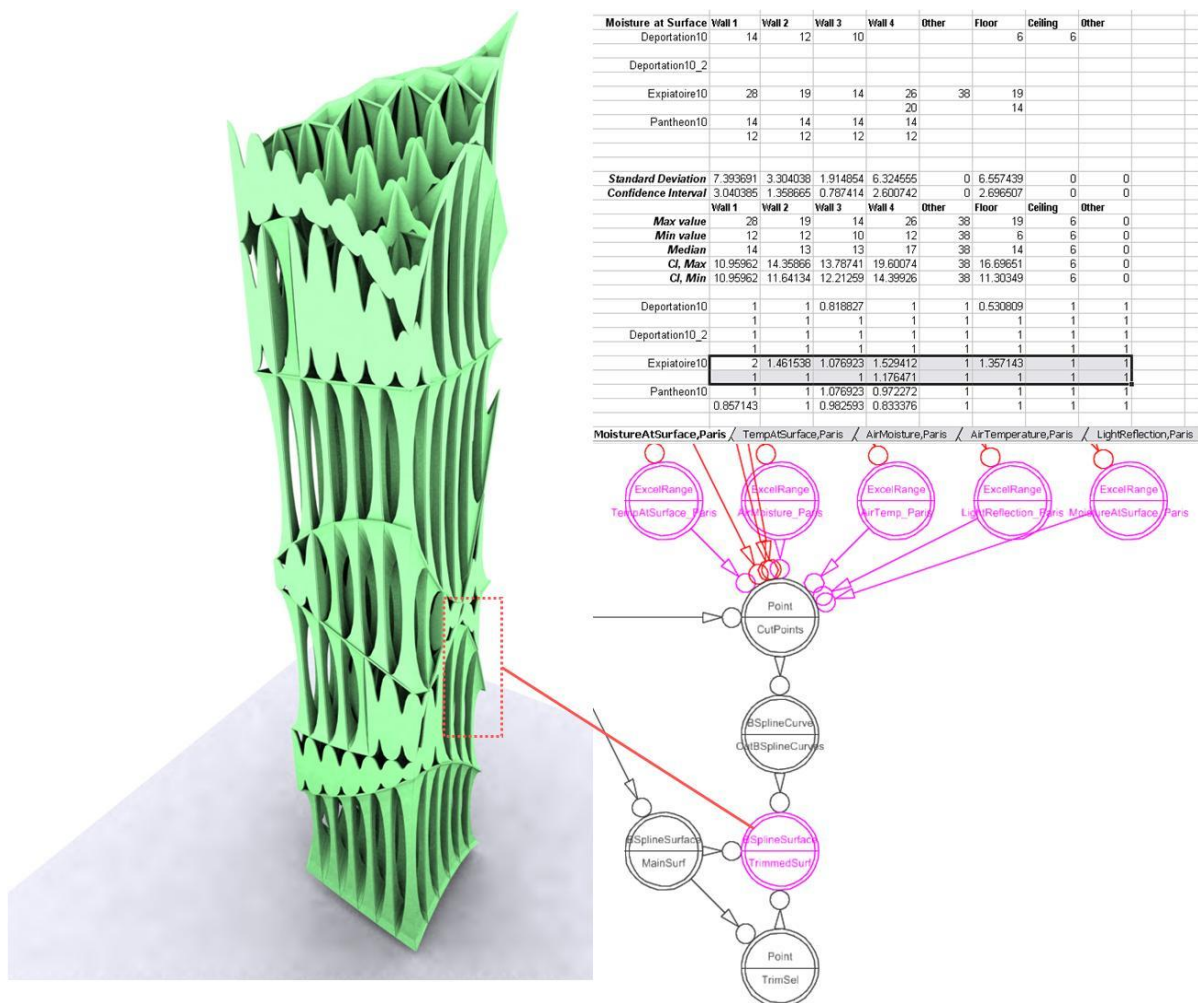


Marie-Antoinette and the Beauty of the Scar

Philippe Campays

Marie-Antoinette, ayez pitie!¹ *La Chapelle Expiatoire* that once housed your remains has been ignored, then confined, despised, like a blemish on the pure and porcelain skin of Paris, a lesion masked with vegetation, hidden as the face is powdered over: presentable, beautiful. The drawing of a sculpture has been created to reveal a new truth and dimension of the history of your commemorative space² and to give a rare insight into the embodied experience of such place.

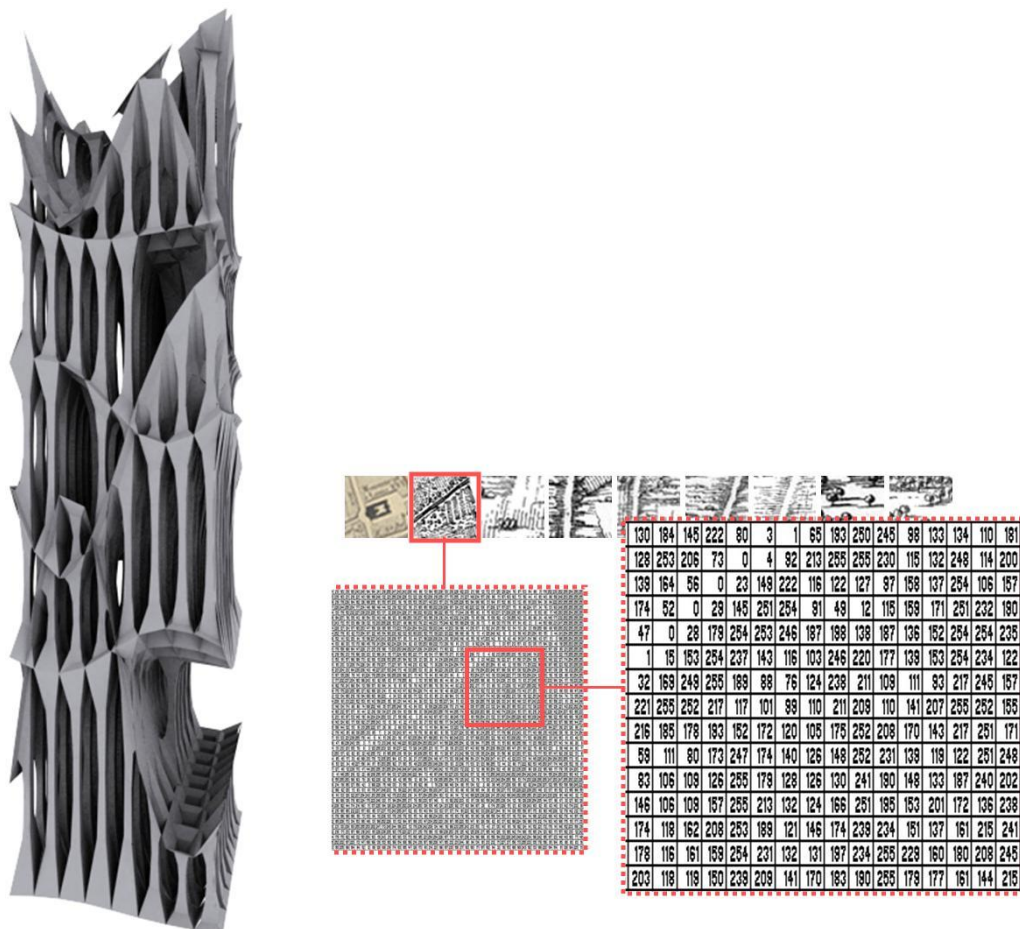
A digital sculpture is being designed to test whether a direct relationship can be established between the experience of mood in a memorial, and the visual representation of invisible elements in its environment. This project is part of a larger body of work focusing on settings of high emotional content such as haunted spaces, cemeteries and places of trauma, of slavery or holocausts.

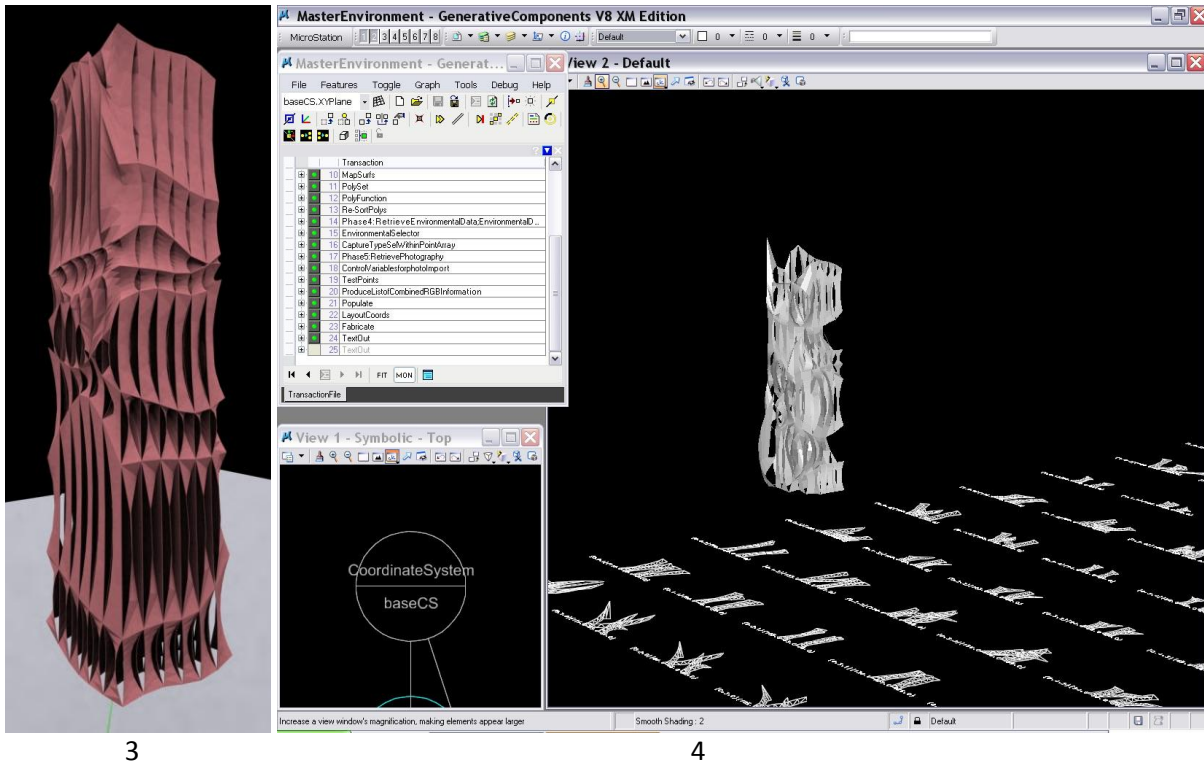


Expiatoire site with component reacting to internal data from the site.

In a first stage the site data is collected then gradually revealed to an external interpreter for visual representation with no or limited expectation on the outcome. This is performed in order to distance the process of interpretation and its resulting images from the initial collector's emotional experience of site. One could argue that this underlying attempt to test the notion of emotion transposition resides in the domain of artistic expression rather than in scientific verification. As an outcome, processes of abstraction and diagramming are deployed to generate a composite image of the site. Physical data from the building influencing the pre-reflective experience of the occupant is gathered including temperature, light and air qualities (picture 1).

This data is categorised as mood determinates³ which are overlayed with a sample of the palimpsest of written and visual representations of the site. In this particular project, layers of historical maps and drawings of the urban fabric across centuries, from the Roman Empire to the 19th century occupations of the building site are considered (picture 2), reinterpreted and processed into three-dimensional form (pictures 03, 04). Through the consideration of this imagery a digital sculpture is generated.





In a second stage the recreation of an emotive experience of the memorial is intended through the examination of this digital expression. It is presented to viewers unaware of the content, the story, and the representational process, with the intention of observing their emotional responses to such personal encounter. Subsequently it is commonly reported that experiencing the viewing of the sculpture, a cold numbness ensues, an ache, an inexplicable nostalgia, a sense of loss; then, the viewers are drifting in waves of reverence. Beyond the digital performance itself, the assessment of success of such artistic evocation may be limited to the commonality found between these emotive responses and their alignment to the mood initially experienced in the space itself.

I propose that the digital sculpture reveals the history of site and gives a rare insight into the embodied experience of commemorative space. Through this art form one explores the unconscious and emotive response to *La Chapelle Expiatoire* creating a rare and unusual experience; the emotional experience of architecture generated by a digital sculpture. The sculptural language of fragmentation, abnormality and deformation (pictures 05, 06, 07, 08) evokes a revenge on an unwanted woman, a despised presence. This dislike is revealed in the darkness of the sculpture, shame hidden in its depths, cloaked so it cannot emerge in light to offend our eyes and disrupt our sense of the beautiful, of the pure and radiant face of the city.











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The sculpture is a tribute, evocative of suffering and of dismemberment. In understanding the history of site, the ugliness is reconciled and no longer viewed as a blotch but as blossom, the antagonising and unpleasant becomes attractive, alluring, angelic. The scar holds beauty. The sculpture offers the possibility of empathy, understanding and awareness.

Note:

I wish to acknowledge the contribution of Matthew Randell, Stephanie Liddicoat and Paul James.

¹ Marie-Antoinette, have pity!

² The *Chapelle Expiatoire* was designed as a commemorative building dedicated to the memory of King Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette. It was built between 1815 and 1826 on the site of the old revolutionary mass grave where the King and Queen's bodies had been originally buried soon after their respective execution. During the period of Restoration (of monarchy) architect Pierre Fontaine (Prix de Rome 1785) was engaged by Louis XVIII to design the edifice, to house 'victims of the Revolution'. Never accepted by Imperial and later Republican France, this discreet and introverted building had been subjected to either ignorance or threat of destruction. For political reason, the building is seen as '*a permanent insult to the aspirations of the French Republic*' and does not appear in any architectural record or dictionary until the 1970s when art historians renewed interest on that specific architectural period of history.

³ The consideration of invisible conditions of site as mood determinates correlates to Dr Terman's work on the effect of ionisation on mood shifts, further illustrated by Philippe Rahm's art installations.