Silent Witness examines the British sculptor Rachel Whiteread’s Nameless Library, (1996-2000), a holocaust memorial in Judenplatz Square, Vienna. For her project, the sculptor designed an inverted library in concrete, the proportions being derived from those found in a room surrounding the square. While the majority of critics refer to this memorial as an ‘inside out’ library, this paper argues that Whiteread’s design is not so easily understood. It will identify the ways in which her design complicates relationships between sculpture and architecture, container and contained, private and public, interior and façade, as well as domestic and civic scales. The work is placed within a ‘counter monumental’ tradition of memorialisation, as articulated by James E. Young, which demonstrates a radical re-making of memorial sculpture after the Holocaust. It is argued that this site-specific memorial, partially cloned from the urban context in which it is placed, commemorates a loss that is beyond words. Nameless Library utilises architectural operations and details to evoke a disquieting atmosphere in urban space, borrowing from the local to inculcate neighbouring structures as silent witnesses to past atrocities. The memorial is compared to the casemate fortifications on the Atlantic wall; the defensible spaces of bunkers, described by Paul Virilio in his book Bunker Archaeology as ‘survival machines’. It is argued that Whiteread’s careful detailing of Nameless Library is designed to keep memory alive. Under Whiteread’s direction, the typological form of the bunker is transformed into a structure of both physical and psychic defense. The memorial has been specifically designed to resist attack by vandals and also functions as a defence against entropy, taking into itself and holding onto lost loved ones, preserving their memory.

Keywords: sculptors, inverted library, Whiteread, Rachel, 1963-, English sculptors, holocaust memorials, memorials

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Outside Rachel Whiteread’s exhibition at the British Pavilion in 1997 ©. British Council. Famous for her sculpture that gives solid forms to negative space, Rachel Whiteread was the first woman to present a solo exhibition at the Pavilion. Whiteread had already received recognition in the UK as the first female to win the prestigious Turner Prize in 1993 but this exhibition propelled her onto the international stage. Whiteread is primarily a sculptor and the Pavilion exhibition included the cast works that she is most well known for. The main gallery space housed a plaster cast of the spa Rachel Whiteread’s ‘Water Tower’ sculpture. Credit: pinterest.co.uk. In 1993 Rachel was awarded the ‘Turner Prize’, an award given annually to a visual artist born or based in Great Britain as recognition of an outstanding exhibition or piece of work. This award is the one that is considered the highest honour in the British art world. In 1988, Rachel had her first solo exhibition, at the Carlisle Gallery in London. 2000, is the year that Rachel created a ‘Holocaust Memorial’ also known as the ‘The Nameless Library’, which is permanently placed in Vienna. This is dedicated to the 65,000 Austrian Jews murdered during the Holocaust. Each wall of this sculpture is lined with rows of nameless books with two permanently closed doors on the front.