

THE LINEN MEMORIAL

State and Sectarian Violence in Northern Ireland, 1966–present

LYCIA DANIELLE TROUTON

Total Killed During the troubles:
over 3,712

Responsibility for Deaths:

State violence: 367

Loyalists: approximately 1,050

Republicans: approximately 2,140

Those Killed:

Civilians: approximately 2,040

Catholic: approximately 1,235

Protestant: approximately 700

(McKittrick et al., pp.1479–83)

This brief article explains the non-hierarchical listing of all ‘Troubles’ deaths in the inclusive *Irish Linen Memorial* (renamed *The Linen Memorial* in 2007) — killings for which various persons/groups on either side of the political divide, as well as the security forces, were responsible. The artwork-memorial can be read as an anti-monument. *The Linen Memorial* (hereafter LM) acts as a ‘modest witness’¹ in reordering relationships and engaging a parity of esteem between Nationalist/Republican (‘Catholic’) and Loyalist/Unionist (‘Protestant’) communities² during the post-1998 period when Northern Ireland is emerging from conflict.

The use of the linen handkerchief as symbolic for heartfelt grief was what inspired me to use it, as a building block, to create a non-traditional and mobile memorial³ to those killed in the sectarian violence, commonly called The Troubles, in Northern Ireland.

DESCRIPTION

The Linen Memorial as a creative project can help develop alternative narratives about the Northern Ireland community(ies) in our postcolonial times. It was created with Canada Council funding in early 2001, and has been exhibited in North America and Australia, and has recently travelled to Ballycastle, Northern Ireland, in 2008. My project is made of approximately 400 handkerchiefs and almost 4,000 names, dating from 1966–2000,⁴ printed and overstitched.⁵ It is a ‘living monument’ and, as such, continues to be exhibited site-specifically⁶ (or site-contextually) while the crafting process is on-going, inspiring contributions by artists/musicians/performers, and visitors/mourners who are leaving a growing collection of personal mementoes. The LM is a sculptural marker in the project of re-working a common middle ground in Northern Ireland’s communities. It is a visual arts en-

deavour which helps inspire pluralism and diversity; possible re-worked definitions of nationalism (nationalism used in this sense, in contemporary Irish ethnography, precludes associations with Republican/Catholic struggle). It also forms temporary spaces where fragile connections may be made.⁷ The memorial is not fixed, as in a traditional sculpture or structure, but is *mobile*, because a *neutral* site for such a project in Northern Ireland remains an impossibility.⁸

The particular materiality of the memorial is as important as content, form and site. I chose linen because flax farming and linen manufacture were central to the industrialisation and colonisation of Northern Ireland from the later 1700s into the early twentieth century. Linen can be a reference for the universal body, so that while the units are handkerchiefs, the linen symbolically honours the wounded body with a timeless and eternal reminder of the ritual of the ancient death shroud. Hand-embroidery is time-consuming and symbolically illustrates that grieving, and dealing with the anxiety/trauma, is a protracted process. The *LM* claims to be a humble artwork: non-heroic in its materiality, its crafted methodology and in the manner of its presentation as an installation artwork. In my first exhibition of the *LM*, I entitled the work: 'Between Worlds: The Common Body' which asks, 'Whatever one's political, religious, class or ethnic background, perhaps we are all equal, and of the same community, when we die?' The chronological listing⁹ of the names, with which this 'living memorial' is made possible, is derived from the book *Lost Lives*.¹⁰ An accurate chronological names list (and entries which describe the moments before each person's death) took

seasoned Belfast journalists seven years of research.¹¹

My memorial is situated in the intersection between the grief and bitterness caused by sectarian divisiveness. With the different interactive exhibitions of the *LM* over time, various alternative tropes of the relationship between the dead and the living are developed. These are necessary for new schemes of knowledge and social practice for the survivors and the living. It has been hung in various configurations: in a tomb-like formation (Seattle, 2001); as a mourning ritual of inverted catenary arches (Canberra, 2004); as a horizontal quilt (Wollongong, 2005). The 2002 and 2004 configurations involved two Australian collaborators: composer Tom Fitzgerald and choreographer Elizabeth Cameron Dalman and her Mirramu Dance Company. In 2002 Fitzgerald composed 'The Seeming Insanity of Forgiveness,' a complex sonic surround performed at The Long Gallery in Wollongong in honour of the Day of the Dead. Fitzgerald's composition (an excerpt of which is included in this volume) also accompanied the memorial at Canberra's Craft ACT in February 2004. Most recently the *LM* was hung vertically from the skylights in The Crói building at the Corrymeela Centre for Peace and Reconciliation, Northern Ireland (www.corrymeela.org) for the first Day of Private Reflection on the conflict in Northern Ireland, 21 June 2007. At this event every name recorded in *Lost Lives* was read aloud (see www.dayofprivatereflection.com and www.healingthroughremembering.org).

The full listing of individual lives in the *LM* raises a larger aesthetic and ethical question: What effects does the inclusive

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list of names produce in regards to the audience/proposed audience of visitors from the general public and mourners of loved ones? As McKittrick et al., the authors of *Lost Lives*, states, 'Since the deaths are listed chronologically, their sequence provides, in effect, an alternative history [as opposed to an official history] of the troubles.'¹² When such a narrative is re-created through embroidery on linen squares it suggests that slow, recuperative work is needed to examine the failings of Northern Ireland's past, and re-thread a hopeful sense of the future. The project works against a Northern Ireland culture where violent community relations have been the norm for the last 30 years. The memorial attempts to create spaces where a delicate 'parity of esteem' can be held, even temporarily, between individuals and groups of differently-perceived backgrounds in contemporary Northern Ireland, emerging from conflict.



Detail of linen handkerchief and chain stitch embroidery by Margot Damon or Maureen Trouton. Craft ACT Gallery and Design Centre. February 2004 Photo Credit: Creative Imaging, Canberra

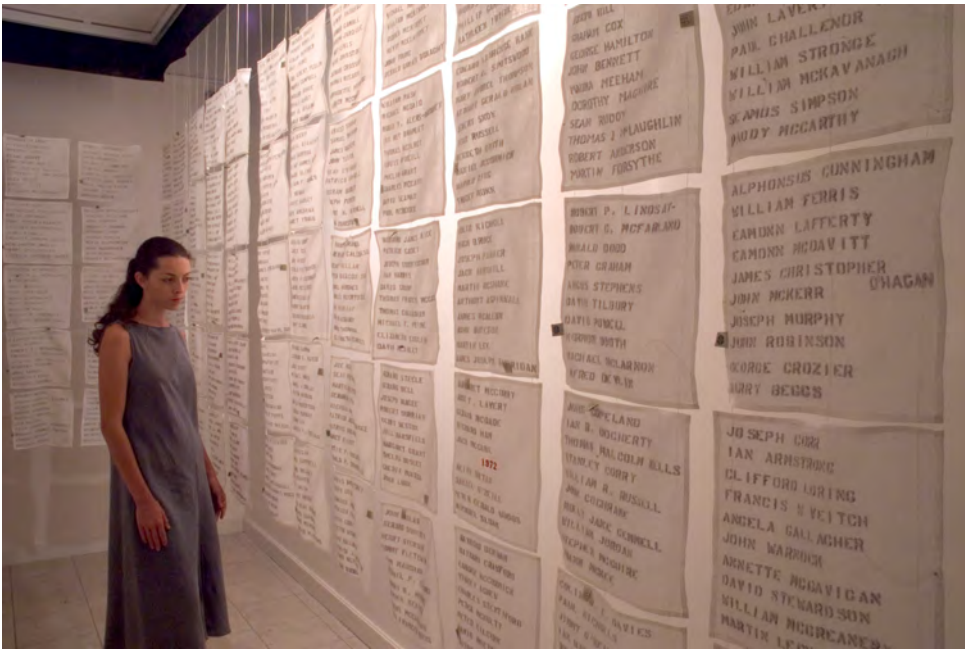


Linen Memorial Choreographer Elizabeth Cameron Dalman and the Mirramu Dance Company Craft ACT Gallery and Design Centre. February 2004 Photo Credit: Creative Imaging, Canberra

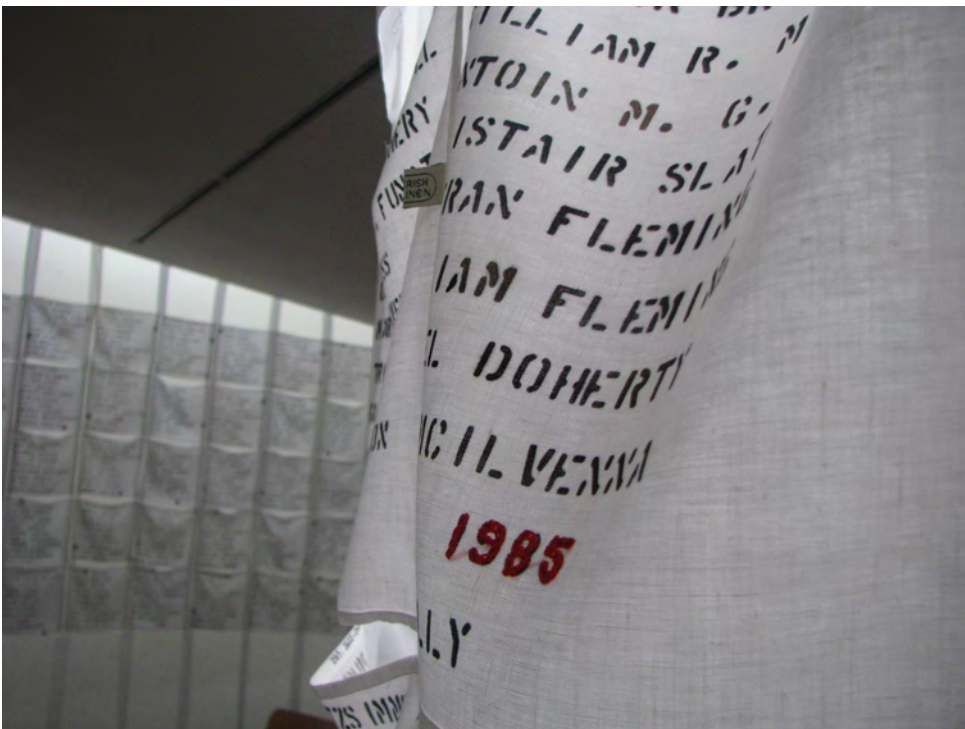


Linen Memorial: printed handkerchiefs University of Wollongong , Faculty Gallery February 2005 Photo Credit: Sean Maguire Model: Jo Ann (Bodie) O'Dell

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Linen Memorial Approximately 150 Embroidered handkerchiefs. Chain stitch embroidery by sisters Margot Damon and Maureen Trouton (née McGladdery), aunt and mother of artist University of Wollongong, Faculty Gallery February 2005 Photo Credit: Sean Maguire Model: Jo Ann (Bodie) O'Dell in rough linen dress

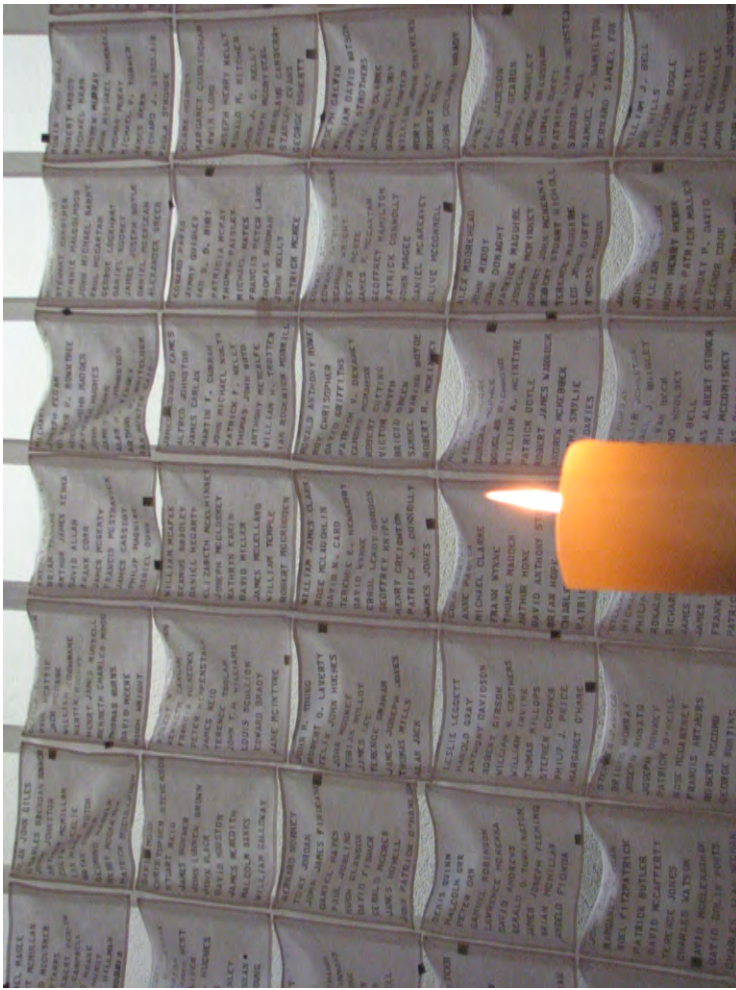


Corrymeela Centre for Peace and Reconciliation Ballycastle, Northern Ireland June 21st 2007 Photo Credit: Christian Guevara



Linen Memorial Dimly lit long corridor into the memorial-installation space University of Wollongong , Faculty Gallery February 2005 Photo Credit: Sean Maguire Model: Jo Ann (Bodie) O'Dell in rough linen dress

The Linen Memorial



Corrymeela Centre for Peace and Reconciliation Ballycastle, Northern Ireland June 21st 2007 Photo Credit: Christian Guevara

ENDNOTES

¹ Donna Haraway, *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium. Femaleman©_Meets_Oncomouse™: Feminism and Technoscience*, Routledge, London, 1997. A modest witness, according to Haraway's concept, is one who attends to the stories produced about the world: 'Changing the stories, in both material and semiotic senses, is a modest intervention worth making' (p.45).

² See developments in cross-community relations in Lizanne Dowds (August 2004), 'Public attitudes', in Northern Ireland Devolution Monitoring Report, *Economic and Social Research Council*, Leverhume Trust pp.23-5 www.ucl.ac.uk/constitutionunit/mon-rep/ni/ni_august_2004.pdf

³ As opposed to a traditional or official monument made from stone, bronze, glass and/or steel.

⁴ I am obtaining the information needed to list subsequent deaths into the present. See <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/features/daily-features/article2144668.ece>

⁵ The handiwork in the memorial has been completed to date by the main embroiderer, my aunt Margot Damon (a professional Home Economics academic), and her sister, my mother, Maureen Trouton, who has also helped (but only, she says, as a 'utilitarian needleworker'). My maternal aunt lives in England, and my mother in Canada; both are originally from Belfast (née McGladdery) and grew up in Armagh, N. Ireland. Also, other needleworkers on the memorial are Edith Morriott of Berridale, and Nerida (a professional quilter) and Glenys Richmond Benson, sisters who both live in Leura, NSW, Australia.

⁶ Site-specific or site-contextual sculpture is not object-oriented and reflects shifts in art-making over the last 40 years and, in particular, in my training at Cranbrook Art Academy, Michigan, USA, 1989-91 under Michael Hall and Joseph Wesner. For example, a site-consciousness is developed and integrated between the art, the surrounding architecture, the landscape/environment, as well as through the artist's consultation with socio-political issues of the site (sometimes obtained through meetings with administrators/managers, urban planners/designers, local interest groups, marginalised groups/persons or politically-conscious programs/events). Some practitioners or theorists separate definitions, such as community-based public art or art-in-the-public-interest, art in public places, or sculpture as public space.

⁷ A 'principled' place where commonality and diversity can exist and new connections may be imagined and performed; this is as opposed to a 1970s weak middle ground of the Alliance Party which conceals a middle-class privilege. See Elizabeth Porter, 'Identity, location, plurality: women, nationalism and Northern Ireland' in *Women, Ethnicity and Nationalism: the politics of transition*, Eds Rick Wilford and Robert J. Miller, London or New York Routledge, 1988, p.54.

⁸ In personal correspondence to me in 2001, replying to a letter I had sent him about my project, Brian Feeney, on behalf of the authors of *Lost Lives*, emphasised just this point. Lycia Trouton, unpublished thesis, 2005, University of Wollongong, appendix p.277b

⁹ In 1987, when I was at art school in Pittsburgh, USA, my Jewish professor of Cultural Theory, Richard (Dick) Schoenwald, alerted us to the incredible impact of Maya Lin's Vietnam Veteran's Memorial, a reconciliatory monument, which also inspired my creation. The chronological listing of names is as crucial as the architectonic structure, materials chosen and site. The narrative that is formed by the proximity of the names and the experiential journey of finding an individual's name amidst the larger listing seems to aid in the grief and healing process.

¹⁰ McKittrick et al., op. cit.

¹¹ The book itself has been considered a memorial. I consider it a mobile, counter-monument itself. *Lost Lives* has been described, according to John O'Farrell, as a book of resurrection and an act of 'public service journalism at its finest'. Nell McCafferty states that, '*Lost Lives* is the first book of its kind ... anywhere in the world, to document every, single person to die in a specific conflict' (McKittrick et al., flysheet).

When I presented the project at the conference 'Pain and Death: Politics, Aesthetics and Legalities' for the Centre for Cross-Cultural Research, The Australian National University, Tom Fitzgerald performed part of the original sonic-scape he composed in 2002 as a contribution to the *LM*. An extract from this sonic-scape is available at http://epress.anu.edu.au/hrj/2007_02/Forgiveness.mp3

Tom Fitzgerald has composed a diverse range of music for film and television projects, as well as for live concert and musical theatre events. He has performed with well-known pop artists, Australian orchestras and contemporary ensembles, and has played for Broadway musicals. Collaborating with multi-media artists, he directs One Earth Orchestra, whose 'wild' expressive style blends contemporary electric sounds, orchestral and tribal textures, frequently incorporating improvisation within scored sections of material and spoken word.

¹² McKittrick et al., op. cit., p.13.