

Ignored by critics

The article by Nicole Sully (arq 14.2, pp. 115–128) is a fine piece of analysis and a competent examination of the various official and informal memorial sites for the late Diana, Princess of Wales. Along the lines of prevailing contemporary views and assessments about memorials exemplified in this case by the reference to ‘Memory and Counter-memory: The End of the Monument in Germany’ by James E. Young, the author presents an analytical argument in respect to the diverse nature of Diana’s commemorative sites. In addition to being a study worthy of note, the importance of this article is in the fact that it fills in a specific lacuna in architectural criticism. The Diana memorial sites have hardly been discussed in architectural journals and very little in periodicals in general.

The muted response by architectural critics is also disproportionate to the quiet but significant popularity which the princess commanded among artists and architects, best exemplified by Diana’s highly publicised appearances such as at the Serpentine Gallery or at the Tate. These kind of engagements stood in tacit opposition to the more conservative architectural policies promoted by her former husband, indicating that Diana’s friends and contacts were from the Modernist rather than the traditionalist camp.

In her account Sully quotes Mark Cousins, who argued that the nature of modern memory is self-referential. In other words, our references to Diana are about ourselves, best exemplified in people referring to the places or to the occasions where they had heard the news about the fatal accident. Consequently within this dynamic, once the referent disappears the public will gradually find another focus to relate to. Due to the excessive media exposure, the images that memory uses to maintain itself become overused and exhausted, steadily losing their appeal and potency. Unlike the traditional religious icons that were not so readily available at all times, the well-circulated modern *eidola* easily wear out and lose power to incorporate new significations. Therefore any possible new meaning bounces back, leaving the image with only one denotation – the last one. This is often the news announcement that will signify the rupture to the private reverie-cum-dialogue that people have with the figures in



2 Official memorial to Diana, Princess of Wales: Le Jardin du Clos des Blancs-Manteaux, Paris



3 Unofficial memorial: Flamme de la Liberté, Place de l’Alma, Paris

media. The image and the memory of Diana are therefore not filled-in with contemplation about her life, her joys and sorrows or her sacrifice for the good of the nation. Truly this public image has always been an empty signifier. Instead the memory drifts, becoming related to the viewer’s own experience. This mechanism is at the heart of what Sully portrays.

Another crucial point is the analysis of both the official memorial parks in London and Paris, and the unofficial sites such as the one at Pont de l’Alma Tunnel and the shrine erected by Mohamed Al Fayed in Harrods, London. Through Sully’s examination, we obtain a clear indication of how official sites have a tendency to put Diana ‘in her place’. This transpires in the case of a meagre, hardly visible garden memorial that has been allocated for the princess in

Paris and in the persistent sentiments of inadequacy, failure and defectiveness that surround the Diana Memorial Fountain in London’s Hyde Park. The author’s own photograph of the dilapidated signage at the entrance to Le Jardin du Clos des Blancs-Manteaux gives a clear indication how the power of the state manages to effectively put down rebellious femininity while apparently endorsing it with honours. The story of London’s official memorial(s) is apparently more complex, where complexity is another strategy for the systematic watering down of energy that was publicly mobilised in the grief for a confused and unsettled princess. Sully perceives how the unofficial memorials incorporate what might be seen as anti-establishment protest. This seems to be their true source of power. The unofficial, improvised and unresolved site at

Alma tunnel and the overdone kitsch presentation in Harrods are sad and unattractive places but still capture the public's imagination. Their success testifies to the inadequate official representation of the memory of this popular and well-loved figure.

The apparently innovative strategies that were to celebrate Diana's care for charities and her love for children did not manage to successfully establish their legacy. The London fountain seems to enforce the self-referential aspect of memory's contemporary condition. The gates of Kensington Palace remained the most potent memorial site for the public as this is the focus where flowers are laid for her anniversaries. The continuing confusion stands in sharp contrast to a very conservative memorial for the Queen Mother. Her effigy was unveiled in 2009 and has been widely praised by both the public and the media. Sully concludes that the public was seemingly unprepared for the commemorative gestures they demanded for Diana, Princess of Wales. The establishment in the meantime has put up a temporary fence as the refurbishment of the Kensington Palace surrounds is undertaken. The results remain to be seen.

GORDANA FONTANA-GIUSTI
Canterbury

Gordana Fontana-Giusti is Professor of Regional Regeneration and Director of Research at the Kent School of Architecture, Canterbury

The question of evidence

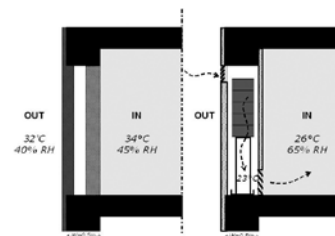
I can't remember who quipped that England and America are two countries separated by a common language, but the article 'The Question of Evidence' (arq 14.2, pp. 105–114) certainly supports the observation. It took me until the third page to realise that 'environmental design' was not what we mean very specifically by that in the UK – the physics-based process of reducing the impact of buildings on the physical environment – but simply the 'design of environments', specifically medical environments. Chastened, I began again, not wanting to short-change the two thoughtful writers. Then I realised I didn't know what was meant by 'evidence' either. A definition of sorts can be inferred from the second page:

'evidence-based design (EBD) is "the natural parallel and analogue to evidence-based medicine" [...] For its part, evidence-based medicine emphasises the use of research evidence generated through the scientific method as the basis for patient care'. Again, the British reader needs some editorial help. 'EBD' seems to be a hot topic in the States and the authors quite naturally assume that their readership is au fait with its complexities. One is therefore parachuted into the middle of a debate that, to the uninitiated, doesn't make much sense.

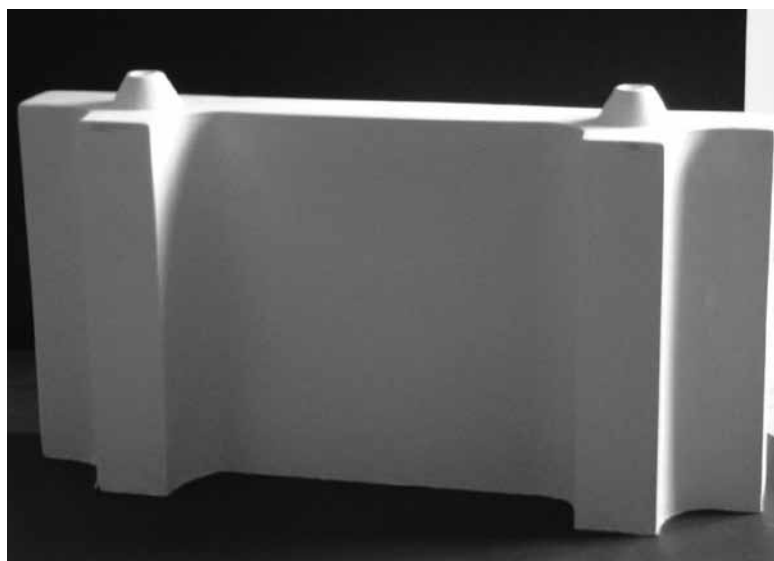
Evidence-based medicine relies on 'research evidence generated through the scientific method'. Evidence-based *design* delivers the spaces in which healthcare is developed and delivered, and by implication therefore also relies on 'research evidence generated through the scientific method', for example: the mapping of patients' survival and recovery rates, of staff efficiency levels, of medically and financially effective spatial organisation etc. In other words, a high performance industry has stimulated the development of a high performance design specialism – evidence-based design – both of which rely on the analysis of empirical data to formulate strategies. So far so good. What doesn't make sense is the authors' dissatisfaction with this. Or is it simply that I'm ignorant of the extent to which some American architects are impatient with the dominance of ill-defined design problems and overly intuitive solutions and are looking to EBD to introduce a little rigour? In which case, the authors' warning about EBD as a design

model for buildings other than instrumental medical buildings makes sense, as they quite rightly maintain that EBD doesn't include other ways of knowing and other forms of research more typical of a broader spectrum design process. The reader remains unclear as to whether 'environmental design' is ever intended to mean more than the design of healthcare buildings. If it isn't, then the authors are presumably saying that, even within the confines of [medical] 'environmental design', designs are generated by more than simply hard data, and that medical buildings should be more than simply machines if they are to be 'healing' as well as efficient. A point with which one can hardly quarrel; but was that the point?

Interestingly, if 'environmental' had meant in this article what it means in the UK, the same discussion would pertain. Like EBD, the empiricism of [ecological] environmental design is also criticised as an inadequate model for the design process and its architectural outcomes, even if it does introduce greater rigour to both. The ecological interpretation of 'environment', however, is much more pervasive. It is embedded in architecture, and always has been.



5 Integration of a porous ceramic system into an existing perimeter wall (before—left and after—right)



4 Stacking ceramic prototype, part of an experimental evaporative cooling system