

Beyond the Accident Republic: Making Life and Safety with Disaster Memorials in Korea*

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Figure 1. “Press Conference On the Government’s Proper Response to Disasters to Ensure Victims’ Rights.” 2023.¹

Received July 7, 2023; Reviewed July 29, 2023; Accepted August 29, 2023.

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.36092/KJHS.2023.45.2.365>

* This work was supported by the National Research Foundation of Korea (NRF) grant funded by the Korean government (MSIT) (NRF-2018R1A5A7025409). We would like to thank Prof. Buhm Soon Park and the staff of the KAIST Center for Anthropocene Studies (CAS) for their support. Also, we would like to express our sincere gratitude to Youngkwan Ban, Jaehwan Hyun, Yunjeong Joo, Jinyoung Park, Ryuma Shineha, and three anonymous reviewers for helpful and considerate comments.

On February 18, 2023, at Jungang-ro Station, where 192 people died after being engulfed in flames, disaster victims from all over the country stood side by side with the bereaved families of the Daegu subway disaster in front of the ‘Wall of Remembrance’, where the burnt public phone boxes and items left by the victims were displayed. Victims of the Sewol Ferry Disaster, the Inhyeondong Fire Disaster, the Humidifier Disinfectant Disaster, the Tae'an Marine Corps Private Camp Disaster, the Stella Daisy Tragedy, the Sampoong Department Store Disaster, and the Sea Land Disaster demand complete remembrance of the Daegu subway disaster and to never repeat such disasters again. We promised to hold each other's hands.²

Memorial Work

In the winter of 2023 a truly extraordinary gathering of survivors and bereaved family members took place in Daegu, South Korea. The attendees were each witnesses to the worst moments in contemporary Korean history. Marking the grim 20th anniversary of the Daegu Subway Disaster, these activists and survivors were convened by the 4.16 Foundation—an organization founded by bereaved family members of Sewol Ferry Disaster victims—with the goal of sharing their stories, taking comfort in the unique solidarity of their shared experiences, and with the ostensible goal of establishing a Disaster Victims’ Rights Advocacy Center.

The 4.16 Life and Safety Park is not yet built, ground is not even yet broken, but already an enormous amount of “memorial work” has gone into the project. Memorial work in Korea is more than just making architectural plans. In Korea since the 1980s, memorial work has taken to mean multiple different types of activities—scientific investigation to determine causes, forensic investigation to identify victims, land development to rehabilitate disaster sites, selection and construction of memorials, and political struggles over the rights of disaster victims—each of which has evolved over time to shape the 4.16 memorial process. In this article we trace each

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¹ “Disaster Victims’ Meeting: A Powerful First Step for the National Disaster Victims Network [재난피해자 모임] 전국 재난피해자 네트워크의 힘찬 첫걸음!,” 4.16 Foundation 4.16재단, <https://416foundation.org/>(accessed on May 31, 2023).

² Ibid.

of these types of memorial work through disaster memorialization cases in Daegu, Seoul, and Ansan to arrive at the point of a ground-breaking moment.

Defining this as “memorial work” is an intentional analytical move intended to show the activity of bereaved families and survivors and the necessity of the expertise they have developed in order to advocate for disaster justice. They are not passive victims, and the actions they take to establish and maintain memorials are complex, reflecting hard-won skills. Many of these skills are technical, scientific, even forensic (determining causes for investigative or crime-solving purposes)—a necessity given the deeply technological nature of the disasters that reshaped their lives or took the lives of their loved ones. It is a major theme of the articles in this special issue: over the past 30 years CCTV and the mass application of surveillance technologies, DNA analysis and victim identification, ubiquitous personal communication devices, and social media have utterly transformed the ways that the public apprehends disasters; and these new technologies have transformed the methods through which disasters are investigated. As such, the memorial work of victims’ rights activists now includes scientific and technical skills as well.³

The activists also bear what psychologist Robert F. Lifton terms “the wisdom of survivors”—and among the many, many ways this wisdom collects is in their special knowledge of the struggle to memorialize, to build memory and translate loss into positive social change.⁴ The wisdom, not inherent in just one person or group, has proven to be cumulative over the past three decades of Korean life. But what has been learned about the path to memorialization, what tactics do more recent survivors take from survivors of earlier disasters? In what ways might this learning be discoverable through public processes, like forensic investigations, political organizing, community-building, and the battles over where and how to build memorial structures? This article aims to address these questions through close examination of the Sampoong Department Store, Daegu Subway, and Sewol Ferry disaster

³ Kim Fortun, Scott Gabriel Knowles, Vivian Choi, Paul Jobin, Miwao Matsumoto, Pedro de la Torre III, Max Liboiron, and Luis Felipe R. Murillo, “Researching Disaster from an STS Perspective,” in Ulrike Felt, Rayvon Fouché, Clark A. Miller and Laurel Smith-Doerr (eds.), *The Handbook of Science and Technology Studies* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2016), 1003–1028; On disaster investigations, see also, Sheila Jasanoff (ed.), *Learning from Disaster: Risk Management after Bhopal* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994); Stephen Hilgartner, “Overflow and Containment in the Aftermath of Disaster,” *Social Studies of Science* 37:1 (2007), 153–158; Scott G. Knowles, “Learning from Disaster? The History of Technology and the Future of Disaster Research,” *Technology and Culture* 55:4 (2014), 773–784; Scott G. Knowles, “Learning from Disaster? New Directions in Disaster Investigations,” *Natural Hazards Observer* 39 (2015), 16–20; Diane Vaughan, *The Challenger Launch Decision: Risky Technology, Culture, and Deviance at NASA* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Diane Vaughan, “The Dark Side of Organizations: Mistakes, Misconduct and Disasters,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 25:1 (1999), 271–305.

⁴ Robert J. Lifton, *Death in Life: Survivors of Hiroshima* (North Carolina: Univ of North Carolina Press, 1968).

memorialization narratives. In each we will note that the political context of democratization sets the backdrop of expanding public expectation of a technically-competent, ethical, and memorial-minded government.

Disaster memorialization in South Korea is a social process that involves much more than government funded architectural competitions. Bereaved families fight for preferred sites (sometimes losing), they build coalitions like any interest group, and their memorialization efforts take on meaning as artifacts and narratives emerge through which to represent their loss, and their hopes. These are too-often overlooked in the rush to close the disaster and move on in the period of time in which memorials are shaped. This is, in the life of the disaster, the grieving period for families. It is the time in which survivors suffer bodily and psychologically. It is the time in which public support often swings from strong solidarity, to apathy, and sometimes to hostility. The process and period of struggle is in itself a crucial stage of memorialization, one that largely disappears from the record in the end, when all focus shifts to the permanent architectural memorial. The site fights, artifact preservation and choices, the education efforts—all of these are memorials, temporary ones, fleeting ones. But the record is a crucial one if we are to understand the ways that public memory works in a democratic society, and the ways that bereaved families perform “memorial work” not as a closed or singular act, but rather as an ongoing process of interlocking activities. Indeed, protecting the rights of the bereaved emerges as a signal test of democratization in this era of Korean history. For the activists we profile here, truthful, science-backed forensics and meaningful structures of memory combine to help create a modern, risk management state.

History of science, technology, and STS scholarship each have a role to play as we make sense of this interdisciplinary historical terrain. Work from scholars as diverse as Diane Vaughan, Eden Medina, Kim Fortun, Nathalie Jas, and Soraya Boudia help us form an analysis that brings disasters and their politics, disaster investigations, and disaster memorialization into one frame.⁵ Crucially, we pay attention to the ways that scientific techniques such as forensic analysis open up new opportunities for disaster memory, and the new demands that such innovations place on bereaved families and disaster justice advocates to engage (sometimes quite unexpectedly) in scientific debates. In this way we hope that our article is also in close conversation with the others in this special issue.

The history of memorials presents cases of finished spaces, complete with many different types of artifacts, in museum structures or adapted disaster sites. This article deconstructs these finished sites, exploring the tangled pathways whereby objects of forensic scientific analysis become “memorial” objects. Post-disaster

⁵ See Fortun and Vaughan [note 4], and Eden Medina, “Forensic Identification in the Aftermath of Human Rights Crimes in Chile: A Decentered Computer History,” *Technology and Culture* 59 (4 Supplement) (2018), S100-S133; and, Soraya Boudia and Nathalie Jas, “Risk and Risk Society in Historical Perspective,” *History and Technology* 23:4 (2007), 317-331.

investigations engage deep scientific research in the search for disaster causes and lessons that inform future construction and regulatory practices. Artifacts are collected and analyzed, many of these highly personal, serving simultaneously as both objects of scientific interest for investigators and emotional connection for families and friends of the injured and deceased. In many cases, such artifacts may have been used to identify victims, and as such the life of the object goes far beyond having been simply in the possession of someone who died tragically—it also bears a forensic purpose.

The history of disaster memorialization is a relatively new addition to the field of disaster studies, and relevant to our work in this article. Starting with Edward T. Linenthal's path-breaking book *The Unfinished Bombing: Oklahoma City in American Memory*, scholars began to look critically beyond the architectural competitions of war memorials and began to consider disaster memorialization more broadly as a crucial social phenomenon, closely tied to the long term processes of disaster recovery.⁶ Such recovery includes public acceptance of the state's response to a disaster, in the case of the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing this was a complicated story, involving domestic terrorism and the collapse of a building, quite different from the war memorials that dot the American landscape and have been analyzed separately in the historiography of American war and peace. Linenthal's observation that he could not easily draw a circle that included Oklahoma City victims on one side and non-sufferers on the other was an enlightening finding—many, many more people than he expected wished to be part of the therapeutic community through involvement with the construction and educational activities of the memorial.

Linenthal's book was the tip of a historiographic iceberg that saw memorials capture the fascination of scholars considering events like the Chernobyl and Three Mile Island nuclear power disasters, civil wars and genocides around the world from Sudan to Chile to Cambodia, and of course the September 11 terror attacks.⁷ The defining features of these works were to: 1) consider disaster events as ongoing social processes of continuing trauma, 2) consider memorialization as a tool of bereaved and survivor trauma reduction, 3) consider memorialization as a crucial pro-democracy activity.

Considered more broadly, memorialization works alongside post-disaster scientific investigations in a temporal space of sense-making. STS scholars like Stephen Hilgartner and Diane Vaughan have theorized post-disaster investigations as extensions of the disaster itself.⁸ Indeed from a scientific and technological perspective,

⁶ Edward T. Linenthal, *The Unfinished Bombing: Oklahoma City in American Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁷ The social construction of the placeness of the memorial spaces of the Daegu subway fire and the Sewol ferry disaster has been discussed by Jini Kim and Seil Oh, "The Institutionalization of Memory Places for Social Disasters 사회적 참사와 기억공간의 제도화: 세월호 참사와 대구지하철참사 비교 분석," *Economy and Society* 경제와 사회 136 (2022), 148-198.

⁸ Hilgartner (2007); Knowles (2014); Vaughan (1999).

investigations are the space in which sociotechnical control is recovered, when the scary possibility of a material world gone rogue can be tamed according to the demands of technicians, politicians, and citizens. The temporal simultaneity of post-disaster memorialization efforts and disaster investigations are not accidentally linked, but rather work together in a dynamic where bereaved families often exert enormous (but time-limited) political power to demand answers from the state as a form of healing in both specific (victims) and general (the public) modes. The September 11 investigations functioned precisely in this way, with both the 9/11 Commission and the NIST technical investigation created in direct response to the political advocacy of bereaved family groups who harnessed and deployed their political power skillfully, while at exactly the same time working to raise public and private funds to create three of the world's costliest disaster memorials, in New York City, Shanksville, Pennsylvania, and the Pentagon. As Seulgi Lee has demonstrated, the Sewol Ferry disaster investigations were not segregated with families on one side and scientists on the other.⁹ Rather, difficult issues around forensic investigation and victim identification relied on bereaved family involvement. And, almost immediately following the disaster, the struggle to retain and preserve material artifacts from the disaster were a focus both of bereaved families and technical investigators. In one set of hands a cell phone was a memorial object, in another a forensic tool for disaster reconstruction.

This article examines these phenomena, and does so by developing a historical trajectory of Korean disaster investigations, tracking the entwined trajectories of scientific learning and societal recovery. It is crucial to track the emergence of technical material investigation and forensics for DVI (disaster victim investigation) as techniques that emerged in order to bring some scientific "certainty" to post-disaster political struggles over memory. This was in no small part influenced by the process of identifying victims of the 4.16 Jeju massacre, a process unfolding throughout the period of the 1990s up to today (and detailed in Youngkwan Ban's article in this issue). The memorial work inherent in the Sewol Ferry memorialization process has evolved so far from the 1980s and 1990s that it has, in fact, led to retrospective memorialization efforts in previous disaster sites such as Jeju and Daegu.

In the same manner that disasters are political, so too are disaster memorials. The political forces at play in the formation of the Life and Safety Park build up from struggles over power involving the state, bereaved family groups, local citizens, and scientific investigators. Following the 2014 Sewol Ferry Disaster, the bereaved families worked quickly to establish institutions for self-protection, protest, investigation, and memorialization. For the 4.16 bereaved families, memorialization is not passive, it is an active space for the continual renewal of political creativity and

⁹ See: Seulgi Lee, "Who Narrates Disaster? Sciences, Materials, and Bereaved Families in the Sewol Investigation Commission 누가 재난을 이야기하는가: 세월호 재난조사위원회의 과학, 물질, 유가족," MA Thesis, Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology (2022).

determination; it is also a venue for coalition-building, as well as a tool for healing and teaching. This article contends that Sewol Ferry “memorial work” is a multi-faceted endeavor, involving several discrete types of expertise and action, including community education and outreach, urban spatial site advocacy, and scientific/forensic analysis. To make sense of this memorial work, we recount foundational memorialization efforts following the Sampoong Department Store collapse (1995) and the Daegu Subway Fire (2003) in which survivors and bereaved families pioneered memorial work techniques. Secondly, we track the evolving struggles over 4.16 memorialization in Ansan, the hometown of the 250 students of Danwon High School who died in the disaster, culminating in the site and design selection process of the 4.16 Life and Safety Park. Finally, memorialization efforts recounted in this paper have unfolded against the backdrop of multiple scientific/forensic investigations into the causes of the ship’s sinking and the recovery of human remains and victims’ belongings. The investigations, victim recovery effort, and materials preservation have each informed the political contest over Sewol Ferry memorialization. In the slow disaster of the Sewol Ferry, memorialization is not the final stage, indeed in some crucial ways it may just be the beginning. The memorial work continues. The past is never past, and such is certainly true of disasters in public memory.

“The Accident Republic 사고공화국”: The Sampoong Department Store Collapse and The Daegu Subway Fire

The Sampoong department store was opened on December 1, 1989, at the heart of Gangnam, an exciting district for shopping and the new consumer culture of South Korea. Sampoong was one of the most luxurious department stores in the country, with two buildings; building A in the north exhibited luxury items, and building B in the south was for sports facilities. The owner of the department store, Joon Lee, was a former executive at the Korean Central Intelligence Agency 중앙정보부 during the Park Chung Hee regime. Because of his proximity to power, Lee made a fortune through speculative sales and real estate development based on classified information.¹⁰ The period when Lee pushed ahead with the construction of Sampoong is marked as the beginning of democracy in South Korea after the June Democratic Struggle, a nationwide democracy movement, in 1987. The developmental dictatorship from the Park Chung Hee system, nevertheless, continued to exert its power, allowing Lee to bribe the public officers at the Seoul City Government to bypass safety inspections. The collision between the public officers and Lee resulted in the

¹⁰ Taewoong Park, “How Did Sampoong Accumulate Wealth... Speculative Investment in Real Estate 삼풍건설 이준회장 어떻게 축재했나 권력밀착...땅투기로 부일귀,” *The Hankyoreh* 한겨레, 1990. 7. 2.

building's many well-documented structural vulnerabilities.¹¹

On June 29, 1995, the Sampoong department store collapsed with a storm of dust and asbestos. Thousands of people were visiting the department store that day where the ground was protruding, the ceiling was descending, and the water was leaking. After the collapse, the democratic government of President Kim Young Sam was put to the test. Five hundred and two people lost their lives, nine hundred thirty-seven people were injured, and six were missing. As an event, it recorded the highest casualties in Korea since the Korean War. Investigation revealed that the building was constructed under poor conditions and was over-expanded, an issue pointed out as the cause of the collapse.¹²

The collapse made the cover page of the *Hankyoreh* the next day with the title "The Sampoong Department Store Collapse Catastrophe."¹³ "Accident Republic," a phrase first coined by a spokesperson for the opposition party in 1994, resurfaced and became popular among citizens who had witnessed consecutive disasters since the beginning of the new era of democracy in Korea.¹⁴ Social critics saw the Sampoong disaster as the symbol of a corrupt society. They interpreted that the collapse of Sampoong represented the failure of the "fragile development," tainted with corruption.

How was the "accident republic," which had already made public apologies twice for the sinking of the MV Seohae (1993) and the collapse of the Seongsu bridge (1994), going to solve the deep-seated problems regarding infrastructural safety? What measures would be taken for Korean society to recover from this catastrophe? With the eyes of the entire nation on the ruins of Sampoong, the pressure was on both the central and the Seoul Metropolitan Governments to make restorations and amendments. Their first steps were to communicate with those suffering the most from the aftermath of the disaster—the bereaved families, the injured, and the survivors. The bereaved families formed the "Committee for Victims," and the survivors suffering from injuries formed the "Committee for the Injured" to discuss compensation and further support.

In the earliest meetings to discuss compensation issues, the Seoul Metropolitan Government emphasized that Sampoong was responsible for compensation and that the government would "stand by the bereaved families as an arbitrator" and support

¹¹ Yong-kyun Kim and Hong-Gyoo Sohn, "Disaster Response Policy Change in the Wake of Major Disasters, Labeled Focusing Events," *Disaster Risk Management in the Republic of Korea*, (Singapore: Springer, 2018), 113-190.

¹² Kihun Kim and Daeyeol Kwon, "Sampoong CEO Lee sentenced 10 and a half year in prison 삼풍 후(이)회장 징역 10년6월," *The Chosun Ilbo* 조선일보, 1998. 12. 28.

¹³ "Catastrophic collapse of Sampoong department store 삼풍백화점 붕괴 대참사," *The Hankyoreh* 한겨레, 1995. 6. 30.

¹⁴ Jongku Kim, "Democratic Party Condemns the "Accident Republic 민주 '사고공화국' 맹비난," *The Hankyoreh* 한겨레, 1994. 12. 9.

them in reaching an amicable agreement.¹⁵ As most of the board members of Sampoong (along with several public officials who took bribes) were going through legal actions right after the collapse, the compensation was delayed. The Seoul Metropolitan Government and the central government decided to financially support the recovery plans by providing a special lease to Sampoong.¹⁶ Sampoong could repay its debt by disposing of its property, including the real estate of the land where the Sampoong department store once stood.

The Seoul Metropolitan Government's plan for Sampoong to dispose of the disaster site ran counter to the request from the Committee for Victims. The Committee had shown an intense desire to establish a public memorial at the disaster site since their third meeting on October 24, 1995.¹⁷ The Committee's request was to build a memorial park and a memorial tower. In response, the City Government suggested preparing a 100 pyeong (330 m²) open space to build a memorial tower. The memorial tower issue was brought to the table again at the tenth meeting, which was held two months later. The city government made it clear that the disaster site was the private property of Sampoong, which would become the financial resource for compensation. In response, the Committee requested to build the memorial tower at the disaster site on land five times larger than what the city government had offered (500 pyeong). The Committee added one more condition for the memorial tower: it would be built at a prominent location at the disaster site so that the "citizens could easily notice its existence." The memorial tower should have greater visibility and accessibility for the general public because it was the community that had to learn a lesson from the disaster. The city government proposed that the committee choose between two options: 330m² land at the disaster site or a larger venue in a park nearby.¹⁸ The memorial park/tower agenda seemed to have a long way to go before any agreements could be made. After December 13, 1995, no discussions were held among the Committee for Victims, the City Government, and Sampoong.

Consecutive disputes over the site indicate that the land was layered with different values and meanings. The 74,000 m² of land located in the Seocho district was at the same time a site of the catastrophic collapse and the "last high-end real estate in Gangnam," which the Seoul Metropolitan Government was eager to sell to replenish

¹⁵ Seoul Metropolitan Government, *Sampoong Department Store Collapse White Paper* 삼풍백화점 붕괴사고 백서, (Seoul: Seoul Metropolitan Government, 1996), 504-506, According to the summary record of each meeting, Sampoong was held responsible since the first meeting, which was held on October 9, 1995, and the term "arbitrator" to describe the role of the Seoul city government first appeared in the records of the second meeting, which was held on October 16, 1995.

¹⁶ Ibid., 481.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., 517.

the compensation fund.¹⁹ It should be noted that it was the Central and Seoul Municipal Government who wrote the principles that linked the compensation fund and the property of the Sampoong group. Within their principles, the economic value of the site could not be disregarded to bring justice to the victims. However, the justice that these measures would bring would only be partial, since the bereaved families hoped for not only monetary compensation but also a proper memorial.

The victim's families and the Seoul Municipal Government had a shared understanding as to the meanings of the memorial tower but a contrasting position on its location. The dissonance between the victims' families and the Municipal Government was apparent in the public discussion broadcasted live on "TBS March," a program on a public radio channel, on February 24, 1996. Calls were made by the friends and families of the victims to speak with the Deputy Mayor, Kim Eu-jae, who was on the show. To the callers who emphasized the importance of a memorial tower for comforting the souls of the victims and allowing the construction industry to self-reflect on their fault, the deputy mayor expressed his consent but once again mentioned the technical problem of the compensation scheme: that the site was the financial source of the victim compensation fund. Here the deputy mayor argued that if the victims' families were not going to accept the proposal to build a memorial tower in a smaller area on the disaster site, there was an alternative measure to establish a memorial park in the forest nearby. The deputy mayor expressed his opinion that it was not necessary for the tower to be built at the exact site of the collapse.²⁰

In March 1996, the Committee for Victims and Sampoong began to make progress in their discussions on monetary compensation and the construction of the memorial tower. As there was a breakthrough in the discussion, the Committee for Victims contacted Bong-gu Kim, an Ewha Women's University professor, for a blueprint of the memorial tower that they would bring to the discussion table. On March 10, approximately three hundred members of the Committee gathered to put the proposal made by the city government to a vote. The proposal suggested that either a memorial park of roughly 500 pyeong (the surface area requested by the Committee for Victims) be built in the Yangjae Citizen's Forest, an alternative location, or a 100 pyeong park at the disaster site. Out of 327 voters, 216 people approved, while 108 disapproved.²¹ Ten days later, the representative and executive members of the committee signed the March 20 agreement stating that the memorial tower would be built in the Yangjae Forest.²² The option of building a smaller memorial at the site of the disaster had suddenly vanished.

¹⁹ Hak-bong Cha, "Sampoong Site For Sale '삼풍부지 살사람 없나요,'" *The Chosun Ilbo* 조선일보, 1996. 8. 8.

²⁰ Seoul Metropolitan Government, op.cit., 555-583.

²¹ Ibid., 544.

²² Ibid., 546.

It was not only the location but also the scale and the design of the tower that had gone through significant changes since the March 20 agreement. According to the blueprint by Bong-gu Kim, the tower would be 16 meters tall with a 4 billion won budget scale. The officials from the City Government proposed to reduce the scale of the tower to 1.5 billion won (which was still twice its precedents) but was turned down.²³ They later contacted Bong-gu Kim for advice and an alternative design (11m, 1.7 billion won), but the victims' families also declined the new proposal. For two months, from February 11 to April 21, 1997, the representatives of the victims' families and the officials met six times to reconcile their opinions, reaching a settlement to maintain its original design but with a smaller scale (12m, 1.8 billion won).²⁴ As the shape and size of the tower were finally set, the Memorial Tower Committee was finally organized on May 8, 1997, and held its first meeting on May 9. It took almost a year for the Memorial Tower Committee to become active after the March 20 agreement.

The Council of the Seocho District, where the Yangjae Park was located, disapproved of the original plans from the Seoul Municipal Government in July and once again in November 1997. One of the council members postulated that the park was an important part of the lives of many citizens and that the new tower "should not interfere with its original role." The council members commented that the best location to build the memorial tower would be the site of the disaster, which would also be more meaningful for the victim's families, not the Yangjae Forest.²⁵ After an intense discussion between the Municipal Government and the bereaved families, a revised plan was proposed on December 26, 1997. To "minimize the damage to the park and harmonize with its surroundings," they significantly reduced both the space—from 502 pyeong to 66 pyeong—and the height of the tower—from 12m to 8m. The Seocho District Office once again made changes to the revised proposal by reducing the space from 66 pyeong to 60 pyeong and approved the plan on February 20, 1998.²⁶

The plan for the memorial tower was finalized on February 26, 1998. The memorial tower (with the tentative name of torchlight tower) would serve four roles: (1) a memorial for the deceased, (2) teaching lessons from the disaster, (3) serving as an art piece, (4) serving as a sculpture in a park for relaxation. The third and fourth articles in the mission statement implied that the tower had to serve other purposes than being just a space for memorializing the disaster and disaster victims to be

²³ Seoul Metropolitan Government, Plan for Construction of Monument for the Victims of Sampoong Accident 삼풍사고희생자위령탑건립추진(안) (Seoul: Seoul Metropolitan Government, 1997).

²⁴ Ibid., 36.

²⁵ Seocho District Council, *Proceedings for the 67th Meeting of the Seocho District Council, July 18, 1997* 제67회 서초구의회(임시회) 본회의 회의록 (1997년 7월 18일).

²⁶ Seocho District Council, *Proceedings for the 73th meeting of the Seocho District Council, February 20, 1998* 제 73회 서초구의회(임시회) 총무재무위원회 회의록 (1998년 2월 20일).

incorporated into the forest. The memorial tower also had to be in harmony with the already existing memorial towers as it would be built near the memorial tower for the KAL attack, a terrorist attack by a North Korean agent on an aircraft in 1987.

Although the finalized plan made it clear that the tower was intended to deliver the lessons from the collapse, the location of the tower made this quite difficult. The tower's inaccessibility from the public shows that the community was a long way from learning anything from Sampoong, especially on how to recover from the disaster while preserving its memories from obliteration. The case of the Sampoong department store shows the importance of the site of the memorial, both practically and symbolically. Securing the site for the memorial tower was made difficult as it was placed at the intersection between the victim compensation scheme, the interest of the victims and the community, and the politics of the Seoul Municipal Government and the Seocho District Council. Within this scheme, the bereaved families had to make a choice between monetary compensation and a rightful social consolation, a choice made reluctantly only after prolonged discussions and struggles. This case demonstrates clearly the skills required for bereaved families to make post-disaster demands of the government: rapid organization and group cohesion, media savvy, and a shared sense of the social possibilities inherent in memorialization. In the new era of Korean democracy, Sampoong's bereaved families were learning that they had the voice to demand memorialization. Still, they lacked power to push back against the entrenched forces of real estate development in the Accident Republic.

The Daegu Subway Fire offers a more complicated case for securing a space for memorialization, as the site of the disaster was a crowded public facility: the underground metro station. On February 18, 2003, a subway train was set on fire by one of its passengers in Jungang-ro station, Daegu City. The fire soon spread to the second train that entered the platform three minutes later without being aware of the situation. Most victims came from the second train, where the power supply was cut, and the door was shut. One hundred ninety-three people died, and 151 were injured, making it the worst subway disaster in Korean history.

A dispute emerged over the necessity and techniques of preserving the disaster site. Different meanings of "preserving the scene" put the Daegu Mayor, Daegu Subway Corporation, and the National Forensic Service (NFS) in opposition to the bereaved families. The Daegu Subway Corporation moved quickly to put things back to "normal." Later that day of the fire, the trains (or what was left of them) were moved to the Wolbae Garage. The next day, hundreds of soldiers were mobilized to clear the scene of the fire. Shoes, clothing, cell phones, and all other remains were packed in sacks and sent to the open-air yard of the Ansim Garage. Two days later, the station was washed down. It took four days to clear the biggest subway disaster

in Korean history.²⁷ The victims' families found remains and hundreds of artifacts from the platform among the discarded sacks. One of the bereaved family members recalled in a recent interview that "after they found the remains from the sacks, it was when the bereaved families were outraged. I also had faith in the city municipality. But after the remains were discovered, I lost all trust."²⁸

Arriving at the scene on the day of the disaster, the NFS personnel heard the news that the train was going to be moved to a nearby garage. The NFS organized the KDMORT (Korea Disaster Mortuary Operational Response Team), a joint investigation team with professionals from all over the nation, including scientific investigators from the Prosecution Office and experts in forensic dentistry, forensics, and physical anthropology from different universities. The KDMORT set up the basic facilities necessary to identify the bodies, including a temporary morgue at the Wolbae Garage. The identification processes were arduous, as bodies that were burnt inside the train were piled upon one another, and the numbers of the victims were inconclusive. Nevertheless, the NFS saw in retrospect that the bodies were comparatively well-preserved, and moving the train to the Wolbae garage prevented further damage to both the site and the bodies.²⁹

The NFS also conducted the fire investigation by inspecting the scene of the fire and reviewing the surveillance camera footage, the floor plan, and sound recordings. The first investigation took place from February 18 to 20, 2003, and the second investigation from March 1 to 2. The team investigated both the station and the train before and after it was moved to the garage. The focus of these investigations was (1) to reconfirm the result of the criminal investigation, (2) to interpret the course of ignition, and (3) to interpret the state of the opening and closing of subway doors.³⁰ A 347-page final NFS report was published in 2004.

Contrary to the efforts of the NFS to closely document the disaster investigation process, the Daegu Municipal Government and the Daegu Subway Corporation had shown actions that intentionally erased, ignored, and neglected the subway fire. A week after the fire, the hurried cleaning of the disaster scene was criticized on public television. On February 26, 2003, the fact that the Daegu Municipal Government

²⁷ Sanghwa Kim and Kilsang Ryu, "Daegu Subway Disaster: Washing down the scene the day after the disaster, 'disappeared site' 대구 지하철 참사/ 참사 다음날 물청소 '사라진 현장,'" *Seoul Shinmun* 서울신문, 2003. 2. 22.

²⁸ Hyejeong Cho, "20th anniversary of the Daegu Subway Disaster... the promise of memorialization never kept 대구 지하철 참사 20주기... '추모'의 약속은 지켜지지 않았다," *The Hankyoreh* 한겨레, 2023. 2. 11.

²⁹ National Forensics Service, *Daegu Subway Disaster: Management of Mass Disasters and Mass Deaths* 대구지하철참사, 대량재해와 집단사망자 관리 (Seoul: National Forensics Service, 2004), 149.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 267.

and the Subway Corporation mobilized the army to clean up the disaster site the day after the fire was reported through the MBC news.³¹

After criticizing the hastened cleanup, the media started to question the effectiveness of the investigation process. Jong-bae Wang, the head of the Safety System Research Team at the Korea Railroad Research Institute, said in an interview that “the police, who lack professional knowledge (about subway systems) have an exclusive authority to conduct an on-site investigation. We need to delve into the structural problems in the subway operating system. There are hidden problems such as the operating system and safety management, specifications of the train, and safety education for the employee, in addition to the fault of the command center and railway drivers. It is questionable how much investigation has been conducted on these issues.” Wang argued that the on-site investigation conducted by the NFS was insufficient to identify the problems in the subway operating system. The police investigation had its limitations as it was centered on investigating the suspect and the railway drivers.³²

After investigating the charges against the Head of the Daegu Subway Corporation for destroying the evidence, the Supreme Court Ruling offers a concise detail of the hurried clean-up and normalization. It is noted in the ruling that the Daegu Municipal Government requested a prompt recovery of the subway system to show the public that the current situation would not disrupt the upcoming August 2003 Daegu Summer Universiade, a sports competition drawing athletes from 174 nations. The subway was also considered “the feet of the citizens.” The Municipal Government suggested that the subway system would re-open operations as soon as possible; hence the Command Center (Daegu Subway Corporation, Daegu Municipal Government, Daegu Fire Department, Dong-gu District office, and Daegu police department) made the decision to put the subways back on track the next day.³³

The municipality’s failure to preserve the scene led to its failure to maintain the trust of the families of the missing persons, the injured, and the local community. The families and the citizens demanded the Mayor of Daegu resign.³⁴ The Municipal Government delegated most of its role of disaster management to the Central Government Support Group and has taken on a passive position ever since.³⁵ The

³¹ Wonshik Kang and Sanghwa Kim 김상화, “Daegu Subway Disaster: Four bodies found in the trash pile 대구지하철 대참사/ 쓰레기더미서 유해 4구 발견,” *Seoul Shinmun* 서울신문, 2003. 2. 26.

³² Ibid.

³³ Supreme Court, “Sentenced on May 14, 2004, ruling 2004-do-74 2004. 5. 14 선고, 2004도74 판결,” Korean Law Information Center, <https://www.law.go.kr>.

³⁴ Changhwan Lee, “The bereaved family to ‘strike for subway suspension’ 유가족 ‘지하철 운행중단 실행행사,’” *Maeil Shinmun* 매일신문, 2003. 3. 14.

³⁵ Youngpyung Jeon, “Reflecting Daegu Subway Disaster Control Failure from the Perspective of Local Politics Crisis 대구지하철 재난대응의 실패,” *The Korean Journal of Local Government Studies* 지방정부연구 8:4 (2005), 147-164.

reluctance of the Daegu Municipal Government and the Daegu Subway Corporation towards preserving the scene, delving into the core of the disaster, and asking difficult questions was shown in their hesitance in taking the role of an active moderator between different victims of the subway fire. The Municipal Government failed to mediate differences in opinions between the bereaved families and the local residents near the sites that were selected for building the memorial. Resultingly, the names of the spaces that were once seen to take on the role of a memorial do not directly mention the Daegu Subway Disaster. Instead of being called with their rightful names, “Daegu Subway Disaster Memorial,” “the memorial tower,” and “the memorial cemetery,” they are called “Daegu Citizen Safety Theme Park,” “Sculpture Symbolizing Safety,” and just “green grass.”³⁶

It was after the sinking of the Sewol Ferry that the Daegu Municipal Government began to show action in reserving a space for memorializing the Daegu Subway Fire. After the sinking of the Sewol Ferry in 2014, the media’s attention was refocused on the aftermath of the Daegu Subway Fire. In the *Hankyoreh* on May 9, 2014, transcripts of the discussions made between the bereaved families of the Daegu Municipal Government regarding the burial of the victims’ bodies were published. It was reported that the then-current minister of the Ministry of Safety and Administration was the deputy mayor of Daegu, who made a side agreement with the bereaved families in 2005 to build an enshrinement forest and a memorial tower for the victims.³⁷

On February 16, 2015, two days before the 12th anniversary of the Daegu Subway Fire, the mayor of Daegu officially announced the establishment of a public foundation for memorializing the Daegu Subway Fire and their plans to build a memorial wall at Jungangno station.³⁸ The wall was to be located inside the “memory space,” which was opened to the public in December of 2015.³⁹ The “memory space” exhibited burnt subway equipment, a burnt public telephone, and a burnt wall that preserved the severity of the disaster. A memorializing space inside the station had faced opposition not only from the Municipal Government but also from those who were injured by the fire. There were people suffering psychological trauma since the subway fire who hoped to stay away from any artifacts that could bring back memories from the fire.⁴⁰ Disaster victim groups are never homogenous. The city’s decision to take responsibility for finding a balance between different levels of

³⁶ Jini Kim and Seil Oh, “The Institutionalization of Memory Places for Social Disasters 사회적 참사와 기억공간의 제도화: 세월호 참사와 대구지하철참사 비교 분석,” *Economy and Society* 경제와 사회 136 (2022), 148-198.

³⁷ Hyung-jung Yoon, “The Bereaved Families were driven to be responsible for a secret burial 유가족은 그렇게 암매장꾼으로 몰렸다,” *The Hankyoreh* 한겨레, 2014. 5. 9.

³⁸ Taewoo Park, “Public Foundation for the Daegu Subway Disaster established after 12 years 대구지하철참사 12년 만에 공익재단 설립,” *The Kyunghyang Shinmun* 경향신문, 2015. 2. 17.

³⁹ Il-Woo Kim, “Daegu Subway Disaster Memorial Wall after 12 Years 12년만에 대구지하철 참사 추모벽,” *The Hankyoreh* 한겨레, 2015. 12. 28.

⁴⁰ Kim and Oh (2022), 168.

victimhood, opening the memory space for public visitors, and engaging with the bereaved families, all of these after the sinking of the Sewol ferry, show us how the present may affect the past. New disasters and new demands towards the state in disaster management by the public pressured it to make amends for its past wrongdoings.

The sinking of the Sewol Ferry, even from its early stage, became a catalyst for the state to move beyond the “accident republic,” where disasters are often preferably called “accidents,” toward the disaster management state. Following the cases of the collapse of Sampoong and the fire at Daegu Subway, we were able to witness the intense struggles of place-making around the sites of disasters and disaster memorials. They show us that multiple meanings are anchored on the grounds where the disaster takes place and where memorialization is to take place. What complicates the dynamics around these grounds is that they are concurrently sites of systematic failure that led to a disaster, sites of traumatic memories, and sites of death. In the aftermath of the disaster, they became all at once sites of fact-finding, sites of forensics, and sites of mourning. It did not take long for the bereaved families of the Sewol Ferry to acknowledge that they were about to repeat the same fights.

Time and Memory: The Local Struggle for Memorialization in Ansan

After the collapse of the Sungsoo Bridge and the Sampoong Department Store, the safety management of facilities became a major national issue in Korea. On January 5, 1995, the “Special Act on the Safety Control and Maintenance of Establishments” was proposed by the National Assembly and signed into law. The Act aims to “contribute to ensuring public safety and further promoting the welfare of the people by preventing accidents and disasters and improving the utility of establishments through safety inspections and appropriate maintenance of establishments.”⁴¹ The Act defined “facilities” as structures such as bridges, tunnels, ports, dams, buildings, and others created through construction work; the core content for safety management of facilities is to conduct regular, detailed, and emergency safety inspections and to prepare safety measures based on the findings.

Min-hwan Kim, who conducted a comparative study of peace memorial parks in Okinawa, Taipei, and Jeju Island, remembers when he met the Sewol Ferry bereaved

⁴¹ “Special Act on the Safety Control and Maintenance of Establishments (2016. 1. 19),” Korea Legislation Research Institute/Korea Law Translation Center, https://elaw.klri.re.kr/kor_service/lawView.do?hseq=56563&lang=ENG (accessed on May 10, 2023).

families in November of 2015.⁴² “We need to recognize that the creation of a memorial is the final step in the process, and the intention of the government could be not to investigate the truth, but only to commemorate,” Professor Kim told them.⁴³ But, the bereaved families found it challenging to understand the difference between the government's pace of investigative work and memorialization work.

On 15 July 2014, less than a year after the disaster, the bereaved families submitted a petition to establish a disaster investigation commission to independently investigate the disaster, which was signed by more than 6 million citizens. The process was so controversial that the bereaved families were stopped by the police while they are submitting the petition. After the turmoil around the process died down, the Special Investigation Committee was established on 1 January 2015. Compared with this hardship, the process of memorialization seemed relatively calm. In late March 2015, the Special Act on Relief and Support for Victims of the April 16 Sewol Ferry Disaster(4.16 sewolhochamsa pihaegu je mich jiwon deung-eul wihan teugbyeolbeob mich sihaenglyeong 4.16 세월호참사 피해구제 및 지원 등을 위한 특별법 및 시행령) was enacted, and the Support Group for Victims of the April 16 Sewol Ferry Disaster and Victim Memorial Project(4.16sewolhochamsa pihaeja jiwon mich huisaengja chumowiwonhoe 4.16세월호참사 피해자 지원 및 희생자 추모위원회) was established at the Office of the Prime Minister. This law laid the legal foundation for the establishment of the memorial of the Sewol Ferry disaster. Based on this law, the April 16 Sewol Ferry Disaster Victim Support and Victim Memorial Committee was established and began its activities in earnest. Along with these moves, the memorial department of the 4.16 Sewol Families for Truth and a Safer Society (hereafter 4.16 Family Council), which is the biggest victims’ families’ association, also began to actively work.

It was in this context that bereaved families questioned the smooth establishment of memorials—the bereaved families soon realized that a lot of disagreement and conflict would pile up on the way. The first point was about timing. Many bereaved families felt that memorialization could only take place after all investigations and truth-finding processes were completed. The second point was similar to timing but different, focused on priorities. The Sewol Ferry bereaved families' association, 4.16 Family Council, was organized by various departments, including a salvation department, and a truth-finding department, directly related to forensic work. There was also a member organizing department and memorialization department. Even more, some clubs include crafting workshops volunteer work, and a choir. Bu-ja

⁴² Minhwan Kim, *Comparative Research on the Formation of Peace Memorial Park in East Asia : Focusing on the Cases of Okinawa, Taipei and Jeju Islands* 동아시아의 평화기념공원 형성과정 비교연구: 오키나와, 타이페이, 제주의 사례를 중심으로, Ph.D. dissertation, Seoul National University (2012).

⁴³ Mindo Gi, “A guardian of the bereaved family of the Sewol ferry: ‘Memorial park in the city, 5% possibility has become a reality’ 세월호 유족 지킴이 ‘도심 속 추모공원, 5% 가능성이 현실됐다,’” *Seoul Shinmun* 서울신문, 2019. 4. 14.

Jung, the head of the Sewol memorial department of the 4.16 Family Council and the mother of Ho-Seong Shin, who was one of the victims of the Sewol Ferry disaster, remembers the differences of opinion among the bereaved families in the early days of the memorial project. As time passed, however, the majority of the bereaved families slowly agreed on the fact that memorialization can and should proceed alongside the investigation process.

Some mothers think that restoring the honor of our children or finding the truth comes first. And I am a mother who thinks that putting our children together in one place comes first. We can't let that happen. We need to do it, and we need to educate people so that this tragedy doesn't happen again, and we need to do it in a place where a lot of people can come, and we need to do it together, and we need to make sure that the truth is revealed.⁴⁴ --Buja Jung

Ansan City organized the 4.16 Sewol Ferry Disaster Ansan Memorial Project Council (4.16 sewolho chamsa ansansi chumosa-eob hyeob-uihoe 4.16 세월호 참사 안산시 추모사업 협의회 (hereafter referred to as the Memorial Project Council). The Council was established in accordance with the Special Act for Relief and Support for Victims of the 4.16 Sewol Ferry Disaster to collect the opinions of stakeholders, including victims' families and local residents, on memorial facilities in Ansan, such as the creation of a memorial park, the construction of a memorial hall, and the erection of a memorial monument. The need for such a public-private consultation body had been discussed since September 2015 but was delayed due to differences between stakeholders over the membership of the council, which was established on July 6, 2016. The committee was composed of three appointed members, including a chairperson, Ansan Mayor Jong-gil, the head of the 416 Family Council Myung-sun Jeon, and the city's director, as well as 21 appointed members, including the head of the memorialization support section of the National Coordination Office, two city councilors, five members of the Victim Recovery Council, four family representatives, three resident representatives, three social organization executives, and three experts.⁴⁵ This complicated mixture of members underlined the challenge of hearing from all stakeholders in the Ansan memorial project.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ 4.16 Memory Archives, *Talking about the day—Buja Jeong, Hoseong's mother: 4.16 Oral Testimony, Danwon High School, 2nd Grade, 6th class, vol. 5 그날을 말하다 – 호성 엄마 정부자: 4.16구술증언록 단원고 2학년 6반 5권* (Gyeonggi-do: Hanul Press, 2019), 162.

⁴⁵ Jongchan Han, "The first step of Ansan City's 'Sewol Ferry Tragedy Memorial Project' ... Council launched 안산시 '세월호 참사 추모사업' 첫걸음...협의회 발족", *Yonhapnews* 연합뉴스, 2016. 7. 6, <https://www.yna.co.kr/view/AKR20160706052400061> (accessed on June 13, 2023).

⁴⁶ For an explanation of a similar problem in finding the "golden ratio" of stakeholders, but from the perspective of the investigative commission, see: Jeon Chihyung, Scott G. Knowles, and Sang-Eun Park, "Disaster (continued): Sewol Ferry investigations, state violence, and political history in South Korea," *History and Technology* (2022), 1-23.

In November 2016, the council held public hearings in four affected neighborhoods (Gojan 1, Seonbu 1, Wadong, and Choji). About 100 people gathered in the meeting rooms of each community center. Afterward, the council expanded the scope of the listening sessions in the four affected neighborhoods and held a public discussion with Ansan citizens. During the public hearing and public discussion (i.e., the first round of public hearings), five possible sites for the 4.16 Life and Safety Park were proposed: a hill behind Danwon high school, WonGojan Park, Hwarang Amusement Park, Flower Light Park, and Sky Park. Sites were evaluated in four categories: symbolism, accessibility, ease of securing a site, and connectivity to surrounding facilities. Among them, Hwarang Amusement Park was the only one to receive excellent marks in all categories. However, it was rated ‘unfavorable’ in terms of issues such as complaints regarding the smoothness of project implementation. Hwarang Amusement Park is a complex park centered around the Hwarang Reservoir, with facilities such as the Gyeonggi-do Museum of Art and the Ansan Industrial History Museum, where Ansan citizens visit in their daily lives. Its name Hwarang refers to Hwarangdo, the educational and military system of Silla, which existed on the Korean Peninsula in the past, and the spirit of Hwarang that saved the country. Given that the park has a National Merit Contribution Tower and an inscribed monument introducing Hwarang Amusement Park, this part has been associated with military history and the Korean War.

Hwarang Amusement Park was the location of the government joint incense burner after the Sewol Ferry disaster so the location itself already had great significance for Sewol families. However, just as in the case of Sampoong and the Daegu Subway, the families went through a hard time securing the site. It was a prelude to the long journey to come.

On February 10, 2017, the council held the ‘Second Residents’ Hearing on the Creation of a Memorial Facility (4.16 Life and Safety Park) in Ansan City for the Sewol Ferry Disaster’ with 500 people, including residents of the affected areas, in attendance.⁴⁷ The public disagreed on whether the park should be built in the center of Ansan or on the outskirts of the city, and the issue of whether the park and the memorial facility should be built together was also debated. Those who wanted the park to be built in the city center suggested that it should be “easy to meet the victims,” “the park will be a dark space if memorials are sent to the outskirts first, and a bright space if they are embraced in the city center,” and “it should be built at the landmark Hwarang Amusement Park so that Ansan and the world can remember together.” Those who wanted to build a safety park outside the city replied that, “If a park is built in the center of the city when there are already residents who have

⁴⁷ Ho-yeol Park, “Creation of 416 safety park, ‘in the city center’ vs. ‘outside’: citizens’ opinions are divided 안전공원 조성, ‘도심’ 대 ‘외곽’ 시민 의견 갈려”, *OhmyNews* 오마이뉴스, 2017. 2. 10, https://www.ohmynews.com/NWS_Web/View/at_pg.aspx?CNTN_CD=A0002297574 (accessed on June 13, 2023)

been affected by the Government Joint Memorial Hall, it will cause more damage to nearby residents,” and “If the park is built at Hwarang Amusement Park, it will be a double waste of budget.”

The 416 Family Council and the 4.16 Ansan Citizens' Solidarity organized a signature drive to establish the 4.16 Life and Safety Park at Hwarang Amusement Park. Citizens chanting “No to the memorial park in Hwarang Amusement Park” had been organizing solidarity groups and spreading opposing viewpoints since the public hearings for the preceding two years. More than 30 civil society organizations, including the Apartment Association and the Reconstruction Association, formed a group called “Citizens’ Action Against the Sewol Ferry Memorial at Hwarang Amusement Park,” and actively led protests on “Hwarang Guardian,” which was established on Naver's BAND.⁴⁸ On June 7, 2017, Ansan Citizens' Solidarity held a press conference at Ansan City Hall and delivered the signatures of 31,403 citizens to the city for the creation of the 4.16 Life and Safety Park in Hwarang Amusement Park. In response, residents living in the area near Hwarang Amusement Park held a press conference at the Ansan City Hall on June 30 and delivered 37,565 signatures to the city to oppose the creation of a memorial at Hwarang Amusement Park.⁴⁹

Ansan City and the Ansan Memorial Project Council were ultimately unable to resolve the conflict among the residents. The Ansan Memorial Project Council held its last meeting on June 30, 2017, and passed a report stating that: “The majority of the members of the memorial council decided that the unbuilt site in Hwarang Amusement Park was suitable for the 4.16 Life and Safety Park, considering the opinions of the bereaved families and the accessibility, symbolism, and tourist attraction of the citizens, but they could not come to a conclusion considering the opinions of the community for and against and the need for communication.”⁵⁰ On February 20, 2018, however, the National Assembly announced that Ansan City Mayor Je Jong-gil would build a memorial park for the Sewol Ferry at Ansan Hwarang Amusement Park, despite the conflicting opinions.⁵¹ Following the announcement, all members of the Liberty Korea Party in the Ansan City Council held an emergency

⁴⁸ “Hwarang Guardian 화랑지킴이시민행동”, Naver Band, <https://band.us/band/69995065> (accessed on May 3, 2023).

⁴⁹ Seongmin Yoon, “‘Instantaneous’ 416 Sewol Ferry Safety Park... Sharp confrontation over the pros and cons... ‘일촉즉발’ 416 세월호 안전공원... 찬반 놓고 첨예한 대립...”, *Ansan Internet News* 안산인터넷뉴스, 2017. 7. 13, <http://asinews.co.kr/front/news/view.do?articleId=47032> (accessed on June 13, 2023)

⁵⁰ Jong-il Lee, “The 4.16 Sewol Ferry Disaster Ansan Memorial Project Council ‘disbanded’ without deciding the location of the Sewol Ferry Memorial Facility 안산시추모협, 세월호 추모시설 장소 못 정한채 ‘해산’”, *Newsis* 뉴시스, 2017. 6. 30, https://www.newsis.com/view/?id=NISX20170630_0000028382 (accessed on June 13, 2023)

⁵¹ Yong-deok Hong and Ki-seong Kim, “Establishment of Sewol Ferry Memorial Park in Ansan Hwarang Recreation Area 세월호 추모공원 안산 화랑유원지에 조성”, *The Hankyoreh* 한겨레, 2018. 2. 20, https://www.hani.co.kr/arti/area/area_general/832818.html.

press conference at the Ansan City Council and strongly criticized Mayor Je Jong-gil for making a “unilateral decision that ignored the citizens of Ansan.”⁵²

The conflict intensified ahead of the June 13 local elections.⁵³ Conservative opposition candidates called the 4.16 Life and Safety Park a “cremation facility” or “ossuary,” and claimed that they would “reject the proposal to build a cremation facility at Hwarang Amusement Park.”⁵⁴ At the time, Yoon Hwa-seop, the Democratic Party’s candidate for mayor of Ansan, said that a memorial park for the Sewol ferry should be built at Hwarang Amusement Park in Danwon-gu, Ansan, and that it should be made into a global attraction. With Yoon’s election, the conflict seemed to subside.

At the beginning of the conflict around the 4.16 Life and Safety Park, the main tactics the bereaved families used were picketing or collecting signatures for a petition. However, the bereaved families gradually moved toward more nuanced and mild ways of communicating with neighbors by creating a place where they could gather together. Bu-Ja Jung remembers when she first turned her eyes back to the people of Ansan after the disaster. “Gradually, I realized that strange stories (such as a rumor related to the compensation issue) were coming out of Ansan, this made me think I should meet the Ansan citizens.” After the first anniversary, on April 16, 2015, Ms. Jung set up an ‘Ansan team’ with about 15 bereaved families to meet the Ansan citizens. Two things were important in facilitating the meeting between the bereaved families and the people of Ansan. One was the “416 Crafting Workshop” and the other was the “Community Recovery Program.” The 416 Crafting Workshop was created in the winter of 2014 after the tragedy. It provided a relaxing space for the bereaved families who were reluctant to actively seek counseling and therapy after the disaster. As of 2016, more than 100 mothers were members. In the workshop, mothers made a variety of crafts, including yellow ribbons, sock wallets, and quilted bags. Various organizations provided craft teachers and materials to support the bereaved families in their creative endeavors. In October 2015, for the first time, the bereaved families held a free market called ‘Market with Mom(엄마와 함께하장)’ at Hwarang Amusement Park. Over the course of two days, 2,700 people visited and chatted with the 4.16 mothers, discussions mediated by artworks such as socks, horticulture, calligraphy, natural cosmetics, accessories, and woodwork.

⁵² Youngchang Kwon, “Je Jong-gil, Mayor of Ansan, ‘Creation of Sewol Ferry Memorial Park in Hwarang Amusement Park’ 제종길 안산시장, ‘화랑유원지 내 세월호 추모공원 조성’”, *Shinews* 시흥인터넷뉴스, 2018. 2. 21, <http://shinews.co.kr/front/news/view.do?articleId=16423> (accessed on June 13, 2023).

⁵³ Gi-jun Jang, “Conflict between the pros and cons of building the Sewol Ferry Memorial Park in Hwarang Amusement Park intensifies 화랑유원지 세월호 추모공원 건립 찬반 대립 심화”, *Today Ansan* 투데이안산, 2018. 3. 7, <http://www.todayansan.co.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=4808> (accessed on June 13, 2023).

⁵⁴ Yong-deok Hong, “Ansan Mayoral Election, ‘Sewol Ferry Memorial Park’ becomes an issue 안산시장 선거, ‘세월호 추모공원’ 쟁점화”, *The Hankyoreh* 한겨레, 2018. 5. 28.

Proceeds from the event were distributed to local children's centers, the elderly living alone, and local churches.⁵⁵

The Community Recovery Program was a project by the government and Ansan City to restore the psychological stability and sense of community of victims and citizens in order to overcome the phenomenon of community disintegration, including conflicts between bereaved families and residents and the loss of community bonds. After the program was implemented, it became the basis for further supporting the activities of the bereaved families that already existed, enabling them to meet more easily and productively with the local community. This project, in conjunction with the 416 workshop activities, allowed for a steady stream of free markets and craft workshops to be held in the main affected villages. These activities included programs such as embroidery and bag making, with the mothers themselves serving as instructors. On December 19, 2017, at the sharing session of the evaluation of the first year of the Community Recovery Program, Ms. Jung wrote a post on the 416 Family Council website that, "The citizens of Ansan, who suffered the most from the Sewol ferry disaster, were generally unaware of the news or had misinformation. For the next year 2018, our team will focus on promoting awareness of the Sewol ferry, starting with village leaders."

Mothers' activities were an indirect method for spreading awareness about the Sewol ferry disaster and establishing a life and safety park at Hwarang Amusement Park, but it also gave the bereaved families a sense of accomplishment and empowerment. Artifacts became a great medium for creating a communal sphere for bereaved families and Ansan citizens. Buja Jung explains: "[After hearing] examples of the memorial from abroad and knowing just as there was a lot of opposition to the establishment of a memorial park in the city center for the Daegu subway tragedy, I thought it would be necessary to get the consent of the local residents. In the beginning, we went around Ansan with picketing and signature campaigns, but gradually, we made a place to meet and communicated with the villagers (mediating through making)."⁵⁶ The city finally confirmed the plan for the Life and Safety Park in 2019.⁵⁷

On every 4.16 anniversary, voices opposed to the Life and Safety Park are heard in Ansan. Their concerns resemble those from previous disasters: the lowering of

⁵⁵ Youngshin Kwak, "I live next to death, but I can smile here 죽음 옆에 두고 살지만, 여기서는 웃을 수 있어요," *Ohmynews* 오마이뉴스, 2016. 1. 10, https://www.ohmynews.com/NWS_Web/View/at_pg.aspx?CNTN_CD=A0002174034 (accessed on June 13, 2023); "4.16 Workshop," <https://416.modoo.at/?link=m7g79xye> (accessed on May 3, 2023).

⁵⁶ Hyunsoo Kim, "So that no one is left out, so that everyone is safe 누구나 소외되지 않도록, 누구나 안전하도록," The Hope Institute, <https://www.makehope.org/누구나-소외되지-않도록-누구나-안전하도록/> (accessed on June 13, 2023).

⁵⁷ Junseok Lee, "Sewol's '8th Spring'... '4.16 Life Safety Park' without first shovel in hand 세월호 '8번째 봄'... 첫 삽도 못 뜬 '4.16생명안전공원'," *Nocut News* 노컷뉴스, 2022. 4. 16, <https://www.nocutnews.co.kr/news/5741209> (accessed on June 13, 2023).

real estate value, wasting of tax money, ruining the image of the city with a memorial. The bereaved families and their advocates steadily promote the 416 Life and Safety Park and its value to Ansan, and beyond. Over time, prioritizing the value of “life and safety” (over focused 4.16 memory) became another way to persuade the local community to build a memorial in their neighborhood. When a group of people visits Ansan to learn about the Sewol Ferry disaster, the bereaved families become tour guides. In this tour program, visiting the site of the 416 Life and Safety Park in the Hwarang Amusement Park is always included. Even though the construction has not started yet, the bereaved families have filled the gap by holding various events there, like the 2022 4.16 Life and Safety Park cultural festival and a 4.16 youth cultural festival at the site. The 416 Workshop also participated in the festivals with their hand-made artifacts. Whenever they held events, they set a booth aside to promote and explain the 416 Life and Safety Park. Would such community-based memorial work have made a difference after the Sampoong and Daegu disasters? It is worth considering that the longstanding conflicts and memorial site fights after those disasters may have turned out differently with the approach taken by the 4.16 families. It is a mode of memorial work that precedes the construction of a formal memorial structure, and may very well continue after construction is complete.

Sewol Forensics

Forensic analysis, just like memorialization, is always a social process. The 4.16 bereaved families got to know that fact, that to request forensic analysis of the disaster (the ship, the recovered technologies, the recovered bodies) that killed their loved ones through a disaster commission, public support and mobilization were required. To make “before and after the Sewol Ferry disaster different,” people should not forget the disaster through memorialization, however, the message to remember should also be derived from forensic works. According to the language of the bereaved families of Sewol, forensics was translated into “truth-finding.” To know the “truth” of what made the Sewol Ferry sink, the government organized the first Disaster Investigation Commission in the history of the Republic of Korea. The Korean public witnessed that truth-finding is not simple and that the cause of a disaster is never linear. Even the bereaved families could never completely decide upon what they could acknowledge as the “truth.” What they did agree on was that such a disaster should never take place again. The disaster investigation commission and other commissions that would follow were drawing support nationwide, maybe because there was a shared anxiety about living in the “accident republic,” where the values of human lives and safety were pushed behind other principles such as efficiency and economy.

On July 14, 2022, some of the Sewol Ferry investigation artifacts that had been stored at Mokpo New Port were moved to Ansan for preservation work. News reports explained that artifacts were planned for exhibition and permanent preservation at the 4.16 Life and Safety Park after it is built.⁵⁸ It is not clear yet how such artifacts will be used in the completed exhibition, but one clue can be seen. Mark Wasiuta, Jean Im, and Farah Alkhoury who curated and designed the exhibition explained their exhibition as follows.

The exhibition is a visible archive of artifacts from the great tragedy that happened on April 16th, 2014. It has two primary archive elements. The Horizontal Display System for physical artifacts lays out personal objects lost and damaged during the ferry disaster. The Media Archive Timelines show visual and audio artifacts recorded during the tragedy and after. Audio and video files recorded by cars, cameras, and cell phones on the ferry as well as files recorded by rescuers, news agencies, and observers from the exterior are compiled and organized into an archival timeline. These files play in sequence across the video wall as evidence and narration of the tragedy. Because there are many more files in the total media archive than there are screens, each time the sequence plays new files in new combinations will be selected to appear. Information about the source of the file, the location, and the time code pertaining to the unfolding of the disaster will appear on each screen.⁵⁹

Pieces of evidence can also be memorialized if they are woven into narratives. The designers stress that the exhibition will contain personal objects and also audio and video files recorded by cars, cameras, and cell phones on the ferry. This proposal was encouraged by the design guidelines for the 416 Life and Safety Park International Design Competition, including the instruction to “plan for the storage and display of the Sewol victims’ belongings, including parts of the Sewol hull.” This mode of memorialization is possible only because the Sewol hull and the victims’ belongings have been stored and preserved by the Disaster Investigation Commission.

The artifacts stored in Mokpo New Port and moved to Ansan were retrieved when the Sewol Investigation Commission (SIC, 2017-2018), was active. The SIC was a disaster investigation commission that operated during a gap between two special disaster investigation commissions, focusing on the scientific and technological aspects of the sinking. On April 22, 2015, the government decided to salvage the Sewol Ferry hull from the seabed. The major reason was to retrieve the unrecovered bodies. But, the need for a scientific investigation had also been raised to allow for more

⁵⁸ Jeongeun Yang, “Artifacts from Sewol Ferry leave Mokpo New Port for preservation 세월호 유류품, 보존 위해 목포신항 떠나,” Mokpo MBC, 2022. 7. 15, <https://www.mpbmc.co.kr/article/PEen-kjrjA-> (accessed on June 13, 2023).

⁵⁹ Farah Alkhoury, “Memorial Park Project,” <https://www.farahalkhoury.com/projects/memorial-park1> (accessed on May 11, 2023).

accurate fact-finding activities. After quite some time, on March 31, 2017, the Sewol Ferry arrived at Mokpo New Port, and after being put on land, the SIC began its work.

The division of labor between the SIC's departments was based on whether an artifact under examination was an "evidentiary, forensic" item or an "otherwise, including memorialization" item. This division, however, was not as easy as expected. According to the minutes of the plenary committee of the SIC, for example, there was doubt as to which team should be responsible for forensic research on digital devices.⁶⁰ The SIC discussed whether the digital devices could be utilized to establish the cause of the sinking, which was within the remit of Investigation Division 1, or whether they could be put to better use retrieving objects that belonged to the victims, which was the responsibility of Investigation Division 2. On 24 April 2017, at the second plenary committee meeting, one item on the agenda was also forensic work. There were multiple ways of proceeding with the forensic work, depending on whether the waterlogged digital devices retrieved would give the committee any meaningful information as to the cause of the ship sinking, or whether their retrieval would be purely for the benefit of the victims' families. After the discussion, Division 2 was placed in charge of the digital forensic work.

On 13 June 2017, journalist Sung-soo Kim from the newspaper *Newstapa* urged the need for mobile device forensics, stating that it is primarily for finding the truth, but that the value of it goes even further. In the news, Sung-soo Kim showed how families who had not yet recovered their children were able to spot them in the recovered mobile phone memory of other victims. He wrote, "Recovering the victim's mobile phone is the state's duty to heal the wounds of the bereaved families."⁶¹ Later, the SIC also understood the value of all aspects of electronic device forensics as both evidence and memories. Members of the commission, Yong-mo Kim and Dong-kwon Lee, mentioned this as well.

From an expert's point of view, I questioned whether there was even a need for a full investigation of mobile phone forensics. However, after many conversations with the bereaved families, I thought that the SIC must have some motive (to conduct a full investigation) as well as evidence investigation to be able to heal the hearts of them. It is important to collect evidence to investigate the cause of an accident or evidence with a forensic method, but I think the more important

⁶⁰ Sewol Investigation Commission, "Minutes of 2nd plenary meeting 선조위 제2차 전원위원회 회의록," (April 24, 2017), <https://sewol-fact.newstapa.org/archive> (accessed on June 13, 2023).

⁶¹ Sung-soo Kim, "Eunhwa and Dayoon in Minji's phone... Another meaning of Sewol cell phone recovery 민지 폰 속의 은화·다윤이... 세월호 휴대전화 복구의 또 다른 의미," *Newstapa* 뉴스타파, 2017. 6. 13, <https://newstapa.org/article/uXnSQ> (accessed on June 13, 2023).

value is the memory contained in it. The government needs to return those memories.⁶²

The process to retrieve the data inside the digital devices was done through the cooperation among investigators, bereaved families, and also technicians. Bereaved families mainly contributed to the first aid part of retrieving and recovering mobile phones. When things were being retrieved from the hull, workers hung items on hooks connected to a crane, which could lift them from the wreckage onto the ground. When technicians were in the field, they gave first aid to electronic devices, and when they were not present, the bereaved families on-site immediately gave first aid and called them.

The processes required for forensically recovering the memory from black boxes and the victims' cell phones were practically identical.⁶³ The types of electronic devices are different, but the type of electronic data stored are the same. The digital devices could be understood as scientific evidence that can help to find the cause of the sinking, memorial objects that help the bereaved families heal, and even educational or memorial material that encourages the general public to remember the Sewol Ferry disaster again.

Apart from digital devices like cell phones or CCTVs, there was also difficulty and ambiguity in dealing with lost and damaged personal objects. Lee Eun-guk, who was part of the Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries follow-up team at the Mokpo New Port site at the time, explained in the SIC's witness statement. The only reference he could access before he went to the site was the NFS's work, which dealt with the Daegu subway disaster.⁶⁴ He could get some information both from meeting with the NFS and from a report published by them in an effort to hand over the lessons including dealing with objects. The process of taking pictures, tagging them, and making them available to owners at the Mokpo New Port site, therefore, partially originated from the NFS's experience of the Daegu subway disaster.⁶⁵ Still the NFS's report did not contain a clear guide, ready to apply to the Sewol case, in such important areas such as washing the objects, for example.

As a result, the investigation headquarters of the Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries had to create a manual by imagining the Mokpo site in March of 2017. However,

⁶² Sewol Investigation Commission, "Minutes of 5th plenary meeting 선조위 제5차 전원위원회 회의록," (June 13, 2017), 10-16 <https://sewol-fact.newstapa.org/archive> (Accessed on June 13, 2023).

⁶³ Yomin Lee, "Corrupted memory recovery apparatus and method for digital forensic analysis 디지털 포렌식 분석을 위한 손상된 메모리 복구 장치 및 방법," Patent application number 10-2018-0090177, filing date August 2, 2018, registration date February 12, 2019.

⁶⁴ Sewol Investigation Commission, "Report on the statement of references related to the arrangement of lost articles 유류품 정리 관련 참고인진술조서 보고," December 11, 2017, National Archives of Korea, DA1582867.

⁶⁵ National Forensic Service (NFS), *Daegu Subway Disaster: Management of Mass Disasters and Mass Deaths* [note 29].

when the officials actually entered the site, they soon realized the manual should be completely revised—the prepared facilities were worse than expected. The bereaved proposed their own manual based on what they learned from all the experts around heritage preservation. In the end, one of the bereaved families, Ji Seong Lee, participated in the Sewol Ferry Yupum (in English: “personal objects”) and Hull Utilization Consultative Body 세월호 유품 및 선체 활용 방안 협의체 as the chief of the 416 Memory Archives.⁶⁶ This consultative body agreed on the manual and also published a special report addressing the meaning of the objects. An idea was proposed by the 416 Family Council to use damaged personal objects as symbols of the disaster. It was an important change of perception to approach the remains and objects of the Sewol Ferry disaster as symbols and records of the social disaster.⁶⁷

Unlike the Daegu Subway Corporation’s move to quickly get back to “normal” by packing remains into sacks, the SIC served as a stalling-space where many social stakeholders including bereaved families, scientists, and government officers gathered and unpacked things one by one to find answers, and to find meaning for a future memorial. The videos that were retrieved from CCTV of the cars and cell phones of the victims, and the personal objects lost and damaged are going to compose the exhibition of the Life and Safety Park in the future. A disaster investigation commission, which for the first time tried to focus on scientific and forensic evidence, turned out to be able to provide a sphere for creating a material basis for memorialization.

Culmination: The 4.16 Life and Safety Park

The 416 Life and Safety Park International Design Competition was organized by Ansan City and supported by the Office of the Prime Minister (4.16 Sewol Disaster Victim Support and Victim Memorial Project) and the Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries (Sewol Follow-up Measures Promotion Team).⁶⁸ The Competition was announced in February 2021 and received 75 international and domestic entries. In the guidelines, the organizers emphasized four points to the participants: (1) the responsibility of the state; (2) the importance of thorough investigation and justice to the culpable parties; (3) highlighting the respect for life to build a safer society; (4) and

⁶⁶ 4.16 Memory Archives, *Talking about the day – Ji Seong Lee, Do-eun’s mother: 4.16 Oral Testimony, Danwon High School, 2nd Grade, 3rd class, vol. 1* 그날을 말하다 – 도연 엄마 이지성: 4.16구술증언록 단원고 2학년 3반 1권, (Gyeonggi-do: Hanul Press, 2019), 344-345.

⁶⁷ Sewol Investigation Commission, *4.16 Sewol Ferry Disaster Comprehensive Report II Special Report* 세월호선체조사위원회 종합보고서 (Mokpo: Sewol Investigation Commission, 2018), 332-357.

⁶⁸ 4.16 Foundation, “4.16 Museum—416 Life Safety Park International Design Competition,” <https://416museum.org/4-16생명안전공원/> (accessed on June 13, 2023).

the consolation of victims and social reconciliation.⁶⁹ Five teams were selected for the first phase on April 9, and with these five proposals, the park declaration ceremony was convened on the seventh anniversary, 16 April 2021. On June 25 the final round presentation was held and the final winners were announced after five days.

The winner of the competition was the design plan proposed by ISON architects, part of a consortium composed of Kiohun Architects and Associates as the architect, Design ANPARK as the landscape architect, and Jean Im and Mark Wasiuta for the exhibition. The main theme of the design was “recovery(치유).” All “recovery” comes from revealing the truth. “Revealing the hidden truth and the accumulation of the evidence of our commitment to the truth heals all.” According to the publicized brochure from the winner of the design competition, the 416 Life and Safety Park was an open space where people could come and rest or experience the exhibits on display. The park was to become a space with more than one goal and purpose. It was also going to become: a space for remembrance and education; a space for condolences and memorialization; a space for asking questions and building solidarity; and a space where we could remember the victims. Accordingly, the proposal is composed of not only enshrinement space, but also an educational-cultural-complex where people (especially youths) can utilize the the concert hall and exhibition hall.

During the final round presentation, Jean Son from ISON architects emphasized that one of the most difficult decisions that they made was to reinterpret the design guideline that instructed the enshrinement space to be built underground but also be well-lighted. The theme of their enshrinement space was the “sky.” Son and his team believed that the enshrinement should be placed outdoors instead of being hidden underground. Understanding the complicated nature of the Life and Safety Park, which had to be a memorial and an everyday park nearby a residential area at the same time, and understanding that enshrinement should not be fully open while not being fully isolated to the public, Son decided to design the space as a half-dome structure with an open ceiling. However, being selected as a winning proposal did not mean the end of difficult decisions.

The ISON architects had to convince another important actor in building and running the park who had no say during the selection process in the design competition: the bereaved families. During the design process, any meeting with the bereaved families was banned because of the organizing committee's measure to make it fair between domestic and overseas teams. The voices of the bereaved family members were summarized into quotes in the guideline provided to the participants. They were attendees during the design competition and therefore had their seats during the presentations for the final rounds but were not able to vote. As a result, detailed

⁶⁹ Do-Hun Kim, “A Study on the Directions of Sewol Ferry Tragedy Memorial Park Based on the Analysis on Social Discourse and Recognition Evaluation 도심형 메모리얼파크의 사회적 담론 및 인식분석을 통한 4·16 세월호 참사 추모공원 방향성 제안 연구,” *Journal of the Korean Institute of Landscape Architecture 한국조경학회지* 48:6 (2020), 25-38.

discussions and adjustments with the bereaved families could be held only after the selection. On 18 July 2021 the first briefing of the Life and Safety Park was held for the bereaved families. Do-Hun Kim served as a moderator. Due to it being in the middle of the pandemic, a minimum number of the bereaved families joined and it was instead aired live. Jean Son from ISON, who was the representative of the winner of the design competition, gave an explanation to the bereaved families. In the Q&A session after his presentation, the main issue was around “birds.” Jean Son emphasized birds as symbolic creatures of nature which can visit if a small puddle is formed inside the enshrinement after rain. However, the bereaved families’ opinion was different, and it was related to their pre-existed experiences around the hull.

There are good images of birds, and there are bad images of birds. The reason I say that is because there’s the Sewol in Mokpo New Port. You haven’t been inside the Sewol, right? If you go inside the Sewol in Mokpo New Port, there’s quite a bit of feces. The birds are looking for a safe place, so they’re looking for a lot of places where there are no people, and that’s why I’m telling you. I hope that a lot of people will come to visit, but I think that may not be the case. If that happens, I think it will be a paradise for birds, and a lot of pollution will accumulate.⁷⁰

The original plan was to finish the construction by the 10th anniversary of the sinking, April 16, 2024, but the ground has not yet been broken as of this writing. The construction is being delayed for two reasons. One of them is financial. The COVID-19 pandemic increased the cost of the construction beyond its early estimation, thereby changing the design of the park to become more economical while not impairing its original meaning. Another regards persuasion. Starting from the briefing, issues around safety issues and enshrinement elements became challenging. The biggest challenge in redesigning the Life and Safety Park has involved the urns. The original plan was to build the space for the urns without a ceiling so the victims could experience nature and the changing seasons. The bereaved families were worried that the urns may be damaged because of the harsh weather, animals (i.e. the aforementioned birds), and even intruders. The ISON Architects accepted the feedback and changed their plans ten times from November 2021 to October 2022. Over the course of the conversation, many details were adjusted, including the height of the urns, the distance, and the material of the case.

Unfortunately or fortunately, due to the financial situation which delayed the schedule, enough time for deliberation between bereaved families and architects has now been possible. Jean Son tried many strategies to convince the bereaved families by letting the expert with authority talk, and asking for some mediation from the

⁷⁰ Sewol Ferry Family Broadcasting 416 TV, “4.16 Life safety park briefing session (winner) live copy 4.16 생명안전공원 설명회(당선작) live의 사본”, 416 TV (July 18, 2021), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KIF4-O6SqWg&t=3106s> (accessed on June 13, 2023).

project officials. In the end, however, Mr. Son said, the bereaved family leaders, including Ms. Jung, contributed significantly to reconciling the many different opinions among the bereaved families. Mr. Son also mentioned that the discussions with the bereaved families actually led to improvements in the design, even though the process was not easy.

The purpose of the competition was to select the optimal plan for the creation of a cultural park that combines enshrinement facilities, exhibition, and educational facilities to commemorate the victims of the Sewol ferry disaster and share the pain of the victims. In addition, this is an opportunity to ask and answer questions about how we should remember the Sewol Ferry disaster.

More research is needed to understand disaster memorialization itself as a form of scientific practice, as a form of democratic action, and as a form of place-making. Through close attention to the themes of post-disaster forensic investigation, real estate/ “site fights,” political organization and community organizing, and design competitions, this article demonstrates the cumulative impact of disaster memorialization over the past three decades in Korea and the memorial work deployed by advocates for disaster justice. In sum, the effort to memorialize is not complete when a monument is declared complete. The slow disaster of trauma, of healing, and the repetition of harm when new disasters take place is rarely noted by the media or policy makers, but the harm is real. Survivors and bereaved family members, however, are anything but passive. Their memorial work continues to demonstrate how memory and democratic action can in some crucial ways make meaning from disaster.

Abstract

In the same manner that disasters are political, so too are disaster memorials. Following the 2014 Sewol Ferry Disaster, the bereaved families worked quickly to establish institutions for self-protection, protest, investigation, and memorialization. This article contends that Sewol Ferry “memorial work” is a multi-faceted endeavor, involving several discrete types of expertise and action, including community education and outreach, urban spatial site advocacy, and scientific/forensic analysis. To make sense of this memorial work, we recount foundational memorialization efforts following the Sampoong Department Store collapse (1995) and the Daegu Subway Fire (2003) in which survivors and bereaved families pioneered memorial work techniques. Secondly, we track the evolving struggles over 4.16 memorialization in Ansan, the hometown of the 250 students of Danwon High School who died in the disaster, culminating in the site and design selection process of the 4.16 Life and Safety Park. Finally, memorialization efforts recounted in this article have unfolded against the backdrop of multiple scientific/forensic investigations into the causes of the ship’s sinking and the recovery of human remains and victims’ belongings. In the slow disaster of the Sewol Ferry, memorialization is not the final stage, indeed in some crucial ways it may just be the beginning.

Keywords: memorial, science, investigation, forensics, bereaved