

Spontaneous Memorials: Contemporary perspectives on their sociocultural, psychological and organisational impact

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Abstracts

Gretchen Abuso, Xavier University and University of the Philippines, The Philippines

Spontaneous Reminders of Disaster: The Case of Typhoon Washi in the Philippines

Abstract

On December 16, 2024, the city of Cagayan de Oro, Philippines, commemorated the 13th anniversary of Typhoon Sendong (international name Washi) by inaugurating a permanent interment site for the disaster's unidentified victims. This event, led by the local government, honoured the thousands who died on the night of December 16, 2011, when torrential floodwaters swept through the city. The floods, carrying debris such as tree logs, boulders, and mud, devastated everything in their path. The disaster claimed 1,268 lives, and over 300 victims remain missing to this day. These missing individuals were officially declared "laid to rest" during last year's anniversary.

Typhoon Sendong was the most destructive typhoon to hit the Philippines in 2011, erasing entire communities in Cagayan de Oro. In the wake of such a catastrophe, questions, such as the following, arise: How does a city devastated by such a tragedy memorialise its victims? How do families and communities honour the dead when there are no bodies to be buried?

This paper explores these questions by examining how the survivors and the city of Cagayan de Oro have commemorated the Sendong disaster. Drawing on survivors' accounts and sociological analyses of the typhoon's visual evidence, the paper investigates the spontaneous commemorations and temporary memorials created in the immediate aftermath of the typhoon. The paper begins by documenting the emergence of these spontaneous memorials, which served as initial sites of collective mourning and remembrance. It then examines how these memorials have evolved and endured over the 13 years since the tragedy. Specifically, it evaluates the role these memorials have played in shaping the collective memory of the disaster among Cagayan de Oro's residents. Finally, the paper considers how survivors and communities continue to engage with these memorials, shedding light on their ongoing significance for the city and its residents.

Biography

Gretchen Abuso teaches at the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Xavier University in the Philippines and is currently writing her dissertation for the degree PhD in Sociology at the University of the Philippines. Her work deals with how social remembering takes place in the Philippine context. She welcomes correspondence through mabusso@xu.edu.ph.

Kostas Arvanitis, Robert Simpson and Lesley Cheung, University of Manchester, UK

PLAN – CARE – HEAL: A conceptual and operational framework for collecting and managing spontaneous memorials

Abstract

This presentation introduces *PLAN-CARE-HEAL: A Conceptual and Operational Framework for Collecting and Managing Spontaneous Memorials*. Developed in discussion with cultural sector practitioners, this framework addresses the unique challenges of working with spontaneous memorials that emerge in the wake of mass violence, disasters, accidents, and other tragedies. These memorials, though temporary, are often collected by museums or other memory institutions. However, their unpredictability, deep emotional significance, and the urgency of documentation present challenges, including risks of secondary trauma for practitioners. PLAN-CARE-HEAL seeks to provide essential guidance, ensuring these memorials are appropriately preserved while supporting the wellbeing of those who handle them.

The framework comprises three key phases:

- **PLAN** (Preparedness Phase) refers to proactive preparedness, including developing strategies, policies, and support mechanisms while training for potential challenges. It emphasises networking with stakeholders and allocating resources to ensure readiness for collecting and documenting spontaneous memorials.
- **CARE** (Acute Phase) includes understanding the event's context, assessing organisational capacity, and prioritising the needs of practitioners and stakeholders. It requires implementing a sensitive and inclusive response plan while fostering engagement and transparent communication with affected communities.
- **HEAL** (Longer-term Management and Engagement Phase) outlines the institutional life of any collected/documented spontaneous memorials and their role in long-term societal and organisational recovery. It includes developing and adapting the collection's scope based on resources, needs and longer-term plans, and engaging stakeholders to maximise the collection's ongoing value and use.

The presentation will offer insights into the development and practical implementation of the framework, discuss its potential for international adaptation, and invite dialogue on the evolving role of cultural institutions in the management of spontaneous memorials.

Biographies

Dr Kostas Arvanitis is Senior Lecturer in Museology at Institute for Cultural Practices, University of Manchester. Since 2017 Kostas has been working with a range of individuals and organisations internationally in researching practices of collecting, documenting and digitising spontaneous memorials after accidents, disasters and mass violence events. Based on this work, Kostas has also led the formation of the International Network of Spontaneous Memorials, a community of practice and support network on collecting spontaneous memorials.

Lesley Cheung is a museum researcher and arts administrator in Manchester. As Research Assistant of the Museums and Spontaneous Memorials. A Museology of Trauma project under AHRC, she reviews academic and sector resources to inform the design of practical guidance and develops an evaluation framework for its impact. She presented on museum loans as a speculative and empathetic way of governing temporary spontaneous memorial collections for professional care and community healing at the ICOM UK Student and Emerging

Professionals Conference 2025. She graduated from the University of Manchester with an MA in Art Gallery and Museum Studies with Distinction.

Dr Robert Simpson is currently working as a Research Associate for the AHRC-funded Research, Development and Engagement Fellowship titled “Museums and Spontaneous Memorials. A Museology of Trauma”. Since 2019, his research has centred around spontaneous memorialisation and public responses to unexpected tragedy and disaster. His PhD thesis was interested in exploring notions of social solidarity and community resilience in the aftermath of terrorist attacks; how these notions are created and conveyed at spontaneous memorials; and how cultural heritage professionals negotiate the challenges of collecting, interpreting, and understanding memorial objects and their meanings and relevance in a post-memorial museum settings.

Sakshi Awasthi, Rooftop App – Where India Inspires Creativity, India

From Spontaneous Memorials to Collective Memory: Curatorial, Social, and Psychological Impacts of the Smritivan Earthquake Memorial in Kutch, Bhuj, Gujarat, India.

This paper explores the Smritivan Earthquake Memorial Museum, located in Kutch-Bhuj, Gujarat, India, as a unique case study that bridges the realms of spontaneous memorialization and institutionalized remembrance. Originally conceived as a spontaneous response to the devastating earthquake of 2001, the memorial represents a collective expression of grief, loss, and resilience. Over time, it has evolved into a formalized institution, tasked with preserving and curating these organic expressions of memory while fostering recovery and forward-looking community engagement.

The research seeks to foreground the ways in which the Smritivan Memorial has documented and preserved the ephemeral, time-based expressions of mourning and solidarity that emerged in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake. These spontaneous memorials—ranging from makeshift altars and inscriptions to anniversary commemorations—offer a poignant insight into how communities process collective trauma and grief. By examining the methods employed to collect, document, and incorporate these materials and narratives into the museum’s collection, the paper highlights the institution’s commitment to safeguarding the integrity of these expressions while adapting them for a contemporary visitor experience.

Through an analysis of the museum’s strategies, the paper investigates how Smritivan negotiates the balance between preserving these spontaneous, historically situated memorials and its mission to promote resilience and forward-thinking discourse among visitors. Special attention is given to how the museum incorporates elements of these spontaneous memorials in its exhibitions and programming, ensuring that they resonate not only as artifacts of the past but also as catalysts for dialogue on disaster preparedness, recovery, and community rebuilding.

The research further examines the psychological and social implications of these memorials, both in their original spontaneous contexts and as part of the museum’s curated experience. It delves into how the preservation of such memorials contributes to collective memory and healing, offering spaces for reflection while addressing the ethical challenges of institutionalizing grassroots expressions of grief. Additionally, the paper considers how anniversaries and commemorative events are integrated into the museum’s narrative framework, ensuring that these occasions honor the past while fostering a sense of progress and resilience.

Finally, this study reflects on the broader implications of the Smritivan Memorial as a model for best practices in the documentation and preservation of spontaneous memorials. It

underscores the need to balance remembrance with recovery, demonstrating how such institutions can support community rebuilding and resilience while ensuring the continued relevance of ephemeral expressions of memory. By focusing on the evolving role of the Smritivan Earthquake Memorial Museum, the paper contributes to ongoing discourses on memorialization, the preservation of collective memory, and the ethics of curating disaster-related narratives.

Biography

Sakshi Awasthi is an accomplished Museologist and art researcher with extensive experience in curating and preserving cultural heritage across India. Holding a Master's degree in Museum Studies from The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, where she excelled in the single seat, and a Bachelor's in Fine Arts from Amity University, she combines a strong academic foundation with hands-on expertise in promoting cultural heritage.

Currently, Sakshi serves as an Art Research Associate Team Lead at the Rooftop App – Where India Inspires Creativity. Dedicated to redefining perceptions of art, she conducts in-depth research on artists and movements. A passionate advocate for Indian art, she combines excellent research skills with creativity to enrich educational experiences while also working on art publications and curating exhibitions.

In previous roles, Sakshi researched traditional building crafts, curated engaging exhibitions, excelled in documentation and collection management, and developed programs linking the public to history and art. She coordinated design and skill enhancement projects and contributed to publications.

Her scholarly contributions include two publications, both included in all four National Libraries of India, showcasing expertise in the Cultural heritage field. Also, she had the opportunity to present a lecture based on her first published paper, titled "Museology and its Impact on Touristic Attraction and Economic Benefit," at the University of Cagliari in Sardinia, Italy. Her presentation explored the critical intersection between museums and tourism, further enriching her perspective on the role of cultural institutions in economic development.

Melissa Barthelemy, University of California, Santa Barbara, USA

We Remember Them: The Use of Artifacts from the May 23, 2014 Isla Vista Memorial Archive at the University of California, Santa Barbara

"Why would all of you want to go to the trouble of creating this memorial exhibit and collecting these objects?" That question was posed to me by the father of one of our student victims while taking a private tour of the remembrance exhibit that we created for the one-year memorial anniversary of the mass shooting rampage that happened at the edge of my university campus. On May 23, 2014 a disturbed 22- year-old male who was unaffiliated with the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB) went on a mass shooting rampage that took the lives of six students, and injured 14 others. I began a rapid response collection project that led to the formation of a condolence archive and eventually both physical and digital memorial exhibits. I knew the private tours of the exhibit with the families of the victims would be a highly emotional experience, but I wasn't prepared for this question. From his place of anger and hurt, in the wake of his daughter's death, these stuffed animals, cards, candles, and even the photographs and shoes of his daughter that were collected from the spontaneous memorial sites said very little about her. Who she was as a person, what she stood for, and how she should be remembered. Instead, he wanted to share in-depth stories with me about his daughter that were filled with love and pride. His sister and wife and sons had a very different reaction to the exhibit and were so thankful that we had created it and were moved to see items they had left at the spontaneous memorial were on display. In this moment I was struck by how different the individual reactions of families and friends are to grief archives

and memorial exhibits. I keep coming back to this question of “why do we collect?” and “who do we collect for?”

This presentation will focus on the emotional and scholarly value of spontaneous memorials and grief archives. The artifacts from spontaneous memorials, and photos and videos of people interacting with spontaneous memorials, played pivotal roles in our physical and online memorial exhibitions at the University of California, Santa Barbara. We also taught an upper division Public History class where undergraduate students learned about trauma, community healing, spontaneous memorials, and performed practicums where they helped process the artifacts into our memorial archive at the UCSB Library (Special Collections) and also helped create our memorial exhibition. They learned about careers in public history through this class and also in several other independent study courses where students worked on our project. One of the professors in the writing program for many years had students in her classes write their main paper on memorialization, and used the artifacts in our Memorial Archive as the basis for introducing them to the topic. Artifacts from spontaneous memorials continue to be important for our campus community’s long-term memorialization efforts and were featured this past May in an exhibition for the 10th year anniversary.

Biography

Melissa Barthelemy is a PhD Candidate in Public History at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Her dissertation focuses on community-driven memorial projects in the wake of mass shootings and other public tragedies. From 2014 to 2021 she served as the Project Manager for the May 23, 2014 Isla Vista Memorial Archive which she began in the wake of the mass shooting rampage that occurred adjacent to the UCSB campus and took the lives of six students, and injured 14 others. The archive housed within the UCSB Library Department of Special Research Collections contains artifacts from spontaneous memorials, digital images, and documents. She also curated a national awardwinning memorial exhibition and co-curated a digital version of the exhibit housed on Omeka. From 2014 to 2019 she worked in Student Affairs as a liaison between the parents of the victims and the university administration, and took a lead role in organizing the annual memorial anniversary events. She holds a BA in History from UC Santa Cruz, a law degree from Golden Gate University School of Law, and an MA In History from San Francisco State University.

Amy Batley, National Counter Terrorism Security Office (NaCTSO), UK

The potential of urban community narratives in spontaneous memorials after terrorism

The so-called ‘home-grown’ nature of the perpetrators of terror attacks in Western European cities since 2015 has led to self-reflexive questioning about social cohesion and extremist radicalisation within the communities of these cities. In the short and medium-term aftermath of many of these attacks, it has become commonplace for members of the public to leave mementoes and messages at public memorials in public spaces of the afflicted city. This has resulted in two seemingly contradictory processes; on the one hand, a greater proportion of terrorists originate from the town or city which they target, and on the other hand, the public reaction to such attacks is increasingly to express affiliation or love for the town or city which has been targeted.

Using research from Paris, London, and Manchester between 2015-2020, I will address the architectural, spatial, and commercial contexts that have allowed spontaneous memorials to reflect upon the nature of one’s city. What is the significance of spatial, architectural, and urban contexts which enable these narratives to emerge through spontaneous memorials? I will then reflect on the wider implications of these expressions of urban sentiments in spontaneous memorials, identifying the clear implications that spontaneous memorial narratives have had for municipal and national political rhetoric. As varying levels of authorities grapple with the challenge of addressing domestic radicalisation and extremism of

extreme-right-wing, Islamist, and left-wing/single-issue extremists, the presentation will explore the potential for spontaneous memorials which express urban community affiliations to contribute to counter-radicalisation objectives. The presentation will also address potential risks with this, including evidence that such intentionally inclusive narratives of urban welcome and tolerance have been co-opted by far-right extremists for hostile, exclusionary purposes.

The potential role of spontaneous memorials in responding to the emergence of ongoing terror threats provides a new perspective to the matter of safety and security in an era of 'home-grown' terrorism beyond the architectural hardening of urban landscapes. It draws attention to the cultural and political ramifications of seemingly innocuous individual mementoes and raises important questions for managing the aftermath of any future terror attack or civil disturbance.

Biography

Amy is a policy writer at the Venues and Public Spaces Unit at the UK's National Counter Terrorism Security Office (NaCTSO) which focuses on the Protect and Prepare strands of the UK's Counter Terrorism strategy. She also currently serves as the External Examiner of the MSc in Counter Terrorism at the University of Central Lancashire. Amy completed her PhD in Architecture at the University of Cambridge in 2023, in which her thesis examined the long-term spatial implications of terrorism between 2015-2020 for Western European cities, particularly Paris, London, and Manchester. This is currently in the process of being published! Her PhD followed earlier studies in Political Geography and Urban Studies. She is interested in the securitisation of urban spaces and how post-terrorism narratives influence community cohesion and ongoing processes of radicalisation.

Maëlle Bazin, France

Psychological impact of spontaneous memorials: the researcher's emotional commitment and distancing strategies

While scientific articles and various testimonials highlight the harmful psychological impact of spontaneous memorials for archivists (Collins and *al.*, 2022; Gensburger and Truc, 2020), and the need to provide appropriate support, the issue of researchers' emotions and mental health is still taboo. Based on my doctoral research experience, I will explain the relationship I have maintained with my research objects and present the distancing strategies and care measures I have put in place. In the course of my research on graphic practices in tribute to the victims of the "Charlie Hebdo" terrorist attacks in France (January 2015), I was led to read, manipulate and analyze thousands of tribute writings and drawings. On numerous occasions, I felt emotions of varying intensity, which went beyond the "emotional back-and-forth" (Waquet, 2019) inherent in any research, and which were linked to what I perceived of the content and materiality of the documents I was studying. Emotions that had consequences for the way I dealt with these documents. Sadness, anger, fear, but also joy, I oscillated during my doctoral years between the guilt of sensitivity and the guilt of detachment.

Firstly, I'd like to talk about the silence that surrounds the question of emotions in research work in the humanities and social sciences. Despite the dynamism of research on emotions, those experienced by researchers in contact with visual or textual materials remain a little-explored aspect (Julliard and Quemener, 2018). Existing publications tend to focus on the sociologist's or ethnologist's emotions when confronted with their fieldwork and respondents.

Secondly, I'm going to talk about how the places and contexts in which I work have influenced the nature and intensity of the emotions I've experienced when confronted with the artifacts from the spontaneous memorials. Where the institutional and collective setting of the archive consultation rooms neutralized the emotional charge, once at home, in the intimacy of my

apartment, the confrontation with the content of the messages became more frontal and the emotions more vivid.

Finally, a third step, I'll be talking about the harmful psychological consequences of repeated exposure to violent and/or death-related media content and about my own care measures. Even though doctoral students are a particularly at-risk population in terms of mental health (Boisselier and al., 2022), thinking about specific support and feedback mechanisms would help improve the conditions in which research is carried out.

Biography

Maëlle Bazin is a PhD graduate in media studies. Her thesis focuses on popular graphic practices in response to the January 2025 attacks in France. She has published several articles on spontaneous memorials and the social practices of mourning after a terrorist attack, including a special edition in the journal *La Gazette des Archives* on archives of social reactions to terrorism in France. She was a member of the REAT research group coordinated by G r me Truc.

Louisa Blight, The National Museum of the Royal Navy, UK

'Families First': The Impact of Spontaneous Memorials in the Aftermath of the 2021 Plymouth Shootings

In 2021 something momentous happened in Plymouth. Likened in the way it took over the public psyche to the Plymouth Blitz of 1941 80 years prior, it changed the shape of the city for ever.

On an otherwise quiet evening in August, a gunman took to the streets of the Keyham area of Plymouth and took the lives of several innocent people before turning the gun on himself. The families mourned; the community mourned; the city mourned. As they did memorials spontaneously popped up across the local community and the wider city and within days city leaders had decided that Plymouth must follow in the footsteps of Manchester to ensure the lasting preservation of these memorials for the families who were in no state to appreciate or even acknowledge them.

The Box, Plymouth, a new museum and archive for the city, open less than a year by this point, was seen as the answer and quickly curatorial and record keeping staff were seen as the experts in how to do this despite having no training or lived experience to date.

In this paper, Louisa Blight, who was at the time Collections Manager at The Box, will speak about her experience of responding to this call to help: how the mandate of 'Families First' affected behaviours within the museum, the local authority, the community and the city as a whole. She will reflect on the psychological impact of this both at the time and latterly and attempt to convey the myriad of emotions that colleagues, community representatives and family members demonstrated during the first year after the tragic events on August 2021.

In November 2021, sadly another shocking murder took place in the city and due to her experience in collecting and managing the spontaneous memorials relating to the Keyham tragedy, Louisa was asked to step in and act as Council Liaison to the new victim's family. Louisa will also briefly reflect on how individuals, communities, the local authority and its museum behaved in the aftermath of this event especially given how hard it came upon those of August 2021.

Biography

Louisa Blight has worked in the heritage and cultural sector for 20 years. A trained archivist who sits on the Archives and Records Association (ARA) Board, she has lived experience of collecting and managing paper- and object-based ephemera left in the public domain in the

aftermath of significant public events. She has previously sought to raise awareness of the subject via the annual ARA conference in Chester in 2022 and through her role as Board member for ARA, has led on the commissioning of a report on the impact of spontaneous memorials for ARA members which is due for imminent publication.

Her current role is as Head of Collections & Research at the National Museum of the Royal Navy where she is supporting her team to develop policies and procedures around vicarious trauma which is a tangible risk particularly for those working to provide access to military archives and collections.

Nilsu Erkul, Cardiff University, UK

Remembrance Beyond Barriers: Facebook Groups as Spontaneous Memorials for Varosha's Displaced Communities

This paper examines how digital platforms, specifically Facebook groups, function as spontaneous memorials for displaced communities, focusing on the case of Varosha, a contested urban landscape in Cyprus. Following its abandonment during conflict in 1974, Varosha became inaccessible to its original inhabitants, leaving its physical spaces as "absent places" in urban memory. However, digital spaces have emerged as key sites for collective grief, identity preservation, and the negotiation of contested heritage. Employing digital ethnography, this study investigates two Facebook groups dedicated to Varosha, analyzing their role in reconstructing and reshaping collective memory through digital interactions.

Varosha's Facebook groups represent more than online gatherings; they serve as dynamic, virtual memoryscapes where former residents and community members engage in practices of remembrance and memorialization. Through sharing photographs, anecdotes, and reflections, these groups transform digital platforms into repositories of collective memory, echoing the functions of physical spontaneous memorials.

Key findings include the evolution of narratives before and after the 2020 reopening of parts of Varosha, revealing shifts in memory practices as members integrate new visual and experiential data into their digital remembrances. Additionally, the analysis highlights the affective dimensions of these interactions, where emotional tones such as nostalgia, grief, and longing are prevalent. By examining the algorithms and features of Facebook -such as memory reminders and content prioritization- this study explores how the platform co-constructs these digital spontaneous memorials alongside users.

The research further interrogates the interplay between the digital and the physical. It reflects on how these digital spaces extend, amplify, or contrast with the symbolic and material absences of Varosha. In doing so, it raises critical questions about the inclusivity and potential harms of digital memorialization, including the marginalization of less prominent narratives or the romanticization of the past.

This paper contributes to contemporary discussions on spontaneous memorials by positioning digital platforms as emergent sites of memory and contested heritage. It underscores the potential of digital ethnography to capture the socio-cultural and psychological impacts of such memorial practices, offering insights for policymakers, heritage practitioners, and researchers grappling with post-conflict memory landscapes.

Biography

Nilsu holds a bachelor's degree in Town and Regional Planning (Dokuz Eylul University), a master's degree in urban design (Cardiff University) and currently awaits to defend her doctoral thesis at the Welsh School of Architecture, Cardiff University. Her doctoral research focuses on memories and heritages of conflict. Originating from Cyprus- a country profoundly shaped by conflict- she devoted her academic explorations to how areas of conflict can be

recognised as heritage sites that support a dialogue and reconciliation of affected communities.

Nilsu is an educator in architectural humanities in the undergraduate and postgraduate programmes of the Welsh School of Architecture. She contributed to her academic community by organising PGR and PGT conferences and workshops. Working within and beyond her international academic community, Nilsu has established collaboration with urban designers and heritage scholars from diverse backgrounds and cultures.

Stephanie Gibson, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, New Zealand and **Shannon Wellington**, Alexander Turnbull Library, National Library of New Zealand, Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa, New Zealand

Beyond the First Wave: Understanding the Ebb and Flow of Trauma Collections

In the aftermath of traumatic events, cultural institutions often focus on the immediate collection of materials (first wave collecting), emphasizing aspects such as timing, safety, representation, agency, and legality. This approach ensures that the initial responses are preserved with integrity and respect. However, there is a significant gap in our understanding of the life of these collections after they have been gathered. What does second wave collecting and ongoing community engagement with trauma-based material look like?

On 15 March 2019, a man carrying semi-automatic weapons entered both the Masjid Al-Noor Mosque and the Linwood Islamic Centre in Ōtautahi Christchurch, New Zealand. The gunman opened fire, killing 51 people and wounding another 40. An instant outpouring of grief, shock, and anger followed, leading to the formation of unofficial spontaneous memorials near the attack sites and throughout the country. Two Wellington-based institutions, the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (Te Papa) and the Alexander Turnbull Library (a division of the National Library of New Zealand Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa), collected this first wave of material. In the years since, we have pondered what a second wave of collecting may, or should, look like.

In this presentation we discuss the Christchurch Terror Attack and the resulting spontaneous memorials as a case study to illustrate first and second wave complexities. We consider how these collections are being used, interpreted, and integrated into broader narratives over time. Key questions include: How are these materials helping shape collective memory and historical discourse? What roles are they playing in education, commemoration, and healing? And how might institutions ensure that these types of collections remain active for future generations?

Biographies

Stephanie Gibson is a Curator New Zealand Histories and Cultures at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (Te Papa). She researches the material and visual culture of protest and activism, as well as everyday life in Aotearoa New Zealand. Her museological research focuses on museums and community participation. With Puawai Cairns and Matariki Williams, she co-authored *Protest Tautohetohe: Objects of Resistance, Persistence and Defiance*, winner of the 2020 Ockham New Zealand Book Award for Illustrated Non-Fiction. With Claire Regnault, she co-authored *Tiny Statements: A social history of Aotearoa New Zealand in badges* (2023).

Shannon Wellington is an Alexander Turnbull Library Curator in the National Library of New Zealand, Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa. Shannon's current research interests include collecting ethics, the intersections of art and archive, and material culture studies. Shannon has worked and published across the cultural heritage sector in both a professional and academic capacity with a focus on collaboration between galleries, libraries, archives and

museums. In 2023, Shannon and Stephanie co-authored a paper called First wave collecting – Christchurch Terror Attacks, 15 March 2019 (*Curator: The Museum Journal*, 66: 2).

Katelyn Hearfield, USA

“The Songs That We Sing”: Collective Processing and Affective Labor after the Manchester Arena Bombing

This paper delineates the productive possibilities of music in memorialization, arguing that Ariana Grande and the people of Manchester responded to each other through music and extended their affective labor to their communities in the wake of the 2017 Manchester Arena bombing. The attack occurred at a concert by pop star Ariana Grande, as concertgoers were exiting the arena, killing twenty-three people, including the perpetrator, and injuring hundreds more. Mere hours after the attack, grieving locals began assembling a spontaneous memorial, which was eventually consolidated in St Ann’s Square and would become the center of Manchester’s response to the attack. The memorial lives on through the Manchester Together Archive (MTA), a collection of ca10,000 items in the Manchester Art Gallery.

This paper will draw on both the performativity of the spontaneous memorialisation and the materiality of music-related items in the MTA to demonstrate the reciprocal possibilities of what I call “collective processing,” that is how the embodied effects of music can transform isolated healing into communal experience. For example, a national moment of silence held at St Ann’s Square became a key moment of collective processing when an observer began singing the Manchester classic “Don’t Look Back in Anger” by Oasis, prompting the entire crowd of 400 to join in. Though it was neither planned nor expected, this spontaneous singalong transformed a quiet moment of reflection into a show of resilience that set the tone for the city’s response in the coming days and weeks. In turn, this collective processing through music is represented in the significant number of music-related tribute items in the MTA featuring local musicians and songs (such as Oasis’s “Don’t Look Back in Anger” and The Smiths’ “There is a Light,” among others) as well as iconography related to Grande and the One Love Manchester benefit concert.

The spontaneous memorial became not only a collection of items but also a communal space for processing trauma where music was leveraged as myth, symbol, and ritual. Furthermore, the MTA’s role as a continuation of the St Ann’s Square memorial through the preservation of these materials emblemizes the role of music in memorialization, especially in a city with such a powerful music history and culture.

Biography

Katelyn Hearfield received her Ph.D. in Music at the University of Pennsylvania in 2023. Her current book project, titled *Singing Trauma: Gendered Affective Labor in Popular Music*, examines how traumatic events have impacted the production and reception of popular music, and the particular ways that women are expected to address trauma in their music. She has conducted fieldwork in Manchester and with the Manchester Together Archive as part of her research on musical responses to the 2017 arena bombing. Her work in Manchester has been supported by a Mellon Humanities, Urbanism, and Design Student Research Award and the American Musicological Society’s Eugene K. Wolf Travel Fund for European Research.

Matt Hogan, Greater London Authority

Memorials In The Moment: Lessons from Grenfell for Emergency Management

This presentation examines how an emergency planner, without formal training in memorialisation, navigated the complexities of managing spontaneous memorials following the Grenfell Tower tragedy. Reflecting on personal experiences and challenges of balancing community needs, emotional sensitivities, and operational pressures, I will explore how these memorials became spaces for collective mourning, public acknowledgement and resilience. The case study highlights key lessons for integrating spontaneous memorials into emergency management practices.

The Grenfell Tower tragedy in June 2017 claimed 72 lives and prompted an outpouring of grief expressed through flowers, notes, artworks and other tributes that started appearing within hours. These spontaneous memorials embodied community feelings of sorrow, anger and solidarity becoming focal points for healing and remembrance. As an emergency planner responsible for coordinating on site activities after the fire, I supported these memorials without formal guidance or training. I will share my personal experience highlighting the foresight, collaboration and determination necessary to address challenges which included:

- Community Sensitivity - navigating the diverse and evolving needs of grieving families, survivors, and local residents.
- Operational aspects - ensuring physical safety and site accessibility while preserving the integrity of the memorials.
- Institutional dynamics – considering the intersection of grassroots and institutional responses in balancing immediate and longer-term activities.

Key actions included collaboration with community leaders, documenting and protecting memorials, directing contractors to safeguard tributes, liaising with cultural organisations and ensuring local voices shaped decisions.

The presentation reflects on the ethical, emotional and practical complexities of this work, emphasising the tension that exists between professional duties and personal empathy in the absence of developed guidance. I will advocate for greater inclusion of memorialisation practices in emergency planning frameworks, with three key themes:

- Community-centred recovery - spontaneous memorials play a role in healing and resilience which is not currently recognised in guidance.
- Organisational adaptability – public authorities need to better anticipate and consider the resourcing of flexible and collaborative approaches.
- Policy development - better integration of memorialisation into emergency management policies and training.

Spontaneous memorials are predictable, yet emergency managers lack guidance to address them effectively. Current emergency management guidance prioritises operational efficiency over sociocultural considerations. I will propose co-developing guidance informed by emerging research and grounded in lived experience to better prepare for these sensitive situations. Aligned with the conference's interdisciplinary focus, this practical perspective bridges the gap between emergency management professionals, those with lived experience in caring for memorials and researchers, fostering improved support for survivors and enduring legacies.

Biography

Matt is Head of Partnerships at London Resilience Unit, responsible for the secretariat function of the London Resilience Forum and leading governance across London's resilience partnership of 180+ organisations.

His 18-year emergency management career, he has work in a variety of public authority sectors. He recently spent 6 years supporting the response and recovery from the Grenfell

Fire tragedy and he remains involved as an ex-officio advisor to the Grenfell Memorial Commission.

Matt is passionate about improving equity in emergency management. He champions initiatives which seek to mitigate the disproportionate impacts that emergencies can inflict on individuals and community groups. He has contributed significantly as an author in "When This Is Over: Reflections on an Unequal Pandemic" and has a peer-reviewed book chapter (Palgrave, Queering disasters, climate change and humanitarian crises) in press for 2025 focusing on inclusion and allyship within UK emergency planning.

Tanja Hollander, Artist, USA

Mourning Flowers / Flower Sleeve Installation

Tragically, my hometown of Lewiston-Auburn, Maine is now among many communities around the country that have been devastated by mass shooting events. I have felt an incredible responsibility as a local artist whose work and practice are rooted in social connections to help the community express its grief and loss.

In response to this world-altering experience, I transformed my practice, to help lead the cultural response to process this tragedy. I created two ongoing bodies of work. The first a large grid photograph of flower bouquets to honor the victims and I just finished the second, an installation for the one-year commemoration from all 261 flower sleeves of bouquets left at the spontaneous memorials in Lewiston. In the coming year, I plan to expand the work and collect flowers and their sleeves on the yearly commemorations of sites of mass violence through out the world.

Through the medium of reclaimed plastic flower sleeves, the work explores loss, the role of impermanent expressions, and the impetus behind shared community recovery from the effects of mass violence. The forms created from the sleeves are elegiac and ghost-like, evoking the devastation of traumatized communities. The work is guided by the fact that 40,000-50,000 people die from gun violence every year in the United States. The ripple effect of trauma from one event moves from the inner circle of victim families, friends, and survivors to the community in which they occur, to the state, to the country, and to the world.

Each bouquet represents one of the victims from the shootings. I use a scanner to photograph them with a black background which visually gives them a sense of free fall separating them from a traditional still life. Flowers are left at all spontaneous memorials sites throughout the world. It has become an easily accessible and long standing tradition. The flowers will vary by season and region, so I imagine the growing collection of bouquets to represent mass grieving, but also individuality within a community.

Biography

Hollander is an artist working with photography, video, installation and social practice to understand how cultural and visual relationships help us to make sense of our chaotic world. For the past thirteen years, her practice has looked at the many ways in which we build community both online as well as and offline.

She was born in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1972 and received a B.A. in photography, film, and feminist studies from Hampshire College in 1994. Her last body of work, Are you really my friend? debuted in its entirety as an exhibition, short documentary and book for a year at MASS MoCA in 2017. Sections were recently exhibited at the Museum of Fine Arts (Boston), Portland Museum of Art (Maine), Virei Viral (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil), and the Carl-Schurz-Haus (Freiberg, Germany). She lives and works in Auburn, Maine.

Emeritus Professor Margaret Holloway, University of Hull, UK

Theorising Spontaneous Memorials: towards a framework

This paper utilises the author's research into death, dying and bereavement as psycho-social-spiritual transition, drawing in particular on her model of the 'Special Deaths of late modernity' (Holloway, 2007) and AHRC-funded interdisciplinary research conducted into the changing face of memorialisation (Holloway et al, 2019). In keeping with the observation that spontaneous memorials are commonly grassroots responses to a traumatic event, Holloway identified 'special deaths' as being those which are particularly difficult to grieve on account of their high level of psychosocial trauma; that social stigma may be attached; that they may be existentially problematic; that the grief may, as Doka described, be 'disenfranchised'. Holloway further identified that deaths apparently increasing but certainly more in the public eye, such as those arising from man-made disasters, sectarian killings or terrorist incidents, have additional features. They frequently raise an issue of public concern; there may be high popular media interest, both in the deaths themselves and in any socio-political issues lying behind them; the circumstances may threaten the ontological security of both individuals and the wider society; certain groups may feel alienated or marginalised; and for the bereaved, there is frequently a search for moral purpose out of the trauma. The individual and community responses which give rise to spontaneous memorials arguably incorporate several, if not all, of these features.

The paper will suggest that herein lie the controversies and dilemmas around what to do with spontaneous memorials, whose ongoing curation and formalisation is challenging for the museum industry; and for environmental agencies, the removal of decaying or regularly renewed memorials, is fraught with public relations issues. These issues highlight deficits in existing research and hence theoretical underpinnings; Holloway, Hukelova and Bailey (2018) found in their literature survey of contemporary memorialisation that while considerable attention has been given to memorial forms, particularly emerging and digital forms, scant attention has been paid to the *ongoing process* of memorialisation, which itself is poorly defined and frequently conflated with the concepts of memory and remembering (Holloway, 2020). The paper will conclude by applying the working definition of memorialisation (arrived at in the 'Remember Me' study) as a dynamic and multi-layered process, to the phenomenon of spontaneous memorials.

Biography

Margaret Holloway is Emeritus Professor at the University of Hull, UK. A former social worker and social work academic and Editor of the *British Journal of Social Work* from 2015-2020, she has specialised in research, teaching and practice in the field of death, dying and bereavement since the mid-1980s. PhD studies at the University of Manchester into spiritual, philosophical and theological issues in death, dying and bereavement, led to the development of a sub-theme around contemporary spiritualities and religion. She was a founder member of the British Association for the Study of Spirituality and Chair of its Inaugural Conference in 2010. She led as PI two interdisciplinary studies funded by the UK AHRC: *Spirituality in Contemporary Funerals*, and, most recently, *Remember Me. The Changing Face of Memorialisation*.

Matthew Jago, Department of Children Education and Young People, Australia and **Karen Hampton**, Devonport City Council, Australia

Hillcrest Primary School Tragedy

Hillcrest Primary School is a State-run primary school in Devonport, Tasmania (Australia) and has approximately 220 enrolled students ranging from Kindergarten to Grade 6. On the 16th December, 2021, an end of year celebration was being held at the school oval. During the

event, sudden and powerful wind gusts tragically upended a jumping castle and zorb balls while children were playing on them. Tragically, six children were fatally injured and three were seriously injured and hospitalised for some time. In the days that followed, a significant number of floral, written and physical tributes were left at the school site. By the end of December, 2021, the number of tributes left at the site alone had exceeded 2,000 items.

This presentation will outline immediate challenges faced in the aftermath of the tragedy, particularly the care and preservation of the spontaneous memorial site that quickly became a focal point for community grief. It will explore the management and preservation of the spontaneous memorial site, including the respectful handing over of tributes to the impacted families. A key component will be the creation of personalised, high-quality keepsake memorial books for each family, documenting the heartfelt tributes received. The process undertaken to design and produce these keepsakes will be detailed. Additionally, the presentation will focus on the transformation of the school environment, addressing the steps taken to restore it from a site of tragedy to its original purpose as a place of learning. Finally, the presentation will reflect on the lessons learned throughout this process. It will discuss the importance of balancing remembrance with recovery, fostering resilience within the school community, and supporting students, parents, and staff as they navigate the journey of healing and rebuilding.

Biographies

Matthew Jago is the manager of Interagency Student Support. As part of the role Matthew is the direct liaison between education and other agency and support groups within Tasmania. Matthew became site manager at Hillcrest Primary School after the tragedy.

Karen Hampton is Devonport City Council's Community Services Manager, a position she has held for 8 years. As part of that role, Karen acts as the community Social Recovery Coordinator and was part of the locally led team who responded to the Hillcrest tragedy in the first instance and subsequently seconded to the State Government's Recovery Team for 12 months.

Hannah Jones, Sector Development Manager: East & Arts, The National Archives, UK, **Mike Rogers**, Sector Development Manager: Midlands & Transport, The National Archives, UK; and **David Morris**, Head of Regional and Networks Team, The National Archives, UK

Rapid Response Collecting: developing practical guidance for the archives sector

The National Archives holds the advisory and leadership function for archives in England. We offer a wide range of support and guidance through our Archives Sector Leadership (ASL) department, working with archive services and archive-holding organisations across the country. The archives sector is wide-ranging and can encompass national institutions, local government authorities, schools and universities, businesses, charities, arts organisations, libraries and museums and other specialist institutions. In 2024, ASL commissioned a piece of guidance on Rapid Response Collecting (due for publication in January 2025) as part of its regular programme of producing new documentation to meet sector needs. This presentation would speak to the approach that we adopted in developing the guidance; utilising the expertise of archivists and curators who had participated in rapid response collecting scenarios and providing practical advice and examples wherever possible.

The aim of the guidance is to support archive services and groups facing a rapid response collecting scenario. Given the broad scope of the sector and the range of instances that could arise, there has been an intention from the outset for the guidance not to be proscriptive but instead to present services with a range of approaches that they can implement. Drawn from examples of rapid response collecting and spontaneous memorials across the world, the guidance will inform services and groups of potential approaches in what can be sensitive,

emotive and rapidly developing situations with high levels of media interest.

Sections of the guidance include first response, prioritisation, and short and medium-term actions. The objective throughout is to provide practical advice to enable responders to make informed decisions, backed up with examples from events including Shoreham (2015) and Manchester (2017). In line with ASL's role to support the entirety of the archive sector, we also go beyond responses to attacks and disasters, and feature case studies from other rapid response collecting scenarios including the 2001 Foot and Mouth outbreak, the Covid-19 pandemic, and documenting student protests. The guidance also features practical conservation advice for dealing with tributes left at memorial sites.

In summary, the guidance will equip archivists, curators and volunteers with a range of approaches that they could adopt in what can be the vital first days of a response scenario as well as longer-term considerations and strategies for acknowledging spontaneous memorials.

Biography

Hannah Jones is Sector Development Manager: East & Arts; **Mike Rogers** is Sector Development Manager: Midlands and Transport and **David Morris** is Head of Regions & Networks, all part of Archives Sector Leadership at The National Archives (TNA). Jones, Rogers and Morris are all qualified archivists, with backgrounds in local government archives before moving to TNA. Their work involves building relationships with, and providing tailored advice and support to, archive services and other individuals and organisations holding archival material; facilitating the development of sustainable archive networks across the sector; advocating on behalf of archives to senior decision makers within organisations; developing relationships with strategic partners; and gathering, analysing and sharing sector intelligence with colleagues across Archive Sector Leadership and the wider organisation in order to support decision making and programme development.

Katharina Karcher, University of Birmingham, UK

Fighting for spaces of memory, fighting for change –spontaneous memorials in the aftermath of the Hanau shootings in 2020

In recent years, spontaneous memorials after terrorist attacks in Europe have become the subject of a growing body of research (see, e.g. Truc, 2016; Milosevic, 2017; Bazin, 2022; Arvanitis and Simpson, 2024). As Sarah Gensburger's (2019) careful analysis of a grassroots memorial for the victims of the Bataclan terror attack in 2015 and 2016 illustrates, such memorials can become sites of both curation and contention. Building on this important work, this paper documents and analyses spontaneous memorials in the aftermath of a racist terror attack in Germany in February 2020.

On 19 February 2020, a racist shooter went on a killing spree in his hometown Hanau near Frankfurt. Nine people lost their lives in the brutal attack: Gökhan Gültekin, Ferhat Unvar, Hamza Kurtović, Said Nesar Hashemi, Vili Viorel Păun, Mercedes Kierpacz, Kaloyan Velkov, Fatih Saraçoğlu, and Sedat Gürbüz. Similar to previous attacks, the Hanau shooting sent shockwaves around the world. However, as this paper shows, in the aftermath of the Hanau shootings it was difficult for people to express their grief and solidarity with flowers, candles, soft toys, and other objects in town. Less than one month after the attack, politicians declared a first national Covid-19 lockdown. In a speech on 18 March 2020, Chancellor Angela Merkel called for solidarity – not for the victims of the Hanau shooting and other racist attacks in Germany, but in response to the threat posed by the new Coronavirus. In the following months, it was the virus, not the shooting, that dominated the media headlines.

Travel restrictions and bans on public gatherings made it difficult for the victims of the Hanau shootings and members of the public to create spontaneous memorials at the attack sites. This, however, did not stop them. Rather, they found creative ways to express grief and

solidarity. In this paper, I will zoom in on three memory projects: (1) the use of the hashtag #saytheirnames; (2) a graffito by the art collective 'Kollektiv ohne Namen' at a major bridge in Frankfurt; and (3) a series of public readings by Mutlu Koçak and Çetin Gültekin. As I hope to show, this memory work was not 'spontaneous' in the sense that it happened 'naturally' 'without any planning'. The actors involved had to proceed with great caution, and many faced hostility and threats. Yet, they have achieved something remarkable: they have boosted interest in the lives and experiences of the victims and continue to challenge open and hidden forms of racism in Germany.

Biography

Dr Katharina Karcher is Associate Professor in Modern Languages at the University of Birmingham, UK. Katharina's research focuses on political protest and violence in the 20th and 21st centuries. In this context, she is particularly interested in questions of gender, race, class, dis/ability, and political ideology. Katharina's publications have focused on a range of topics including feminist activism in the Federal Republic of Germany, the global 1968, the UK exile of the disabled German student activist Rudi Dutschke, and urban terrorism in contemporary Europe.

Jen Kavanagh, freelance curator and oral historian and **Kostas Arvanitis**, University of Manchester, UK

The impact of collecting spontaneous memorials on the mental wellbeing of the record-keeping workforce

In spring 2024, Jen and Kostas were commissioned by the Archives and Records Association UK & Ireland (ARA) to conduct research and present findings on the impact of collecting after sudden, unforeseen or violent events on the mental wellbeing of the record-keeping workforce. Their report was completed in late 2024 and is pending online publication by the ARA.

Research into the subject involved speaking to institutions across the UK and internationally, through interviews, workshops and an online survey. Case studies including the Shoreham air crash, University of Virginia shootings, Pulse Nightclub massacre in Florida and the 2020 Reading terrorist attack. Findings and recommendations were collated into a detailed report, featuring both named and anonymous quotes from participants, alongside insights from relevant literature.

This paper will provide an overview into the methodologies used to conduct this work, reflecting on what worked and what was learned. It will then summarise key findings, sharing insight into the experiences of those who participated, both collective and personal. These findings include the significant risk of secondary trauma, the emotional and physical strain of rapid-response collecting and the need for structured policies and procedures.

The paper will conclude with sharing the recommendations collated from the research and reflect on how the sector can aim to better equip itself and support its peers when working with material of this nature.

Biographies

Jen Kavanagh is a freelance curator and oral historian specialising in contemporary and community history. In her role as Senior Curator of Contemporary History at London Museum (previously Museum of London), Jen oversaw a re-display of the book of tributes created following the 7/7 London bombings. She has written papers on collecting such events and has worked as a consultant on advising affected communities on how to care for their personal archives.

Dr Kostas Arvanitis is Senior Lecturer in Museology at Institute for Cultural Practices, University of Manchester. Since 2017 Kostas has been working with a range of individuals and organisations internationally in researching practices of collecting, documenting and digitising spontaneous memorials after accidents, disasters and mass violence events. Based on this work, Kostas has also led the formation of the International Network of Spontaneous Memorials, a community of practice and support network on collecting spontaneous memorials.

Vicki Leibowitz RMIT, Australia & **Cristina Garduño Freeman**, UNSW, Australia

Bus stops and Bedrooms: Digital Practices of Spontaneous Memorialisation in War-torn Ukraine

Backup Ukraine is an online digital archive championed by Vice Media Group and 3D tech startup Polycam (along with heritage organisations UNESCO and BlueShield Denmark) to help Ukrainians digitize their cultural heritage. It was originally conceived as a response to Russia's incursion into Ukraine, intending for citizens to 'securely store digital records of historical artefacts based on smartphone image capture'. The stated goal of the archive initiative is to empower Ukrainians to resist the cultural and historical erasure which emerge as an outcome of war by enabling citizens to digitally capture places, sites and objects of heritage value. The outcome is a participatory project with unanticipated results. Since its initiation in 2022, the archive has amassed over 35,000 3D captures. While some of these represent significant sites and artefacts of conventional heritage, they also include intimate, personal and unexpected items, all of which have been contributed to the archive by thousands of Ukrainians seeking to acknowledge and respond to the conflict. While collectively these scans -as an archive- can be seen as an unconventional document of Ukrainian cultural heritage they can also be understood as a form of spontaneous memorialisation.

This paper understands the creation of this archive as an expression of spontaneous memorialization, one that tests and indeed expands conventional definitions of such memorial processes and outcomes. Spontaneous memorials are typically characterised as grassroots or citizen-led public expressions of grief and as repositories of the memorialization processes that reflect the temporal, spatial, material and political zeitgeist of which they are a part. This paper suggests that the digital captures that make up the archive of Backup Ukraine, both the quotidian scenes such as bedrooms, and the public spaces such as decorated bus stops, should be understood as an expression of spontaneous memorialization. This categorisation emerges, in part, from the intimate and impulsive operations of capture that facilitate the process of memorialization and its intangible outcomes (the dataset), and also from the way in which many of the captures reflect an emotional connection to place and national identity. Taken individually each act of capture is embodied and performative, accomplished through the intimate camera lens of a hand-held device. Taken collectively, the archive is an outpouring of grief and an act of resistance to amnesia, and according to Backup Ukraine's founders, it is also an expression of political and national resistance.

The Backup Ukraine archive provides a case study for the intersection of technology, popular culture and the shared impulse to record life around us as a manifestation of spontaneous memorialisation. The archive presents a unique record of contemporary Ukrainian life and cultural history expressed through the collective process of capturing (and sharing) both personal and public artefacts of significance. Where, in other examples of spontaneous memorials communities come together to express their grief and demand action after the tragedy has occurred, the digital captures in the Backup Ukraine archive represent a communal expression of loss expressed synchronous to, or even preceding, the act of destruction itself. Moreover, the digital nature of the captures and their widespread online availability - beyond the specifics of place - catapults this memorial into a global arena, revealing the personal impact of the conflict in new and unanticipated ways.

Biographies

Dr Vicki Leibowitz and **Dr Cristina Garduño Freeman** have collaborated for over a decade on a shared preoccupation with the significance of tangible and intangible culture of architecture and heritage. Vicki is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at RMIT in the Design and Creative Research Enabling Impact Platform and Cristina is a Senior Lecturer in architectural history and theory in the School of Built Environment at UNSW Sydney. Their collaboration spans academic articles, joint research projects and creative outputs on materiality, meaning and memorialisation. Cristina has held academic and research positions at the Australian Centre for Architectural History, Urban and Cultural Heritage (ACAHUCH), The University of Melbourne, Deakin University, Heritage NSW, collaborated with Heritage Victoria, was an Australian Co-convenor for the 2020 and 2023 ICOMOS GA Scientific Symposiums and Secretary of the Society of Architectural Historians Australia and New Zealand (SAHANZ) from 2019- 2023.

Binar Asri Lestari, School of Oriental and African Studies, UK and **Syifa Adiba**, School of Oriental and African Studies, UK

Justice in the Shadows: *Aksi Kamisan* as Indonesia's Resilience Memorial

What is Aksi Kamisan

Aksi Kamisan is a form of an enduring act of remembrance and a weekly protest held every Thursday in front of the Presidential Palace in Jakarta. Begun in 2007 by family members of victims of human rights abuses in Indonesia, it serves as a solemn space for public mourning, solidarity, and demands for justice. Participants, dressed in black and carrying black umbrellas will silently stand to embody collective mourning and resilience. The protest specifically commemorates victims of state violence and oppression, including those affected by the 1998 tragedy, where activists, students, and civilians were subjected to disappearances, imprisonment, and violence. This group protest is a vivid example of how grassroots memorials serve as platforms for both public grief and calls for accountability.

How is it a Recurrent Spontaneous Memorial

Aksi Kamisan exemplifies a “recurrent spontaneous memorial” as it continually emerges outside formalised state recognition or support. It is a grassroots response to ongoing political and social grievances, drawing on the memorialization practices of spontaneous shrines or sites of grief that persist even without official sanction. Unlike one-time memorials, *Aksi Kamisan* has evolved into a sustained act of memory, embodying the resilience of victims' families and their refusal to let these tragedies fade from public consciousness. This ongoing practice reflects Indonesia's unique landscape, where public spaces serve both as sites for remembrance and silent protest against unresolved injustices. *Aksi Kamisan* has become a living site of grief and resistance, embodying the commitment of victims' families to ensure that past tragedies are neither forgotten nor ignored.

Circle of Futility

Despite its persistence, *Aksi Kamisan* confronts significant political challenges, particularly under the current administration where historical grievances remain largely unaddressed. Prabowo Subianto, a former general associated with human rights abuses during the 1998 tragedy elected as Indonesia's current president, has intensified a sense of futility among people. The concurrent *Aksi Kamisan*, now over a decade long, reflects a painful “circle of futility” —a continuous demand for justice met with systemic inertia. This ongoing cycle underscores the gap between public memory and state action and highlights the fragility of democratic principles and the complexities of transitional justice in Indonesia.

Keeping Memories Alive: 1998 in Popular Culture and the Role of Younger Generations

While *Aksi Kamisan* endures as a persistent memorial within the activist community, the legacy of 1998 has permeated Indonesian popular culture, engaging new generations through documentaries, literature, films, music, and visual art that frequently revisit the tragedies and activism of the *Reformasi* era. This cultural revival serves as a powerful medium of memory, drawing young Indonesians to narratives of justice and human rights and encouraging them to participate in historical remembrance. Through social media and popular culture, they have found ways to keep these memories alive, amplifying the spirit of *Aksi Kamisan* beyond weekly gatherings and reaching audiences within and beyond Indonesia's borders.

Biographies

Binar Asri Lestari is a seasoned researcher and curator with a background in public policy, currently pursuing a Postgraduate degree in Creative and Cultural Industries at SOAS, University of London. With prior experience at the Indonesian Heritage Agency and collaborations with government and international organisations, Binar's interests lie in cultural heritage, historical memory, and social justice in Indonesia. Her work explores how grassroots movements like *Aksi Kamisan* contribute to public discourse and memory, especially within Indonesia's complex democratic landscape.

Syifa Adiba is a part-time researcher with a Master's in Digital Humanities and Public Culture at The Australian National University, Australia. Her work focuses on bridging the gap between digital technologies and cultural preservation. Syifa's interests are in areas such as digital heritage, cultural memory and art history. She is eager to engage with scholars and practitioners to explore new avenues of research that challenge traditional frameworks and contribute to the evolution of digital humanities.

Cathy Long, The Common Ground Project, UK and **Lisa Nash**, Association for Cultural Advancement through Visual Art (ACAVA), UK

Memorialising Grenfell; Listening to the Silence, Capturing the Anger

Our paper examines the creation of spontaneous memorials around Grenfell Tower, focusing on who participated and how themes of silence and anger were communicated. We analyse two key dimensions of the response: the expression of anger through grassroots action and the transition of these ephemeral memorials into permanent artworks. We argue that considerable challenges arise when community organisations must navigate the absence of legitimacy from the local authority, which in this case was widely blamed for the disaster.

In the immediate aftermath of the Grenfell Tower Fire on 14 June 2017, the local community came together to support friends, neighbours, and relatives. By the end of *Day One*, community centres and places of worship were overflowing with donations, while global media organisations set up camp in the area. In the absence of a coordinated official response, community members stepped in to fill the void—a particularly fraught task given the perception of the local authority as responsible for the disaster.

In the days that followed, the area transformed into a public canvas where residents expressed their emotions. *Missing* posters created by friends and relatives appeared alongside slogans and pleas for change. Billboards, pavements, railings, church steps, and walls became sites of anger, mourning, and calls for justice.

As local residents, both Cathy and Lisa were deeply involved in the response. Cathy instinctively began documenting these powerful, ephemeral contributions, relentlessly photographing the makeshift art that emerged. In the subsequent months, Cathy collaborated with the London School of Economics (LSE) to conduct interviews with community responders and local authorities, documenting their experiences and collating records of the hundreds of

community meetings and activities that took place. She co-created an exhibition that traced the timeline of events and showcased the graffiti and messages of grief and protest.

During this same period, The Silent Walk, a spontaneous act of memorial, began to take place on the 14th of each month. This peaceful form of protest offered a space for solidarity, remembrance, and a collective commitment to seek justice. Zeyad Cred, the instigator of the walks, described it as follows: “In the midst of all the chaos, it was one of the most beautiful things I have ever seen. The area was flooded for weeks with reporters and camera crews, and that 30-minute walk of pure silence was the first time in weeks I felt like I could think.”

Lisa, then a curator at ACAA, worked with the community to produce a series of large-scale public mosaics, two of which were installed on the hoardings around Grenfell Tower. A particularly impactful project, *Walking as One*, features 39 co-created mosaic roundels embedded into paving stones along local streets, marking the route of the Grenfell Silent Walk. In 2022, *Walking as One* received the Culture, Health & Wellbeing Alliance’s Collective Power Award for its role in uniting and honouring the community.

Our paper will reflect on the impact of these memorials, highlighting the challenges and controversies surrounding funding, community legitimacy, and organizational involvement. We will explore how these spontaneous expressions of grief and anger have been preserved and commemorated through permanent memorials—such as *Walking as One*—and their enduring ability to unite and heal the community.

Biographies

Cathy Long is a researcher and resident of North Kensington. She ran a spontaneous rest centre after the Grenfell Fire, worked as a research associate at LSE on the Lessons from Grenfell Knowledge Exchange project and runs Common Ground, a CIC that works to share knowledge and information that helps people to find common ground. Her experience in post disaster work stretches back to the Hillsborough Disaster when she curated and managed the scarf tribute at Anfield.

Lisa Nash is a socially-engaged artist, curator and producer, and a resident of North Kensington. In the wake of the fire and beyond, she ensured local people, particularly families, had access to a safe and welcoming creative space to support their wellbeing, ensuring facilitating artists adopted a trauma-informed practice. She continues to consult on Grenfell memorial artwork and archival material for ACAA. Lisa has recently been working with academics from the University of Bristol on a participatory research programme, the outcome of which was accessioned into the Wellcome Collection archive in November 2024.

Prof Kevin Malone (former Chair in Social and Autoethnographic Composition), University of Manchester, UK (retired)

Fence, photograph, pandemic, piano: The Makeshift Music of *Sudden Memorials*

This paper will detail *Sudden Memorial's* method and impact, including audio excerpts and images of the 9/11 photograph and the makeshift mosaic approach.

Anglo-American composer Kevin Malone became immersed in the events of 9/11 since his first orchestral memorialisation was premiered in Kyiv, Ukraine in 2002. Subsequent 9/11 works explored documentary techniques, autoethnography and community expression, using recordings of air traffic controllers and his recorded site-specific sounds and interviews with witnesses and first responders. In 2006 he spent three weeks in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, the site where passengers of United Airlines Flight 93 crashed their aircraft to thwart hijackers, and which gave rise to a makeshift memorial to the victims. The site and memorial kindled further music: a children's song (*Gently Tread*, 2006) about the crash site's hallowed land; an orchestral work (*Angels and Fireflies*, 2011) about night descending at the memorial; an

orchestral tone-poem (*E pluribus unum*, 2011) about the memorial's land and community; a trio (*Tacet al fine*, 2013) about a victim memorialised in an anonymous child's letter left at the 9/11 Memorial Chapel.

During April 2021's pandemic lockdown, a video conversation with concert pianist Adam Swayne drifted to Malone's 2006 photograph of the makeshift memorial: a wire fence on which visitors could spontaneously (or with predetermination) attach items of remembrance. This prompted a substantial work for just solo pianist due to the pandemic, closely following the processes by which such memorials arise and evolve. *Sudden Memorials* (May 2021) was performed in lockdown conditions in London, Oxford, NYC, Brighton and Manchester. It is the central work on Coviello CD 9:11:20.

The photograph of the memorial reveals: temporary fencing; spontaneously offered objects; predetermined self-made objects; predetermined store-bought objects; predetermined specialist memorial objects; perishable objects; objects with socio-political messages or personal stances. Malone's unique compositional method had to reflect how visitors reacted with these diverse types of objects. To ensure poetic fidelity:

- a six-week deadline was set to spontaneously compose, structure, edit, finalise, typeset and record in a studio 30 minutes of original piano music; Malone closely focused (often to the point of weeping) on 20 diverse objects to compose depictions of their likely direct and indirect impact on visitors;
- the depictions became mosaic tiles – “objects” – to be arranged into a non-narrative, quirkily juxtaposed psycho-emotional experience, without linear teleology, such as a memorial visitor would experience;
- Malone worked with Swayne on theatrical gestures to discover “objects” in, on and around the piano while playing, evoking a visitor's impromptu movements, sensations, memories and interpretations at the mosaicked fence memorial, keeping a sense of internal isolation;
- the photograph became part of the performance, with the pianist spontaneously improvising while looking at objects in the photograph.

Biography

Kevin Malone's music explores social concerns and global events. He studied at the Eastman School of Music, New England Conservatory, Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique, and Universities of Michigan and London (Goldsmiths College), and was Music Director of the Brecht Company USA. His concert music frequently embraces theatricality, polystylism, discontinuity, and emotional and psychological surprises. His numerous award-winning works includes eight pieces about the impact of 9/11 on individuals and communities, a two-hour Mark Twain opera *Mysterious 44* with three international productions, two volumes of feminist piano pieces, electroacoustic installations and sonic sculptures, large-scale choral works, and live and animated film scores. Malone is a former Professor and Chair in Social and Autoethnographic Composition at the University of Manchester, with specialisms in the technical aspects of film composition and community music.

His music appears on five solo-composer and 12 compilation CDs. He is exclusively published by Composers Edition at composersedition.com/kevinmalone.

Megan McCormick, Cardiff University, UK and **Dimitra Ntzani**, Cardiff University, UK

Tracing the Rhizomes of Trauma: Psychogeographies of protest and grief in Grenfell Tower Commemoration.

On June 14 2017, in London's Kensington and Chelsea borough, The Grenfell Tower fire claimed 72 lives and left more than 70 injured, and 223 escaping. Seven years later, the lack of prosecutions, and the absence of memorial in the blaze's ground, has left the community

grappling with grief and injustice. However, the communal trauma still populates public and mass media discourses, fuelled by the release of the final inquiry report and the commissioning of a permanent Grenfell Memorial design.

The multifaceted impact of the catastrophic event is evident in the numerous commemorative displays that spread around the tower. These Grenfell Disaster memorials bring forth unresolved sociocultural issues like racial and class discrimination and institutional neglect, which have all compounded to the disaster. These displays, both spontaneous and permanent, may represent collective mourning but also demands for justice, showcasing how traumatic memory haunts physically urban spaces.

This research explores how trauma memory evolves in time, focusing on how commemorative displays, both grassroots and institutional, serve as mechanisms for grief and protest. To do so, it adopts a mixed methods approach which includes the fieldwork, urban photography and GIS mapping of memorials, and their thematic analysis according to permanence, commissioning stakeholders, materiality, and access. By capturing the thematic evolution of these displays, from the immediate aftermath in 2017 to their current state, is also observe how traumatic memorialisation has evolved and spread throughout the city.

By mapping and thematically analysing the rhizomatic nature of traumatic commemoration of the Grenfell blaze, the study demonstrates how memorials can serve as both a form of protest and a tool for grief. The data collected contributes to broader academic discourses on public perceptions of Grenfell captured in the commemorative displays in the area. Furthermore, it explores how traumatic memory evolves and spreads across the city. By mapping grassroots and spontaneous commemorative displays across space and time the research brings forth the moments in space and time that protest and grief compete or merge in urban space to keep trauma memory routed in the present. Unlike institutional memorialisation, these bottom-up initiatives provide authentic, inclusive memorials that deeply resonate with the community, revealing not only sorrow and loss but also hope, resilience, and solidarity.

Biographies

Megan's interests lie in the intersection between memory and architecture, particularly in how traumatic memory manifests within the public realm. Having personally undertaking the on-site fieldwork and researching the topic in much detail, she has first-hand input on the spontaneous memorials in the field of research. Thus, prepared to be the first author, and lead communications.

Dimitra's research is interdisciplinary and brings theories and methods from cognitive linguistics and distributed cognition into design studies and the design of cultural heritage. It focuses on spatial metaphors as cognitive scaffoldings and their ability to shape architectural design, and support empathetic engagement in various educational environments (HE & heritage institutions). Dimitra is currently interested in metaphors that shape the design of contested, difficult or dark heritages, and explores their impact on visitors' experience.

Sayan Parial, Kazi Nazrul University, Asansol, India

“Night is Ours”: A Bricoleur of Affect, Activism, and Aesthetics

On the midnight hours of 14th August 2024, in response to the “Night is Ours” call by women in general, the people of West Bengal, India, gathered in solidarity to demand justice for the brutal rape and murder of a 31-year-old trainee doctor who worked at RG Kar Medical College, West Bengal, India. This spontaneous reaction, primarily from the youth of Bengal, not only demonstrated an alternative way of participating in resistance but also unleashed a series of affective commemorative performances.

This paper attempts to engage with the carnivalesque nature of these evocative performances, which were mediated through the bricoleur of affect, activism, and aesthetics. The theatrical productions on streets, live singing, slogans, dancing, paintings, poster-making, spontaneous processions, and street art—all in protest against the injustice done to Nirbhaya (the name given to the victim by the protestors, meaning “fearless”)—become a discursive emancipatory intervention in the dominant political structure of the state and the medical industry. The theatrics behind the formation of the spontaneous “becoming” of new resistive subjectivities transgress urban borders, including people from the rural interiors of West Bengal, while simultaneously resonating in global corridors due to their repeated iterations in newer forms of resistance. The voluntary participation of protestors, without any direct personal bond with the victim, explicitly reflects a shared crisis that has been systematically repressed by the complex workings of institutional power.

Thus, this event becomes an instance of democratic collectivism, explored in this paper through three stages of understanding:

1. Firstly, the paper critically examines the heterogeneous dynamics of these protest narratives to locate the dialogue between spatio-temporal affective spontaneity and permanence.
2. Secondly, it establishes a bridge of exchange between Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of the Carnival, Alain Badiou’s proposition of “Emancipatory Universalism,” and Performance theories to understand the various forms of resistance to rape culture arising from Bengal’s “Night is Ours” movement.
3. Thirdly, it proposes a pedagogical approach to engage with the spirit of resistance in spontaneity and to archive the narratives of performative commemorations.

Biography

Sayan Parial is working as a Contractual Teacher at the Department of English, Kazi Nazrul University, Asansol, India. His areas of research interest are Partition Studies, Environmental Studies, and Performance Studies. His essay “Actor--Network Theory and the Postcolonial: A Reading of Amitav Ghosh’s *The Calcutta Chromosome*” is included in the book “Science Fiction in India” (eds Shweta Khilnani and Ritwick Bhattacharjee, Bloomsbury, 2022). His forthcoming book chapter ““My Race is not My Virus”: Affective Racial Algorithms during Covid-19 Pandemic” is included in the book *Panorama of the Pandemic: A Phenomenological Inquiry* edited by Simi Malhotra et al. (Routledge India, 2025). He was invited to deliver his talk at King’s College London entitled “Thinking Disaster Through Indian Theatre and Performance: Poetics of Enactivity” in the month of September, 2024. Moreover, he is an active theatre worker at Drama Club, University of Gour Banga, India.

Jan Seidler Ramirez, National September 11 Memorial & Museum, USA

Prolonging Impermanence and Pushback to Permanence: Two Cases at the National 9/11 Memorial & Museum Memorial

This talk will focus on the museological challenges of preserving and presenting tribute ephemera and artifact assemblages dating from the early months after the September 11, 2001 terror attacks, and managing the ongoing phenomenon of materials of remembrance brought to, and animating the open-air 9/11 Memorial. The latter preceded the former because construction of the outdoor Memorial was finished several years before the Museum opened underneath its 8-acre Plaza.

When dedicated on the 10th anniversary of the attacks, the outdoor memorial was envisioned as a permanent place-marker where the still- bereaved and public-at-large could pay respects to the 2,977 victims killed that deadly Tuesday. The Memorial’s egalitarian design and

accessibility would retire the need for eclectic displays of grief, or so the expectation held. Indeed, the sloped angle and polished surfaces of its 76 bronze panels were guards against the easy accumulation of tributes at specific names. Following caretaking advice sought from other well-trafficked sites where victims of mass atrocity are remembered, managers of the new World Trade Center memorial quickly instituted a nightly housekeeping schedule for clearing objects or biotic offerings left at the names parapets. That removal protocol emphasized both the unnecessary and transient status of such material. ("Reflecting Absence," the formal title of the Memorial assigned by its architects, was not only a poetic allusion to lost human beings.) Nevertheless, emotional necessity proved the mother of invention: visitors, relatives and former coworkers of the Dead soon learned how to adapt their tribute offerings to the Memorial's layout. This presentation will outline the collection-management policy and practices put in place since autumn 2011 to respectfully remove, document, occasionally exhibit, and puzzle out the meaning of tangible ephemera brought to the twin pools of the Tower footprints— if now in lessening numbers, then in more noticeable patterns and calendar dates outside of the September 11 anniversary.

The Memorial Museum opened its doors 32 months after the Memorial's completion. Unlike its more abstract precursor, its concerns are to reflect the presence of the lives and place erased on September 11, 2001, to contextualize the terror attacks, and to furnish evidence of the multiple responses to, and actions mobilized by this mass trauma at local, federal, and international levels. Examples of rapid-response collective mourning and compassion are well-documented in the institution's primary history exhibition and as well as its larger permanent archive. In fact, the Museum's largest space ("Foundation Hall") was built to accommodate and centralize the visitor experience around an artifact known as the Last Column. This 37-foot tall piece of core steel wreckage from the South Tower functioned as the first magnet for *in memoriam* postings and messages left on it by the Ground Zero rescue, response and clean-up community. The multi-ton beam acquired offerings until May 30, 2002, when it was ceremoniously removed and saluted as "the last load out" of the World Trade Center's vast 16-acre pit.

Safeguarding this resonant totem – with its mantle of tribute ephemera and transient messages of loss and resolve – emerged as one of the most challenging stewardship assignments assumed by the Museum's collections team. How does an institution committed to authenticity protect that core value, applied to a touchstone artifact situated in a vast open-mount environment likely to jeopardize its integrity? What interventions are usable -and ethical -- in the cause of prolonging the display-life of the distressed metal Column and the fugitive paper, plastic, textile and floral tributes original to it? Part two of this talk shares some of the preservation strategies the Museum adapted in service to privileging the artifact's ephemeral aura.

Biography

Jan Seidler Ramirez (Ph.D., American Studies, Boston University) is the founding Chief Curator and Executive Vice President of Collections at the National September 11 Memorial & Museum in New York City. Under her guidance, the Memorial Museum's collection has grown to include many thousands of objects (including tribute material left at spontaneous memorials in the wake of 9/11), artworks, photographs, oral histories, and film, audio and digital evidence connected to 9/11 and the legacy of the the 2001 terror attacks. Prior to her 2006 appointment, she served as Vice President and Museum Director at the New-York Historical Society, and Chief Curator at the Museum of the City of New York. She has written, lectured, curated exhibitions and taught widely on subjects related to New York history, rapid-response collecting, and preserving and interpreting traumatic materials and their associated human stories. Recently, she was appointed to serve a term as a consulting member of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum's Collections and Acquisitions Committee.

Cristian Monforte Rubia, Laboratoire CARISM - Université Paris-Panthéon-Assas, France

Spontaneous memorials and identity conflicts: the impact of identity tensions on the expression of popular emotion after the 2017 Barcelona attacks

On August 17, 2017, Barcelona suffered a mass attack carried out with a ramming truck, followed by another attack in the coastal town of Cambrils later that night. These attacks, which claimed the lives of 16 people and injured more than a hundred others, suddenly thrust Catalonia into the spotlight of international media.

Quickly dubbed "17-A" by the press, these events received extensive coverage across Spain. They revived, among Spaniards, memories of other major events (Nora, 1972/2015) that have profoundly marked the country's contemporary history, as well as the powerful images associated with them (Dayan, 2006). However, unlike those previous events, the attacks of August 17, 2017, occurred amidst heightened tensions between Barcelona and Madrid, influenced by the political and territorial crisis surrounding the Catalan independence movement and a blurring of collective identities.

Amid this climate of intense political and identity-related tensions, thousands of citizens gathered in the streets of Barcelona to express their solidarity with the victims. These gatherings gave rise to the creation of spontaneous or grassroots memorials (Grider, 2001; Sánchez-Carretero, 2011; Santino, 2006; Truc, 2016), primarily located on La Rambla. These "extraordinarily dynamic" spaces of gathering (Grider, 2001; Margry & Sánchez-Carretero, 2007) facilitated a new form of communication with the deceased. However, in the Catalan context, these spontaneous memorials uniquely express not only gestures of solidarity but also identity and ideological dimensions tied to the period of political and social tensions surrounding the Catalan independence process.

Consequently, popular writings within these memorials offer an opportunity to further explore the relationship between these forms of expression and broader social, political, and identity narratives prevalent during this particularly complex post-attack and pre-referendum period.

This paper aims to analyze the impact of identity-driven rivalries on the production of objects and texts within these spontaneous memorials. We seek to determine how political and identity-based tensions—and the hegemonic narratives associated with them—shaped the production of the ephemeral memorials on La Rambla and sustain the collective emotional response following the attacks. More specifically, we will examine how these memorials reflect or challenge political, journalistic, and social narratives about the Catalan independence question in a context deeply marked by strong identity-based ideological competition.

To this end, we will draw upon a corpus of 4,500 texts collected from the spontaneous memorials on La Rambla, analyzed with a mixed approach combining qualitative and quantitative methods. In parallel, we conducted an in-depth media monitoring exercise covering the two weeks following the attacks, relying on the main Catalan and Spanish print newspapers to assess the influence of media narratives on the expression of popular emotions post-attack. This analysis will be done using a multidisciplinary approach rooted in information and communication sciences (combining semiotic-discursive analysis, the sociology of social and memory mobilizations, and modern theories of nationalism and national identities) in order to analyze the types of messages found, the connections made between the attacks and national and collective identities, and the impact of these identity-related factors on the expression and materialization of grief and collective solidarity at the Catalan and Barcelona levels.

Biography

Cristian Monforte is a fifth-year doctoral candidate at CARISM (Center for Interdisciplinary Media Analysis and Research) at the University of Paris-Panthéon-Assas and a former scientific member of the École des Hautes Études Hispaniques et Ibériques (EHEI) at the Casa de Velázquez in Madrid. Currently pursuing his doctoral thesis, his research focuses on the Barcelona and Cambrils attacks, examining their political, social, and civic dimensions. In parallel, his work also explores new digital media, the production and circulation of media discourses and narratives, event configurations, and collective and national identities.

Pam Schwartz, Thinc Design, USA

Biography

Pamela Schwartz is a nationally award-winning museum industry executive and curator who currently serves as Managing Director of Thinc Design, an NYC based exhibition and experience design firm, working with such projects as the Forever One Memorial in Las Vegas, the Empire State Building, and others. With more than 23 years in museums and memorialization, she was formerly with the Orange County Regional History Center in Orlando, FL where, shortly after the Pulse nightclub shooting in 2016, Schwartz was the architect and curator of the urgent-response One Orlando Collection Initiative, which includes over 10,000 artifacts, photographs, archives, and oral histories documenting the memory of the shooting and its response. She has become an authority on historical collecting after community or mass tragedy and has assisted numerous other sites globally in their own response.

Heather Sparling, Cape Breton University, Canada

Cartographies of Vicarious and Disenfranchised Grief: Intangibly Memorializing the 2020 Nova Scotia Mass Shooting in Song

The deadliest mass murder in Canadian history occurred on April 18 and 19, 2020. A 51-year-old gunman shot multiple people at multiple locations in rural Nova Scotia. By the time he was shot and killed by police, the perpetrator had killed 22 people and injured 3 others. Occurring only weeks into the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown, people were left to process their shock and grief in relative isolation, a matter complicated by the wide geographical spread over which the shootings had taken place. Even though many Nova Scotians had no direct ties to the victims or the sites of the murders, they were shocked, experiencing vicarious grief (Chochinov 2005a, b). Because their grief was vicarious, it was also disenfranchised (Thompson and Doka 2017). Canadian society (and Western society more generally) does not generally recognize the grief of mourners not directly related to victims, part of the reason for the growth in spontaneous memorials over the past several decades (Sparling 2023). Nova Scotians' disenfranchised grief was exacerbated by Covid-19 restrictions on travel and social interactions, which limited their ability to mourn with others. While various forms of spontaneous memorialization did emerge in the wake of the tragedy, music's intangibility made it especially significant. I will argue that disaster songs serve as intangible memorials for those who experience tragedy vicariously and who therefore experience disenfranchised grief. Although the intangibility of songs means that they are not tethered to a physical location in the same way as material memorials, I will demonstrate how songs about the Nova Scotia 2020 mass shooting offer cartographies of grief, mapping places, relationships, and the experience of grief as a means of processing, expressing, and sharing grief in virtual community.

Biography

Heather Sparling is a Professor of Ethnomusicology and the former Canada Research Chair in Musical Traditions at Cape Breton University. She researches disaster songs, vernacular memorialization, and grief. She is the author of *Disaster Songs as Intangible Memorials in Atlantic Canada* (Routledge 2023) and is currently co-editing a two-volume anthology on music and grief.

Dr Stepan Stepanenko, Leibniz-Zentrum für Archäologie (LEIZA), Germany and **Dr Alina Yarova**, Rylsky Institute of Art Studies, Folklore and Ethnology, Ukraine

Grief, Protest, and Power: Exploring Spontaneous and Organised Memorials in the Context of War and Hostage Crises"

Memorials serve as powerful symbols of collective mourning and protest, offering insight into how societies process grief and communicate political messages. This paper examines the contrasting dynamics of two recent examples: the spontaneous, people-driven memorial in Kyiv marking 1,000 days of war, and the organised, institution-driven Shabbat table in Israel, set to highlight the plight of hostages. While both memorials address grief and suffering, their origins and perceived purposes reveal critical differences in authenticity, emotional resonance, and public impact.

The Kyiv memorial emerged organically from grassroots efforts, driven by the need to honour victims of Russian aggression and protest the ongoing war. This spontaneous expression of grief allows individuals to create a narrative unmediated by organisations, fostering an atmosphere of raw compassion and authenticity. By amplifying the voices of ordinary people, such memorials not only serve as powerful tools for local mourning but also act as global symbols of resilience and resistance, raising awareness of Ukraine's plight on an international stage. This grassroots approach, however, raises questions: does its perceived authenticity inherently lend it greater emotional value, or is this shaped by the immediacy of its creation and its direct connection to the people most affected?

In contrast, the Shabbat table in Israel is a meticulously organised effort designed to highlight the suffering of hostages held by Hamas. With its carefully curated imagery and messaging, this memorial carries a dual purpose: aiding collective mourning while explicitly appealing to global audiences to take a moral and political stance. While undeniably poignant, its institutional backing invites scepticism. Organised memorials may be critiqued for prioritising strategic objectives over the raw expression of grief, potentially reducing their emotional resonance. Yet they often succeed in mobilising action, suggesting that political purpose and authentic mourning are not mutually exclusive.

This paper interrogates these dynamics, asking whether spontaneous, people-driven memorials truly hold greater universal value or if their impact is contingent upon context. It also explores how organised efforts, despite their institutional nature, can shape narratives and inspire collective action in ways grassroots movements cannot. Through a comparative analysis of these two memorials, the paper probes broader questions: who controls the narrative in memorialisation, and how does this influence the message's reception both locally and globally? Ultimately, it seeks to understand the evolving role of memorials as both emotional sanctuaries and political instruments in times of crisis.

This exploration contributes to wider discussions about the intersections of grief, power, and representation, offering insights into the complex relationship between public mourning and political advocacy.

Biographies

Dr Stepan Stepanenko is an archaeologist and political analyst who has worked for a range of UK foreign policy think tanks in research and directorial capacities and a contributor to the Kyiv Post and the Times of Israel. He is a Humboldt Foundation research fellow at the Leibniz-Zentrum für Archäologie, an associate member of the CNRS UMR 8167, and has contributed to research on Eastern European trade and settlement dynamics.

Dr Alina Yarova is a cultural anthropologist with the Rylsky Institute of Art Studies, Folklore and Ethnology, in Kyiv, Ukraine. She began her career as an archaeologist, working on a range of early medieval sites, focusing on the study of Rus period pendants. Her doctorate and subsequent work focused on the vernacular architecture and architectural traditions of 19-20th century Chernihiv region and north-eastern Ukraine. She has conducted extensive field work, including near the front lines in the Kharkiv region and in the Chernobyl exclusion zone.

Dr Nicole Sully, University of Queensland, Australia

Flowers on Elm: Spontaneous memorials following the assassination of John F. Kennedy

In the days following the assassination of John F. Kennedy, in November 1963, citizens from around the world looked for meaningful ways to direct their grief. Spontaneous gatherings and commemorative services occurred throughout America, and beyond. There was a marked rise in charitable donations and acts, as well as a flurry of speculation about more permanent forms of commemoration. Among these early responses were a series of makeshift memorials—which would now be considered spontaneous memorials—that sprouted in the most likely and unlikely places. In the USA, floral tributes and other objects, including notes and letters, were left near the assassination site, and in the following weeks, mass floral tributes were also left at his grave in Arlington Cemetery. On the other side of the world, in the Netherlands, floral tributes quickly accumulated outside of an American trade exhibition.

While the Kennedy assassination had a profound impact on memory studies—becoming, for example, the prototypical case for Brown and Kulik’s seminal work on Flashbulb Memories (1977)—discussion of commemorative responses to his assassination have been largely overlooked by Kennedy and commemorative scholars alike. In particular, there has been little discussion of the spontaneous and makeshift memorials that emerged immediately following his death, as well as on important anniversaries. This is made more surprising, given the public response to the death of John F. Kennedy Jr and Carolyn Bessette-Kennedy, whose deaths in 1999 elicited spontaneous memorials that were widely covered by the media at the time. Rather, scholarship of spontaneous memorials routinely begins with the public responses to events such as the Oklahoma City Bombing (1995), the death of Diana, Princess of Wales (1997), the Columbine massacre (1999) or the September 11 terrorist attacks (2001).

The paper—part of a larger project examining the commemoration of John F. Kennedy—will examine the spontaneous memorials for the late President. Drawing from little-known archival resources and collections in Dallas and Boston, the paper will consider the collection and curation of artifacts from these memorials and consider the legacy of these events, and associated objects, six decades later. In doing so the paper will extend the timeline of scholarship on spontaneous memorials.

Biography

Nicole Sully is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Architecture, Design and Planning at the University of Queensland, where she teaches the history of modern architecture, and architectural design. Her research focuses on the interdisciplinary relationship of architecture and memory and critical reinterpretations of modernism. Nicole’s publications include: *Shifting Views: Selected Essays on the Architectural History of Australia and New Zealand*, (with Leach and Moulis, 2008); *Out of Place (Gwalia): Occasional essays on Australian regional*

communities and built environments in transition (with Goldswain and Taylor, 2014), "Architecture from the Ouija Board: Louis Kahn's Roosevelt Memorials and the Posthumous Monuments of Modernism", *Fabrications*, (2019); and "Urban Planning After JFK: Re-planning the 'City of Hate', (SAHANZ, 2020). Her current research projects focus on postwar commemoration in Europe, America and Australia.

Anne Whitehead, Newcastle University, UK

Title of proposal: Sounding the Angel: Recording the Grassroots Memorial at the Angel of the North

This paper reflects on my recent collaborative project with sound recordist David de la Haye to document the spontaneous memorial at the Angel of the North in a [sound work](#). The memorial, which has grown up in a stand of trees at the foot of the Angel, is unusual in that it responds to a work of public art rather than marking the site where an event (often a traumatic death) happened. Items placed in the trees, and sometimes on the Angel itself, commemorate the loved ones of those who leave the tributes, and the memorial has gradually evolved over a number of years. This paper focuses on the methodological implications of choosing to document the memorial – a highly visual site, responding to a highly visible sculpture – through the medium of sound. It is organised according to the three levels of recording that were edited into the sound work. (1) In-depth interviews with two people who have left memorial tributes at the Angel bring insights into their motivations for doing so, and what the act of leaving a tribute at the site has meant to them, enhancing our understanding of the psychological benefits of spontaneous memorialisation. (2) Field recordings made at the memorial site across the seasons of the year call attention to the memorial in the trees as inseparable from the sonic life of its surroundings, most notably the busy motorways nearby. This chimes with Phil Alexander's (2019) reflections on the Holocaust memorials in Berlin as soundscapes that challenge received ideas of memorial sites as spaces of silent retreat. (3) Finally, I reflect on the recordings of the Angel sculpture itself, made by David through contact microphones. These eerie creaks and drones capture the sounds of the traffic and the wind resonating through the hollow structure, and are suggestive of the deep underground foundations of the Angel, as well as the former coal mine on which it rests. Placed in conversation with the voices of the project participants, the contact-microphone recordings amplify their references to the ghosts of former mineworkers. They also speak of the multiple memorial significances of the site, with the Angel of the North intended by Antony Gormley to commemorate the mine workers who had laboured below.

Biography

Anne Whitehead is Professor of Modern and Contemporary Literature in the School of English at Newcastle University. She has published in memory studies, including *Memory: New Critical Idiom* (Routledge, 2008) and *Theories of Memory: A Reader* (Edinburgh University Press, 2007). More recently, Anne has worked in the medical humanities, and her publications include *The Edinburgh Companion to the Critical Medical Humanities* (Edinburgh University Press, 2016) and *Relating Suicide* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2023).

Shanshan Wu, University of Liverpool, UK

Vlogging as Spontaneous Memorial: Transcultural Narratives of Chinese Students in the UK During COVID-19

Spontaneous memorialisation often arises in response to crises, capturing lived experiences and emotions while serving as sites for collective memory. The COVID-19 pandemic presented unique challenges for Chinese international students in the UK, who faced the dual pressures of navigating an unfamiliar cultural environment while worrying about families and friends in

their home country. Many of them turned to vlogging to capture their daily lives during the pandemic. Despite the growing interest in digital memory practices, little research has explored how vlogging functions as an emerging online space for documenting and processing personal experiences in ways that resemble spontaneous memorialisation in the context of global crises.

In this paper, I investigated vlogging as a form of digital spontaneous memorialisation among Chinese international students in the UK in early 2020. Using qualitative content analysis, I analysed vlogs created by three students on the Chinese video platform Bilibili, focusing on their narratives, emotional expressions, and audience engagement, such as comments. These vlogs documented students' daily routines and emotional struggles while being isolated from family and their home country. They also encountered increased racial discrimination and reflected on the stark cultural contrasts between the UK and China's pandemic responses.

The findings highlighted that the vlogs captured moments of fear, resilience, and adaptation while fostering a sense of nostalgia and patriotism toward China. By analysing the audiences' comments on these vlogs, it became evident that vlogging created shared digital spaces for emotional support, community building, and transcultural dialogue, connecting audiences across physical boundaries. Vlogging not only documented the present in the face of dramatic global events but also served as a form of memorialisation. It helped key actors—including creators, international student communities, and a global audience—construct a collective memory of transcultural pandemic experiences.

By bridging the personal and collective, the vlogs reflected the dual role of digital media as both a coping mechanism and a memory archive. This study argued that vlogging represents a unique form of digital spontaneous memorialisation, offering new insights into how memory practices evolve in the digital age. By examining the intersection of personal expression, transcultural narratives, and collective memory, this research contributed to a broader understanding of the role of digital storytelling in collective grief and post-event individual and societal recovery.

Biography

Shanshan Wu is a second-year practice-based PhD student in Communication and Media at University of Liverpool, UK. With a background in film studies and filmmaking, she practices as an independent filmmaker and works as a writer, director, and producer for commercial agencies. Shanshan's artistic practice includes photography, experimental films, and video installations, which have been featured in a number of group exhibitions across China. Her research interests are digital media memories in everyday life and creative practice as research methods. Currently, Shanshan is developing an essay film as part of her PhD project, examining the transcultural memory of the COVID-19 pandemic through Chinese moving images.

Yves Samuel, Photographer, France

Fragments of Paris: Spontaneous Tributes after November 13

Biography

Yves Samuel is a French photographer specializing in portraiture. He works from his Parisian studio and also travels worldwide. His interest in portraits dates back to his first reportage assignments, and he has continuously honed his photographic technique to better capture faces and expressions. He photographs politicians, artists, writers, business leaders. His most recent projects focus on the following themes:

- Photographs of French Members of Parliament, for which he asked them to provide a handwritten document about their dreams at the age of 20. Yves Samuel plans to continue this work over the next decade.

- Large-format portraits of young individuals who turned 20 during the centenary of the First World War Armistice. Photographed in a place of their choice, each was asked to write a text envisioning their future lives. These individuals, all born on November 11, 1998, turned 20 on November 11, 2018. It juxtaposes these modern portraits and dreams with those of soldiers from the First World War.
- A series of landscape photographs, captured with his portraitist's eye: Mulholland Drive shrouded in mist, Plymouth before dawn.

Yves Samuel earns his living through press reportage, studio photography, and the sale of his photographs in limited editions.