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The Nanjing Massacre Memorial and Angelus Novus: Ephemera, Trauma, and Reparation in Contemporary Chinese Public Art

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Abstract. What is the nature of memorials? Traditionally, memorials have been conceptualized as lasting entities preserving memories of our shared pasts. This paper challenges this view. My aim is to retheorize our practices of memorialization by examining the role that ephemerality plays in experiential memorials. Rather than fixed structures of meaning, experiential memorials are unstable careers whose significance depends on viewers' performative engagement. I provide evidence for my thesis by developing a critical interpretation of Qi Kang's *Nanjing Massacre Memorial Hall* (NMMH) as an example of experiential memorial. The fragmented nature of the here and now frees visitors' experiences. Like the wind propelling Benjamin's Angelus Novus into future and progress, the ephemerality of NMMH's experience unchains its significance from the constriction of dominant narratives of vengeance and resentment. If liberated temporally, the experience of memorials may help us not only to never forget, but also to find reconciliation.

Keywords: Public art, Memory, Monument, Trauma, Reparation.

INTRODUCTION

In a famous article, Arthur Danto wrote that we «build memorials so that we shall never forget» (Danto [1998]: 153). Memorials in effect play a special role in shaping and reshaping our collective memories and histories. If monuments celebrate triumphs and heroes, memorials often pay a tribute to those who have fallen under tragic circumstances. «The memorial is a special precinct, extruded from life, a segregated enclave where we honor the [defeated] dead» (Danto [1998]: 153). A place of remembering, memorials are somber respites from daily concerns where we contemplate sacrifices, wounds, and tragedies influencing our identities as a nation or a community.

For Danto, memorials and ephemera appear to be irreconcilable entities. As artifacts designed to prevent stories from fading

away, memorials need to be durable: their structures and messages must be able to survive the passing of time to serve as beacons of the past. On the contrary, ephemera such as flyers, menus, and postcards are short-lived entities. They are not intended or expected to outlast the *here and now*. If there is a connection between memorials and ephemera, it seems merely one of the opposing variety.

However, such an understanding of ephemerality and memorialization overlooks the temporal possibilities unleashed by experiential memorials. This variety of memorials emphasizes viewers' engagement as a key moment of meaning-making. Through the performative interaction between structural elements and visitors, experiential memorials acquire an unstable significance, which is constantly re-described in response to the evolving historical and contextual circumstances of reception. Rather than fixed structures of meaning, experiential memorials are unstable careers – an assembly of snapshots, if you wish – whose overall significance importantly depends on viewers' performative engagement. Seen under this light, there is a closer connection between ephemera and memorials that one could anticipate.

My main objective in this paper is then to re-theorize practices of memorialization and the role of ephemerality in them. I argue that experiential memorials are better understood as (collections of) ephemera. I provide evidence for my thesis by developing a critical interpretation of a Chinese example of experiential memorial: Qi Kang's *Nanjing Massacre Memorial Hall* (NMMH). The fragmented nature of the *here and now* frees visitors' experiences. Like the wind propelling Benjamin's *Angelus Novus* into the future and progress, the ephemerality of NMMH's experience unchains its significance from the constriction of dominant narratives of vengeance and resentment. This in turn opens up possibilities for healing from the social trauma that the 1937 massacre inflicted upon the Chinese, while remodeling memories of the Japanese invasion. These possibilities are *inclusive*, and may help Chinese and Japanese people

reimagine new ways of «being-together» (Nancy [2000]). If liberated temporally, the experience of memorials may help us not only to never forget, as Danto points out, but also to find reconciliation, forgiveness, and mutual regard. In the following section, I offer a vivid description of NMMH, providing historical details of the context of its construction, which are relevant to this discussion. Then, I argue that NMMH – as well as other experiential memorials – is a collection of ephemera. In developing my argument, I also show how the ephemeral nature of NMMH promotes healing. Finally, the paper addresses issues of reconciliation and reparation in Sino-Japanese relationship.

2. CELEBRATING THE DEAD: THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE NANJING MASSACRE MEMORIAL HALL

In August 1985, Chinese authorities inaugurated NMMH¹. Designed by Qi Kang, a Nanjing-based architect, NMMH is dedicated to the memory of the victims who suffered and died during the Japanese occupation of Nanjing. For six weeks from 13 December 1937, Japanese militaries inflicted terrible violence and destruction on Chinese civilians. At least 20,000 women were raped and between 200,000 and 300,000 people were murdered (Pritchard, Zaide [1981]: 49604–05).

The construction of NMMH decades after those tragic events was a response to two interrelated factors. First, China's rapid economic, social, and cultural transformation was challenging its identity (Qian [2008]; Denton [2014]). Remembering the tragedies that the Chinese people suffered by the hand of the Japanese – a discourse labelled as «never forgetting National humiliation» (*wu wang guochi* 勿忘國耻) – offered a powerful narrative fostering identity-bonding (Callahan [2004]). Second, the 1980s saw the rise of Japanese negationism. This culminated in an infamous epi-

¹ On the Memorial's website, the Chinese name is translated as «The Memorial Hall of the Victims in Nanjing Massacre by Japanese Invaders» (<http://www.nj1937.org>).

sode: in 1982, the Japanese Ministry of Education started to control how history textbooks depicted Japan's role in WWII. Its aim was to downplay Japan's occupation of parts of Asia during the war, including China (Qian [2008]; Yoshida [2006]; Yoshida [2000]). In this sense, desires of renewing Chinese national identity and counteracting Japanese negationism are at the root of the construction of NMMH.

NMMH has been built on the site of a mass graveyard located in area of *Jiangdongmen* (江东门), a suburb west of Nanjing. According to records, *Jiangdongmen* was one of the 13 sites where most Chinese civilians were murdered and buried (Qian [2008]: 23). Authorities organized intensive research to pinpoint the position of this mass graveyard whose exact position had faded from collective memory (Zhu [2002]). Soon after the discovery of the burial site in *Jiangdongmen*, the construction of NMMH started.

NMMH's 1985 original structure included an exhibition hall and sheltered «graveyard grounds» encapsulated in church-like architectonic structures. It underwent significant modifications during the last two decades. In 1995, a new L-shaped entranceway and several impressive sculptures were added. For commemorating the 70th anniversary of the massacre in 2007, a new exhibition hall, a grand new entryway, and a peace garden also became part of the construction (Kingston [2008]).

The complex and articulated design is crucial for understanding the identity of NMMH as an experiential memorial, and its possibilities in renegotiating trauma and promoting inclusive alternatives of being together. In the remainder of this section, I offer a close description of NMMH². In the following section, I then use this vivid account to explain why NMMH is experiential and ephemeral. Thanks to the temporariness of its evolving interpretations, as we shall see, in spite of the circumstances of resentment and growing nationalism within which it was envisioned and

built, NMMH offers us an effective way to forgive and reconcile.

Visitors' engagement with this memorial begins even before entering its gate. Along one of the exterior walls of the exhibition hall, we encounter statues representing scenes from the horrors of those terrible days in Nanjing. A towering figure of a crying mother holding her dying baby makes clear who are those here memorialized: they are the innocents, children, women, elderly, and helpless civilians, who lost their lives in a war that they were not supposed to be fighting.

Walking along the L-shaped entrance, we reach the entrance of NMMH. The gateway to this place of memory is a monumental stone. Dark in color and with low reliefs depicting scenes from those tragic days, it is cracked in the middle. Such a crack allows visitors to walk through it, suggesting a feeling as if one is passing through a small hole in a graveyard. Through this opening, we enter the emotional space that Qi Kang wanted to create with his memorial (Denton [2014]: 144).

The «Memorial Square» then opens. The main element, opposite to the entrance, is a gray stone wall, carved with the name of NMMH and the number 300,000, the estimate of victims. At its sides, we find one of the most impressive sections of the memorial: «Disaster in the Ancient City». A head is lying on the ground, severed from the victim's body that stays half-buried in the sand. It has been cut by a Japanese knife, whose menacing silhouette can still be seen looming over the dead body. Behind, a wall that looks ancient carries the marks of a battle: holes and cracks from bullets and bombs.

Turning to their right, visitors can access the exhibition hall, which includes several documents, including photographs and testimonies, speaking of the tragedies of those days. To enter this building, one needs to go down several stairs, an action which reinforces the feeling of figuratively stepping into a grave (Denton [2014], Qi [1999]). Amongst the many artifacts from the war, explanations of what happened, and the reconstructions of tragic moments of the massacre, one can find a moving installation placed towards the end of the

² The description here presented follows from recurrent visits to NMMH between 2014 and 2018.

exhibition: a pool where every 12 seconds a drop of water falls. This is a symbolically powerful way to represent the Japanese killing spree: 1 victim every 12 seconds.

NMMH's structure continues to unfold through an interesting path, which seems often neglected by visitors³. This path can be accessed through the «Bridge of History», which cuts across the wall of the «Disaster in the Ancient City». The bridge takes us to a courtyard where we find sculptural group called *The Footprints of Witnesses to History*. It includes casts in bronze of the footprints of 222 survivors of the massacre and a few representational sculptures depicting dramatic scenes from the days of the Japanese invasion.

This path takes us through a heterogenous array of spaces and hallways. We walk through gardens whose walls are engraved with bas-reliefs telling stories of the massacre. We pass by the «Remembrance Wall», which carries 10,615 names of victims. Progressing through this path, we encounter the sheltered graveyards, an emotionally moving experience that leaves many in tears⁴. Before the exit, we walk through three other significant places. The «Sacrificial Square» is a small opening right next to the main path. With a minimalistic design and muted grey palette, it hosts an eternal flame that burns to celebrate the memory of the Nanjing massacre's victims. The «Meditation Hall» hosts a shallow pool and candle lights, which are the only illumination in this suggestive space. When we open through the exit door of this last hall, the «Peace Garden» welcomes us. A luminous space thanks to its uncovered ceiling, it engenders in visitors a feeling of openness, which is enhanced by its steer contrast with the atmosphere of the «Meditation Hall».

³ Guided tours of NMMH seem to focus primarily on visiting the exhibition hall. In the three guided tours that I have joined during the years, I was always showed just the exhibition hall. Through the years, I have also gathered further evidence that most visitors quickly pass through the outside path of NMMH.

⁴ In my repeated visits to NMMH, many of my companions, both Chinese and foreigners, broke into tears while visiting the sheltered graveyards.

Walking through the garden's entrance door, a 30m sculpture in neoclassical style becomes the visual focus of one's attention. It carries the word, both in Chinese and English, «PEACE» (*heping* 和平). This place, whose profound symbolism I will discuss more specifically in section 5, powerfully embodies the healing aim of NMMH and its possibilities of reparation: it shows us a tomorrow where conflicts have been set aside. In the following section, by drawing on the description here offered, I argue that NMMH, and experiential memorials more generally, are collections of ephemera.

3. NMMH, EXPERIENTIAL MEMORIALS, AND EPHEMERA

The complex structure of NMMH, which unfolds through a long path traversing a heterogenous arrangement of spaces and artefacts, engages visitors in ways that importantly differ from how viewers respond to more traditional memorials. Consider for example the *Lincoln Memorial* in Washington DC or the *Tomb of the Unknown Soldier* («Altare della Patria») in Rome. Visitors generally approach these memorials with a contemplative attitude. They look at those artifacts from afar, examining their forms, shapes, and all those details that constitute their structure. For their monumental scale and imposing nature, memorials of that kind (intend to) put visitors at a distance. Set outside our daily experience, traditional memorials ask viewers to bracket their daily concerns, desires, and states of mind, and tell them something about (a version of) the past.

Rather than encouraging contemplative attitude, experiential memorials such as NMMH promote participatory engagement. Maya Lin's conception of the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* lays the foundation of this renewed conception of visitors' involvement (Blair et al. [1991]). In the 1-page essay accompanying her successful submission to the contest for selecting the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial's* design, Lin describes the experiential nature of her memorial as follows:

Walking through this park-like area, the memorial appears as a rift in the earth, a long, polished, black stone wall, emerging from and receding into the earth. [...] The memorial is composed not as an unchanging monument, but as a moving composition to be understood as we move into and out of it. [...] The actual area is wide and shallow, allowing for a sense of privacy, and the sunlight from the memorial's southern exposure along with the grassy park surrounding and within its walls, contribute to the serenity of the area. Thus this memorial is for those who have died, and for us to remember them. (Lin [1991])

With these words, Lin rethinks the nature of memorials and of modern practices of memorialization.

Similarly to the experience of the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* described by Lin, we do not simply admire or contemplate NMMH, but live and walk through it: when we enter its gate, we have already left behind the sculptures at the entrance. Our journey from here is open ended, and can follow different directions. In other words, we engage NMMH actively, producing our experiences. We can descend the stairs of the exhibition hall, or walk toward the «Bridge of History» and, if we want to, then come back. While walking, we are immersed in the experience of NMMH, actively responding to cross-modal perceptual stimuli. When we reach the «Peace Garden», for instance, we smell the flowers, feel the breeze blowing on our faces, the warmth of the sun, or the grass under our feet, and hear other visitors' steps and words. In this temporally unfolding embodied experience, we come to notice the statues, the writings, and all those elements that tell us something about the Nanjing massacre. Such experiences are not separate from our daily lives: they are included within them. We do not engage NMMH from afar, in a contemplative attitude, but from within in a participatory sense, and by living through it we produce its meaning(s).

The complex structure of NMMH elicits participatory engagement in visitors giving rise to «a web of multiple performances» (Blair, Michel [2000]: 40), which become a constitutive moment in the creation of the experiential memorial itself.

Experiential memorials, in effect, are more than the material objects that constitute them. They require the perceptual, emotional, and experiential involvement of viewers not only to activate their possibilities of meaning-making, but also to exist as the things that they are. This peculiar variety of memorials shifts the focus from being a carrier of a specific historical narrative to being a catalyzer of viewers' engagement.

NMMH's performative nature is crucial for understanding the relationship between experiential memorial and ephemera. Performances are ephemera at least for the two following reasons. First, just like any other kinds of ephemera, performances are ontologically vanishing events. They do not persist through time and are meant to disappear. In effect, performances are necessarily executed at specific spatial-temporal coordinates. Though one can re-enact a performance that is similar to one that occurred at another moment or somewhere else, it is impossible to recreate the same performance. As events unfolding through the spatial-temporal continuum, the conclusion of a performance causes its metaphysical disappearance. Their being «antithetical to saving» (Clarke, Warren [2009]: 47), and difficult to be archived and recorded, makes performances ephemera.

Second, ephemera are not designed to objectively present a story. In effect, an ephemera is an entity (or event) «no one expected it to give social information or even to survive its career as messenger of» (Barlow [2008]: 150) a positivistic historical narrative. Performances are also incapable of objectively transmitting a pre-established history. In effect, a performance's significance essentially depends on the material conditions and context(s) of its enactment (Case [2005]; Alderman, Dwyer [2009]). Its meaning then is undeterminable before its occurrence, and cannot be fixed in advance. In this sense, a performance «ruptures and rattles and revises history; it challenges the easy composure of history under the sign of objectivity. It discomposes history as myth, making of it as a scene awaiting intervention by the performing subject» (Pollock [1998]: 27). Performances are then ephemera since, rather than whole represen-

tations of historical objectivity, they exist as fragments of the *here and now* constantly asking their audience to rewrite their significance and, therefore, that of the past.

Looking at performances as ephemera allows us to re-conceptualize experiential memorials and to better understand the possibilities of contemporary practices of memorialization. Since experiential memorials and their significance are constituted by webs of performances, these artefacts are in a pertinent sense collections of ephemera. This interestingly connects my view with Deleuze's and Guattari's conceptualization of the memorial, which they considered as «a bloc of present sensations that owe their preservation only to themselves» (Deleuze and Guattari [1994]: 168). They also believe that memorials are more than material objects.

Rather than a mere structure of design, NMMH is then better appreciated as a sequence of visitors' unique fleeting experiences. Those are similar to an assemblage of snapshots. Its ephemeral nature has important consequences in terms of NMMH's meaning and significance. Incapable of conveying a pre-established objective historical narrative, it opens the door to multiple interpretations and re-interpretations of the tragic events that are there memorialized. This in turn, as we shall see in the following section, is crucial for unleashing NMMH's potentials of trauma-healing.

4. EPHEMERALITY AND TRAUMA HEALING

In this section, I am interested in connecting the ephemerality of experiential memorials with trauma. In particular, I want to show how temporariness of memorialization can favor healing. To do so, it is crucial to unpack the intimate relationship between trauma and temporality. My approach aims at capturing the complexities of trauma at a global level, thus looking also at insights originating in contexts outside the West, where the concept originated (Barlow and Hammer [2008]). This in turn can also highlight how public art may very well function in the Chinese context.

In her comparative analysis of Freud's and Kant's respective answers to «questions of time, reason, unreason, and accident» (Morris [2008]: 232), Rosalind Morris points out that a dissolution of one's perception of time is a recurring feature in subjects experiencing trauma. «Freud himself was concerned to understand trauma as precisely such a disturbance of time and of causal sequentiality» (Morris [2008]: 235). According to her analysis, Freud saw trauma as accident, that is, as an experience of an event so incapacitating to one's mind that the subject cannot place it in the causal chain connecting past, present, and future events. «To put it very simply, accident/trauma is the experience of the occurrence as having no reason (to have occurred)» (Morris [2008]: 236). As an explicable event, one might say, trauma lays outside of linear temporality.

In the report of a performance given at an academic conference, Ly (2008) provides readers with a vivid and touching account casting light on the abnormality of trauma's temporality. Of Cambodian origin, Ly is a survivor of Khmer Rouge's violence, and describes his experience as follow: «trauma is forever a painful feeling, [it] is a form of obdurate history waiting to be articulated and written about, but it refuses to be written about in the past tense without the unpredictable – and persistent – intervention of the present tense» (Ly [2008]: 109).

Once experienced, trauma refuses to stay in the past, resisting categorization as a memory or a «finished product» (Ly [2008]: 110). It «resurfaces unexpectedly [as part of the present] surprisingly evoked by body language, images, words, sounds, and silence; trauma always continues to haunt us» (Ly [2008]: 109–110).

Ly's accounts echoes those given by persons who underwent similarly inexplicable moments of terrible violence (Chambers [2004]). When describing that breach of the temporal unfolding afflicting violated subjects, he talks about the «persistent temporality of trauma» (Ly [2008]: 109). Trauma condemns those who suffer from it to a Sisyphean condition of inescapable repetitiveness, where tragedy is never fully experienced as

an event from the past and keeps reemerging in a loop as a present psychological experience. One is stuck in the time of trauma. By using an effective analogy, Wendy O'Brien describes this Sisyphean condition as follows: «The [traumatic] moment(s) is repeated over and over again, like a record with a scratch or a CD that skips playing the same lyrics over and over again» (O'Brien [2007]: 213). For trauma survivors, time is not anymore a linear sequence of events and actions: they spin in circles.

The ephemerality of experiential memorials, I believe, provides us with resources for rebuilding a linear sense of temporality: it can help us place traumatic events where they belong as memories from the past. This is an important step in healing from trauma both individually and collectively. This shows us the value of ephemerality in practices of memorialization. Such a value has been largely ignored and even opposed in traditional forms of memorialization, which have favored fixity and durability as their guiding concepts (LaCapra [2001]).

In order to understand how ephemerality can heal trauma's temporal breach, let me introduce Benjamin's thoughts on historical materialism. In his philosophy of history, the German philosopher defends a «commitment to experiencing the past in current times, tracing the past's pulse in the present» (Souto [2011]: 105). Benjamin describes this dynamic relationship with the past as follows: «This state of unrest refers to the demand on the researcher to abandon the tranquil contemplative attitude toward the object in order to become conscious of the critical constellation in which precisely this fragment of the past finds itself in precisely this present» (Benjamin [1975]: 28). Our relationship with history, in this sense, need not be purely passive or contemplative, but when seen «dialectically» (Benjamin [1999]: 462–463), it can also be productive and (re)-interpretative.

Thanks to its ephemeral dimension, NMMH – as well as other experiential memorials – is a tool facilitating the emergence of this type of productive re-interpretation of the past. In their vanishing, transitory, and ontologically unstable performative engagement with NMMH, visitors

experience tragic events of the Second Sino-Japanese War seen from the peculiar position that they occupy in their present. They do *not* relieve that trauma, but rather see it as a memory from the past. For those who walk through the path along which the various elements of the outdoor exhibition are arranged, it arises a clear sense that NMMH does not aim «to instruct by means of historical descriptions or to educate through comparisons, but to cognize by immersing itself in the object» (Benjamin [1996]: 293).

Like Benjamin's *Angelus Novus*, NMMH's visitors look at the past while being «irresistibly propelled into the future» (Lewis [2007]: 32) by their performative thus ephemeral engagement with Kang's experiential design. «The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise [...]. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future. (Benjamin [1973]: 257–258). Though trauma freezes the flow of temporality, producing its typical Sisyphean condition, the fragmented nature of the *here and now* – like the sun of spring after a long winter – melts that icy cage liberating the temporal stream. The loop within which trauma entraps its victims is then interrupted: temporality is restored and the possibility of both collective and individual healing arises.

The reflections of Chinese college student Yu Zhuang well reveal the interpretative productivity of the ephemerality that characterizes NMMH's performative experience. As described in an email she sent me in March 2016, Yu visited the memorial with a group of Japanese friends. Rather than experiencing a reiteration of trauma, she reinterpreted not only NMMH but also the Nanjing massacre and its significance in the light of her present experience, which included – of course – the presence of Japanese friends. Troubled by the possibility that they, who have «nothing to do with the war», could feel object of hatred while walking through NMMH, she asked me: «Should we look at the historical facts like the wall of names first, instead of [the] sculpture?». Her words show that visiting the memorial allowed her to engage productively with that past. By reinterpreting it – and

the meaning of NMMH – from the perspective of her present, she dissolved the dominant narrative of hatred and revenge.

By encouraging visitors such as Yu and her Japanese friends to engage dialectically with the traumatic past, NMMH offers a «thinking place» in the sense intended by Ulrich Eckhardt and Andreas Nachama (2005). While analyzing the shaping of regional identities in post-World War II Germany, they describe thinking places as sites where one can «sharpen consciousness and memory» (Eckhardt and Andreas Nachama [2005]: 59). And as research in psychology shows, these environments allow visitors «to see, touch, remember, deal with, and master a loss» (Watkins et al. [2010]: 368) thus helping recovery from trauma.

For instance, in the Meditation Hall's silent darkness, gently interrupted by the tenuous and warm light of candle-like lamps, the visitor can take a moment to re-think about that tragic time: a place where the dead and the living meet, here one can «dig» (Benjamin [1986]: 26) through those memories evoked by the bodily engagement with Qi Kang's design. This room – like many others places along the footpath crossing the outdoor exhibition – then «offers a quiet and somber space for spectators to ponder the horror of the massacre and the suffering of its victims, as well as the meaning of this horror and suffering to the present» (Denton [2014]: 147).

During their embodied and lived experience of walking through the path traversing NMMH, moreover, visitors can reflect on what they have seen in the others sections, namely the exhibition hall and the graveyard grounds. In this sense, the participatory and ephemeral experience of the outdoor exhibition promotes a critical and dialectical engagement also with the historical information presented in the other sections. This way of approaching the massacre in turn destabilizes the positivist historical narrative that those other parts convey, that is, the lesson that they want to instruct. And, at the same time, such an experience counteracts the response of shock that exposure to the horrific material included in the exhibition hall may engender in viewers.

This remark about the relationship between the experience of the outdoor exhibition and one's response to the exhibition hall and the graveyard grounds draws from an insight by Danto. In discussing the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial*, Danto examines Frederic Hart's realistic sculptures. A later addition to Lin's original design, the sculptures represent in a figurative style three soldiers of different racial types: «As a piece of freestanding sculpture, it is intrinsically banal» (Danto [1998]: 155). However, Danto adds, its link with Lin's wall, which the figures look at from afar, imbues Hart's work with a deeper and new significance. «By a miracle of placement, Hart's shallow work has acquired a dignity and even a certain power» (Danto 1998: 156).

In a similar way, thanks to their relationship – both spatial and phenomenological – with the outdoor exhibition, the exhibition hall and the graveyard ground enter in a critical dialogue with the viewers and their singular perspectives. The significance of those more traditional parts is then reshaped during the experiential journey bringing visitors to the end: the Peace Garden. Kingston (2008) wrongly dismisses it as a «jarring juxtaposition to the violence and mayhem featured inside, an unconvincing accessory that fails to persuade». Of course, the tripartite structure of Qi Kang's memorial carries unresolved tension and ambiguities – the contrary would be odd considering the events here memorialized. However, the calmness of this open space – whose features strongly contrast with the Meditation Hall that precedes it – provides viewers with the opportunity to re-think the atrocities of the Second Sino-Japanese War while imaging new ways of being-together. And, once again, the dialectical engagement that Yu had with NMMH and its story shows the productive possibilities of reflection that this experiential memorial unleash. In the following section, I take up this issue of how NMMH can promote reparation by helping visitors imagine a new community where victims and wrongdoers can finally stand side-by-side in peace.

5. "WALKING TOGETHER" AND RE-BUILDING COMMUNITIES

In her research on mass trauma following from violent events, Gobodo-Madikizela (2015) stresses the importance of reparation in processes of trauma healing. A possibility to reconnect with perpetrators or enemies seems crucial «to confront and heal a past characterized by moral corruption and widespread violations of human rights» (Gobodo-Madikizela [2015]: 1111). In effect, recognizing the humanity of perpetrators – as well as the suffering of victims – appears as a necessary step in working through trauma. Cynthia Ngewu, whose son was killed during the apartheid in South Africa, explains the significance of reparation as follows: «This thing called reconciliation – if I am understanding it correctly – if it means that this man who killed Christopher has a chance to become human again, so that I, so that all of us... so that our humanity can be restored, then I agree with it. I support it» (Gobodo-Madikizela [2015]: 1113).

The experience of NMMH, I wish to suggest, does not only help us counteract the abnormal temporality of trauma, but can also foster reparation by suggesting new ways of «being-together» (Nancy [2000]). As Nancy (2000) convincingly argues, an original community is metaphysically impossible. In this sense, human tendencies or desires to treat community or being-together as a natural fact appears as philosophically groundless – and historically dangerous. Acknowledging the non-primordial nature of communities also opens up a possibility to regard them as contingent modes of aggregation, interpersonal bonds that are created in the *here and now*. This in turn allows us to see communities as something that we can shape and reshape, even in the aftermath of traumatic events. And, NMMH can help us imagine a community that is inclusive.

The key to unleash NMMH's reparative potential is the ephemerality of its experiential nature: this power of reparation lays, more precisely, in the temporally-bound performative action of walking through the footpath traversing Qi

Kang's design. In effect, walking, or, more precisely, «walking together [is] a paradigm of social phenomena in general» (Gilbert [1990]: 1). Going for a walk with someone brings into existence a plural subject: a «we». Plural subjects are ties by means of which «individual wills are bound *simultaneously and interdependently*» (Gilbert (1990): 7). This type of ties, Gilbert maintains, are the very foundation of collective and communal life.

Gilbert's philosophical thesis about the intimate relationship between walking together and the construction of our social world finds support in recent neuroscientific research. For instance, results of fMRI experiments reveal that «listening to two persons walking together activated brain areas previously associated with affective states and social interaction» (Saarela and Hari [2008]: 401). The stimulation of these areas seems to reflect «the difference between the human perception of groups and single persons, and their impact on the behavior of an individual» (Saarela and Hari [2008]: 409).

Other researches in cultural geography and health sciences also underline the link between psychological well-being, social life, trauma, and walking together: «the shared walk can be generative of a supportive sociality that is embodied through movement and that this can result in a particular mobile therapeutic practice, which is produced and experienced intersubjectively» (Doughty [2013]: 143). Thus, from walking together, new forms of sociality can emerge. This process can produce alternative «social imaginaries» (Dawney [2011]: 542), that is, views about our shared world and how we inhabit it *together*.

But, who are we walking with when traversing NMMH? The structure of the design give rise to a multilayered, polyphonic, and symbolically rich intersubjective dimension, opening up a wide range of possibilities of metaphorical and metonymical encounter – an aspect that has been virtually ignored by previous analyses. First, visitors are sharing their experience literally with other visitors, who may be strangers or familiar individuals. Ideally, one can meet people of any ethnicity and background. In walking together, one

can surely meet individuals of Japanese heritage (if one is not already walking together with them, as it happened to Yu): dialogue – even in an incipient or fragmentary fashion – can surely start. We can begin to see others as members of a larger community. Through the bodily and lived engagement with those walking together, one can envision inclusive social imaginaries. As fleeting and ephemeral as these interactions might be, they still imply an openness to otherness and a transcendence of substantive and exclusive conceptions of social grouping.

Second, metaphorically, visitors walk together with both the survivors and the perpetrators, whose presence is symbolically evoked by important elements of NMMH. The sculptural group entitled *The Footprints of Witnesses to History* is crucial in this respect. As already mentioned, this artwork consists of 222 survivors' bronze footprints. It is placed after the Bridge of History, which connects the L-shaped entranceway with the other elements of the outdoor exhibitions leading to the Peace Garden. Thanks to its forms, representational content, and placement, it unequivocally brings to mind the presence of those who endured the terrible suffering of 1937 during one's walk through NMMH: it makes their presence palpable, if only imaginatively.

The spirit of these individuals whose footprints we see impressed on the soil accompanies us in our journey through Qi Kang's design. Their meaningful company, imagined but deeply felt, is a powerful reminder not only of the atrocities perpetrated by the Japanese army on Chinese civilians, but also of the extraordinary courage and resilience of those who survived. They tell us that there is hope even after the darkest tragedies, that a future may come when we can forgive and something new can rise from the ashes of ruins.

Perpetrators also imaginatively join visitors' journey through the memorial and the reminiscences of the 1937 massacre. Their presence is revealed in many ways and instances. However, from the perspective of possible reparation, the most significant location where visitors find their presence is in the Peace Garden. Here, on the

opposite side where a monumental representation of a trumpeter breaking a Japanese sword with his foot stands, one can see the sculpture of a little girl holding a flower and, behind, the «Shikinsou Garden». As the plate next to the sculpture says, the construction of the garden has been sponsored through a fundraising organized by 83 years old Hiroshi Yamaguchi, son of Seitaro Yamaguchi. Seitaro was in Nanjing in 1939. Amidst the still visible destruction that the Japanese Army brought to the city, he was surprised to see Nanjing's Purple Mountain covered in purple flowers: the «February orchids» (Li [2007]). In the striking contrast between the beauty of those flowers and the desolation of the city landscape, Seitaro saw the brutality of the actions of his own kin. When going back to Japan, he brought with him a handful of seeds of those beautiful flowers. He planted those all over Japan renaming them the «flowers of peace» (Li [2007]).

While walking through the garden, one can also learn of other gestures of repentance and restitution by Japanese people. What the Kumamoto Japan-China Friendship Association has done is noteworthy. Many members of the Sixth Japanese Division, which played an active role in the Nanjing massacre nearly 80 years ago, were from this city. For the last twenty years, this association has regularly visited NMMH in order to express support for Chinese victims. Moreover, every December «members invite survivors of the massacre to speak at events in Japan» (Globaltimes.cn [2016]). As a visible trace of their efforts of repentance, the Association has been sponsoring planting of trees on a dedicated area of the Peace Garden – a practice that, just like planting flowers, adds a further layer to the ephemerality of NMMH.

In their bodily and lived experience of the memorial, visitors then interact with a complex array of presences, some of which are only symbolically suggested but nevertheless felt as real. Walking together exposes those who crosses NMMH to the non-linear history following the massacre in 1937. They can witness the gestures of repentance that Japanese individuals performed in asking for forgiveness: actions as simple and

humane as planting a flower or a tree. This in turn challenges official narratives that emphasizes an irreparable fracture dividing Japanese and Chinese people. Through the ephemeral medium of the experiential memorial, visitors become then part – if only for a moment – of an enlarged and more inclusive community bringing together survivors and perpetrators: in this coming community of human beings, hope in future is restored.

6. CONCLUSION

Traditional practices of memorialization in the West have seen ephemerality at odds with the need for remembering and mourning tragedy. In this paper, I have critically questioned the tacit assumptions that have oriented such a tradition. Ephemerality can play a crucial role in reimagining memorials. Experiential memorials rely upon the ephemeral nature of performative engagement to tell us stories of victims of human cruelty. In the fragmented nature of the *here and now*, visitors actively engage with the story they are told, reinterpreting it in the light of their evolving sensibilities. In this way, they challenge dominant positivistic historical narratives, placing those traumatic events into the past. In doing so, unlike conventional memorials, experiential memorials do not reinforce traumatic stress by forcing viewers to relive in a loop a past event. NMMH allows us to remember the tragedies of the Nanjing massacre and to pay tribute to the victims, while promoting a re-interpretation of those facts that can bring about healing and reconciliation. While walking through Qi Kang's design, we look at the past with our wings open to the future.⁵

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