sense of loss and remembrance through the thousands of names that are engraved into its stone. Monuments influence the tone in which we recall the past. Take WWII for example, and the bombing of Hiroshima. The bombing is perceived by both younger and older generations to be a critical event in the war. However, those who were alive during the war and those who were not rate it differently. Older adults rated it positively—it ended the war, and spared American lives. Young adults, however, rated it negatively—it killed and injured thousands of civilians despite the

fact that the war was already coming to a stalemate (Roediger and DeSoto). This contrast in perspective demonstrates the fact that collective memories are subject to change over the course of generations; that the individual has the power to change the collective.

Through implementing memorials, we, as a collective, are able to maintain collective memory and the tone with which we recall the past. Take the Spanish missions of California, for example. Students in California often spend the end of their elementary education learning about California missions, learning about their history and their role in the state's early history as a colony. They learn about the influences of Catholicism, the caste system, and maintenance of the missions, but are withheld the knowledge of the brutality endured by Natives, and the genocide enacted by colonizers. The retrieval of memory has to be active for change to occur—an active understanding that the United States resides on stolen land and the Land Back Movement that responds to this.

Relative to explicit memory, and more specifically, episodic memory, collective memory is subjective to the collective and the individuals within it. Collective remembering is reconstructive and changes over the course of generations. Each one introduces a new sense of change through the retrieval of information and recollection of history. This change has allowed for a greater sense of awareness over the struggle of people and events that have faced erasure.

Monuments play a significant role in maintaining collective memory. The manner in which the collective chooses to remember the past has a significant impact on the status of a movement. The way that we, as collectives, choose to remember the past influences the manner in which monuments are used to remember. Memory is vital to how we maintain our connection to the past and intention with the future.



#### **IV. The Power of Memory and Memorialization**

Monuments push collectives to remember people or events of value. The memorialization of memory through monuments allows us to face history, which prevents us from being at risk of repeating it. We can use the power of memory and the change that happens as we recall the past to amend the present and change the future. Through memory, we can use monuments to memorialize the past in an attempt to uplift our most vulnerable populations.

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