

Introduction: Commemoration and Public Space

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Memorials stand in public spaces in most cities and towns. Some become unnoticed because of their familiarity. Others remain activated by regular ritual use. Both old and new memorials can capture broad public attention when they create controversy or coalesce significant aspects of collective history or contemporary values. In different ways, their enduring presence shapes the form and significance of our public realm.

Recent memorial schemes highlight their ongoing relevance to public discourse and to the character and use of public spaces. In New Zealand, the competition for a memorial to the victims of the 2010 and 2011 Canterbury earthquakes, and to bring solace to all those who were affected by them, exemplifies the role of memorials in helping traumatised communities. The February 2011 earthquake in particular killed 185 people, injured hundreds more and irreversibly transformed the urban fabric of Christchurch and the lives of its residents. The 2014 brief for a Canterbury earthquake memorial asks that it serves a range of purposes: to provide a space of quiet contemplation; to host large events; to acknowledge the help the city received following the disasters; and to honour and remember those who were killed or injured.

In Melbourne, another proposed memorial raises questions about inclusivity and historical interpretation. In 2014, the city council voted to erect a memorial to two Indigenous men, Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner, who were hanged in Melbourne in 1842 for killing two white whale-hunters as part of their resistance to the white settlement of Tasmania. Their memorial will be the first such capital city acknowledgement of the 'frontier wars' between white settlers and Indigenous Australians during the country's early European period. As such, it challenges traditional ideas about who and what should be commemorated. Both proposals remind us that memorials remain pertinent and powerful loci of public values, embodying contestations over a community's identity, memories, politics and built form.

This special issue of *Landscape Review* draws together contemporary research in landscape architecture, urban design and geography to interrogate the design, use and meaning of memorials in relation to public space. This discussion seeks to go beyond the conventional focus of memorial research on the symbolism and meanings that sponsors and artists intend public memorials to convey, and to analyse their status as public spaces. This enquiry spans public engagement in the briefing and production of memorials, the practical and policy considerations that shape outcomes, and how users engage with memorial settings once they are built through both commemorative practices and informal everyday uses.

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INTRODUCTION

Several themes tie the contributions together. The first is the question of precisely which publics contemporary memorials are designed to engage, considering the varied themes, narrative contents and spatial experiences they offer. Memorials often reveal the tensions of trying to serve and express both social difference and unity. Different advocates for public memorials, whether governments, civic organisations or grassroots groups, have different aims and expectations for their design and use. Some memorials are therapeutic, others seek to teach, or admonish, and the presence of these memorials in a public space is an ongoing reminder of the range of modes of remembering and forgetting that contemporary societies engage in. The contributions identify how, by varying means and to different extents, different interest groups are engaged with designers in the procurement processes for new memorials. The multiplicity of publics who are engaged with or ignored by memorials underscores the fundamentally political nature of those memorials, both at the time of their construction and in the present. While public space design often seeks to be socially inclusive, memorials can sometimes be the opposite.

The complexities of memorials and their audiences inspire distinctive spatial and aesthetic approaches. Many traditional memorial forms – figurative depictions of heroic leaders elevated on plinths and cloaked in allegorical symbolism – were designed to both humble and inspire their audiences. Recent approaches speak to different audiences and in different ways. The articles in this issue indicate the scope for change and experimentation in commemorative approaches and processes, despite the strong traditions and emotions that engender them. Contemporary memorials increasingly take wider, lower landscape forms that are closely integrated with everyday urban public space. They incorporate natural elements and encourage close multi-sensory engagement. Abstract and figural elements are often used in combination; sculptures tend to be less didactic than in the past, but this change is compensated for by additional images and text.

Another distinctive feature shared among the papers in this issue is the link between the forms of memorials and their audiences in terms of how memorial sites are experienced and used. This themed issue illustrates that in an age of ubiquitous media, material memorial sites continue to have importance for people with regard to the embodied, multi-sensory experience of travelling to them, being in them and connecting with other people. Memorials foreground how designed landscapes can support and engender particular ritual actions. The contributors consider the relationship between the traditional language of formal memorials and the diversity of subjects, forms and social practices that constitute contemporary remembrance.

A final related point is that the wider urban context for a memorial makes a vital contribution to its meaning and use, through the constellations of symbols and histories that it sits within, the formal constraints and opportunities that shape its design and perception, and the ways in which people approach and respond to it. This issue explores the tensions between the separateness of memorial settings from the public realm and their connectedness to it. Memorials are activated by use at moments of ritual importance, such as anniversary dates, but also by quotidian activity. Sometimes memorials are subject to uses unanticipated by their designers and sponsors. These may be precipitated by the form and

placement of memorials, or may reflect particular attitudes and lifestyles of the local community. Memorials have always served more than one purpose and one audience, and many are now designed with that diversity in mind. Many play important roles in the development and activation of urban public space. The crowding of memorials in some urban areas creates a need to manage both spaces and meanings.

The first paper addresses these themes, sketching out contours of the conceptual terrain at the intersection of commemoration and public space. Shanti Sumartojo makes three connected arguments, drawing on empirical material from London and the Australian cemeteries of the Western Front. Her first assertion is that commemorative sites are porous, inflected and influenced by their locations, a point that all the subsequent papers expand on. Second, Sumartojo argues that memorials, in appearing 'timeless', connect individuals to the nation and to fellow citizens in the past, present and future. Third, she shows how official and vernacular uses of commemorative sites activate landscape in ways that both reinforce and undermine each other. Thus, context, form and use combine to make memorial sites powerful and enduring for their audiences.

A detailed focus on the narrative aspects of memorials is the subject of the next paper. John Stephens takes up one of the main themes of commemoration – sacrifice – and examines how this has been expressed in memorials and, by extension, the effect it has on memory and forgetting. As he notes, 'sacrifice is a particular tradition of forgetting that has coloured the practice of commemoration and masked war trauma'. Stephens shows how memorials have employed the motif of sacrifice: first, they erase the horrors of war for grieving families through the notion of the 'beautiful death' exemplified in many figurative statues; second, they construct sacrifice as 'sacred' through religious symbolism and ritual language; and, finally, they mask trauma and sanctify the nation, reassuring the grief-stricken that wartime deaths have not been needless. Stephens also turns to the notion of 'postmemory', a means by which the trauma of war loss, although no longer in the immediate memories of contemporary family members, is nevertheless linked to them through an empathetic connection to their ancestors' experiences.

Where Stephens addresses some of the ways in which existing memorials do their symbolic work in a public space, practising memorial designers Russell Rodrigo and SueAnne Ware engage with the process of new memorial creation. Their papers explore how the symbolic language of memorials is imagined and realised through direct examination of client–designer relationships.

Rodrigo tackles the complexity of this relationship, unpacking 'the influence of political, public, personal, contextual, temporal and aesthetic agendas' on memorials. He outlines important factors that shape the memorial creation process, complicating the apparently straightforward relationship between the client or sponsor of a new memorial and its designer. He sets up his argument by defining the 'client' of a memorial in the broadest terms as the 'real and imagined' public that shapes memorials both in their inception and over time through use. This recognition of the complexity and variety of the public allows him to interrogate the 'overlapping ways in which the design of memory is customised', drawing attention to the ongoing activation of memorial spaces, including through critical discussion after instalment and by visitors over a much longer period.

Ware makes a detailed study of a particular design process with ‘grassroots’ origins, the St Andrews Bushfire Memorial in rural Victoria, Australia. Her contribution illuminates the complex negotiation and decision-making processes involving the client community and highlights the challenges of achieving a responsible and ethically engaged outcome. Ware’s practice treats the process of creating a memorial itself as a form of commemoration. This means she does not shy away from the disagreement and contestation that accompany this process. Ware seeks to contribute to the ‘ongoing and useful critique of design by committee, and participatory approaches to design’. She argues that ‘it is not about letting go of being a designer and becoming a facilitator; it is more about finding a blurry space where consultation processes and design space are opened up to other territories’.

Quentin Stevens shifts the scale of analysis from an individual process of memorial creation to the much broader urban commemorative landscape. In a comparison of Berlin, London and New York, he shows how these cities’ policies manage conflicts, clarify priorities and provide for present and future needs, albeit in a piecemeal manner. Stevens points out that no major new commemorative precincts have been created in the central areas of these cities in the past 75 years and that, instead, new memorials must be woven into complex existing spatial contexts. Common themes occur across the three examples in Stevens’ paper; new memorial forms, for example, tend to be ‘spatial’ rather than traditionally figurative. There are now more memorials to victims of accidents, disasters and crimes, and policies have changed to stipulate a minimum time that must elapse before new proposals will be considered. Site-specificity remains fraught, as cities with crowded and sometimes traumatic histories seek to represent the past in meaningful ways. Additionally, all three cities must manage ongoing and increasing calls for new memorial sites in a context of competing demands for other land uses.

As a collection, these papers address several different scales, moving between the symbolic and the practical, and from instances of individual memorials to much larger landscapes. They draw upon various examples to make their points about what contests accompany the creation of memorials, which publics they address, how they are created and planned and what new representational forms they adopt; in several instances, they address the same cases from quite different viewpoints. This collection of papers also shows that the variety of audiences commemorative structures address ensures the meanings of memorials are never settled. Because of this fluidity, memorials can be understood within a dialectic between the official, permanent, determined and ‘designed’ on the one hand and the vernacular, ephemeral, flexible and ‘practised’ on the other. Even as memorials shape the form, meaning and use of our urban spaces and seek to tell us who we are and what we should remember, they remain flexible and contested.

These papers resulted from a two-day public research workshop hosted by the Humanities Research Centre at the Australian National University, Canberra, on 21 and 22 February 2013, in connection with the 2013 Visiting Fellowship Program’s Annual Theme: Cities, Imaginaries, Publics. The papers were enriched by several structured discussions during the workshop, which involved attendees from leading design and heritage practices, local government officials responsible

for open space and public art, and members of the public who have been closely involved in supporting, shaping or contesting recent proposals for public memorials. These discussions were further enhanced by site visits to several important memorials in Canberra's public spaces, including the Sculpture Garden at the Australian War Memorial, Anzac Parade, Kings Park, and Reconciliation Place. First-hand experience of these settings helped greatly to inform reflection and debate about the issues raised in the workshop's presentations and discussions. The editors wish to thank, in particular, the sixth presenter Julia Lossau from the University of Bremen, Germany, and the participants at this workshop who, through their input, helped to shape the contributions to this issue of *Landscape Review*.