

An analysis of different uses in symmetry, inclines, and reflective light to monumentalize the deaths of specific persons, groups, or deities

Throughout millennia, architects have used various forms of vernacular architecture to convey a range of meanings through their works. Since prehistoric times, people have used varying landscapes to show their appreciation for nature and the power it can have on influencing the viewpoints people have on their own lives. Over the course of time, many influential works of architecture throughout the globe have incorporated these core strategies into their structural designs. Death, and the formalized commemoration of it through physical landmarks, has traditionally been monumentalized from the synthesis of nature and mankind into a common space. Different eras throughout architectural history have used these core strategies to commemorate the death of a specific person, a group of people, or a deity through varying forms of symmetry, inclines, and reflective light. These formalized strategies can specifically be seen in the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Passages memorial in Spain, Passage graves in Ireland, and Queen Hatshepsut's funerary complex.

Maya Lin's *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* on the Mall in Washington, D.C. commemorates those Americans who have given their lives in the Vietnam War. The structure of this memorial emphasizes simplicity, with bold underlying statements. The memorial itself is quite simple in appearance. It is a black marble wall with a gray cobblestone walkway. However, the marble itself is quite shiny and reflective. The black marble gives a great reflection of the landscape surrounding the monument, and also gives an optical illusion that shows a form of symmetry with the landscape. It reflects the walkway and the grass areas in front of the monument, making the memorial look bigger than it actually is. Cut into the earth, the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* gives an impression that it is a natural part of the landscape. The two pathways entering and exiting the memorial are actually at a reverse incline rather than the traditional incline entrance into structures, as seen in the ancient and prehistoric practices. The aspect of walking down into the memorial gives a very somber atmosphere to the area. Instead of walking up an incline and feeling a sense of empowerment, it is the exact opposite. Rather, the impression it gives is walking into the ground, being hidden from the landscape instead of viewing the natural beauty it surroundings. It is as if you are being buried rather than resurrected. Both entrances into the memorial start at high ground and descend into the ground at the center of the pathway, as if one descends into the earth and rises again on another side of the memorial. This signifies a cleansing through the process and experience one goes through while 'sharing' the same experience as those lost in war. Though one can never fully experience the horrors of war without being a part of it, the process of descending and rising again on another side of the memorial tries to depict the change in a person's mental state of war and the sacrifices it comes with from those people involved.

In Portbau, Spain, Dani Karavan's *Passages—Homage to Walter Benjamin* commemorates the Jewish German philosopher and cultural critic Walter Benjamin, who committed suicide when denied entry to Spain as he fled the Nazis. Those who approach the memorial are immediately confronted with a mysterious box on the edge of the cliff. The metal used for this memorial looks oxidized and old, as if it were junk or scrap metal.

However, upon closer approach, the closed box opens up in vanishing point to a portal that takes viewers down the Cliffside where the top cover of this box opens to the sky. Upon descent down the cliff, a view of the ocean coast can be seen but cannot be reached. A glass wall within the memorial forms as a barrier that prevents any further procession to the coastline. The underlying meaning behind this structure conveys the idea that things desired and seen are physically there but may not be reached due to some barrier or obstacle. In this case, the coastline is the visual recognition of a desired destination, and the glass wall is the physical recognition of the obstacle to it. This could be the hidden meaning behind the story of Walter Benjamin. As the coastline is approached, the obstacle of the glass wall halts any further movement. Like Benjamin in his final moments, we can see the destination we long for, but will never reach. He saw the final destination, Spain, yet couldn't get into the country because the government (acting as the glass wall) would not allow him to enter.

In Newgrange, Ireland many different prehistoric monuments convey a relationship between religious rituals and the ceremony of death. In this region of Ireland, there are many famous prehistoric passage graves around the countryside. Passage graves are massive dolmens in which a passage leads from the tomb to the surrounding landscape. It only has a dedicated entrance and exit. As one enters a dolmen, they are guided by a long hallway with a straight, symmetrical pathway to a massive circular tomb in the center. Upon approach to the tomb, the pathway transitions to an inclined passageway. Illuminated with natural light coming through man-made windows and openings, this transitional passageway provides an interesting concept between the tomb and the pathway linked to it. These inclined pathways within dolmens help to display that each tomb and the resting place of its deceased are glorified through the use of illumination. Light shines through the man-made crevices, which give each tomb a warming atmosphere. The procession through these pathways to their tombs allow those who experience it to feel a spiritual upliftment upon their approach to the tomb, as they elevate above their natural surroundings of flat ground. This procession is different from that experienced in Maya Lin's piece, specifically since the pathway used in these dolmens are both inclined and lit. Inversely, Lin's pathway starts as a decline and then transitions to an incline back to the natural ground level of its surroundings. Contrasting from one another, the dolmen memorials of Newgrange can only accompany a small group of people whereas Lin's pathway and memorial can accompany large groups of people.

Finally, primary elements of all the previously mentioned designs and memorials can be seen in Egypt at the funerary complex of Queen Hatshepsut. This structure synthesized the forms of architecture, rhythm, and symmetry in one system. The integration of these ideas helped influence most modern-day principles of architecture through the basic design of this building. The complex has terraces that were originally designed for garden-like environments, cult staging, and feast days with a centralized temple entrance. Travel between the terraces of this complex was made possible through a pathway which was led by an inclined ramp. Hatshepsut's funerary complex was built into the cliff face of a mountain. Similarly, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial was built into its surrounding landscape. A recurring theme shown in all of these memorials emphasize the importance of being elevated to a memorialized focal point from their flat, surrounding landscape.

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September 5, 2013

In conclusion, the use of symmetry, inclines, and reflective light are the core strategies used in many influential works throughout millennia to monumentalize the death of specific people, groups, or deities. The strategy used to condition the leveled ground at each mentioned memorial was done so through the placement of ramp inclines or declines. In each mentioned case, a different procession strategy was incorporated that connected the ramps between the origin and destination of each memorial. However, the idea of having an inclined pathway that would bridge the gap between these two focal points shows that monuments like these share a recurring theme of elevation in the spiritual implications these structures aim to perceive.