Enacting Democracy: The National Mall Reflection Pool as a Living Memorial

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Abstract:

Traditional large reflective pools in Government complexes are the symbol of power but ironically not the democracy they allege to represent. This thesis proposes to transform those monuments into the symbols of the power of the people, the essence of democracy, by developing them into dynamic, nonprogram-specific, unoriginal scale, memorial space which is for individualism.

As a test case we will transform the Washington Mall, currently isolated from everyday urban life in Washington into a “living memorial”, explore and draw inspiration from a swamp, a landscape that is sensitive to changing ecological conditions, a strong metaphor to display democracy by going back to the reality and truth of this specific site.

“Living memorial undermined a long-standing iconography and shifted the terms of memorial practice away from what might be thought of as a set of rituals, drawing memorialization closer to leisure, recreation, and the desire for cohesive community.”

——John R. Parkinson, Democracy & Public Space
1. Water Tower

the scale difference between this space and the Washington monument makes it a ritual space.
2. Rain room

Rain inside a room.
3. Movement

“My memorial space should allow me to move around and reminds me of different moments that I shared with the ones who pasted away.”

The zig-zag passages creates dynamic space, movie clips are projected on the walls of the passage chronologically, only by travelling through the passage can a visitor view the whole movie.
4. Dialogue with the self and with time

For whatever we lose (like a you or a me), It’s always our self we find in the sea.” -- E.E. Cummings

A memory is dialogue with oneself, an introspective journey with one’s cherished moments. The globular shape reflects and magnifies sound of whispers, footsteps and the sound of water dripping from the oculus. The visitors are thus acutely aware of themselves while also of the passage of time marked by water drops.
5. Light matters

Light passing through the water always creating a sense of mysterious and ambiguous.
6. Floating gardens.

“I wish to have a garden in a memorial space, because they are about the hope that the living should always have, about Nature that embraces us all. “

The gardens are surrounded by shallow pools. Looking from outside the memorial, the visitors/ gardeners are appear to be half hidden in the water.
7. Long A River

This space emphasizes the fluidity of water in contrast to the static reflection pool of the Washington Monument. On an artificial landscape of an hourglass shaped ramp, a stream of water flows down with the visitor, as if one is moving along a riverbank.
8. Excavated altar

Time moves in one direction, memory in another. -- William Gibson
The Mayan pyramids are the Tlahihualtepeltl, “artificial hill” that reach towards the gods. The steps in the inverted steeped pyramid here lead one downwards, to an altar that connect oneself with ones’ origin.
9. A place to rest

Rest is not idleness, and to lie sometimes on the grass under trees on a summer’s day, listening to the murmur of the water, or watching the clouds float across the sky, is by no means a waste of time. – John Lubbock

Inspired by a friend, who wishes for the memorial to be a place where she/he can gaze at the sky, protected from the streets and in silence relive the moment of with the cherished love ones.
10. “Heightened” landscape

The National mall is an open space characterized by its flatness. This space contrasts the flatness of the Mall through a simple gesture of partial coverage by a low water ceiling over a monolithic and somewhat irregular landscape. The ceiling brings out the sculptural qualities of the ground.
11. Journey to the sublime

A narrow and tall space evokes the sublime, like a passage through the halls of a gothic cathedral.
12. Projection room

(Documenting time by the light slit traveling across the wall. )
Provides a space where Washington Memorial lacks: where veterans can gather and watch projections, slide shows or photos of their old friends.
13. Clock

As visitors move around the circular passage, they are confronted by the endless array of clocks. In contrast to the outside path that relentlessly reminds one of the passage of time, the clean and naturally lit central space stands out as a sanctuary.
14. Unorthodox memorial for Individuals

Inverted scattered pyramids are the opposite image of the Washington memorial that stands on the mirror side of the ground surface. Their forms are inspired by that of the pyramids or the obelisk, both grandiose monuments for nations. However, through irregular tilt and perforation they stand at the opposite side of the conventional.
15. Water walls

We mostly view water as horizontal and formless. This space distorts that perspective by making water into walls, transforming them into vertical elements that seem to hold up the ceiling.
16. Water web

water flow in a curved way, enecting a web system
17. The weight of the water

Through an undulating water ceiling, the visitors experience the depth and weight of water.
18. Graveyard of time

Vertical arrays of glass tubes are inspired by the matrix of white grave yard crosses. Instead of static solid forms, they are transparent while illuminated at the top. The flow of water inside evokes further the passage of time/memory.