

chapter three

**m e m o r i a l i s a t i o n
& r e f l e c t i o n s
o f t h e t r a g i c**

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Memorials are among the earliest artistic creations by mankind. Tonkin and Laurence (2003) state that, in the 21st century “*We are in the midst of a worldwide obsession with memorializing that has been unequalled since the age of the dictators*” (Tonkin & Laurence, 2003, p. 48). Monuments, history museums, memorial museums, public sculptures, commemorative sites and memorial landscapes are created and dedicated to the commemoration of the past. Today, at an unparalleled moment in history, spaces dedicated to the commemoration of the past are found throughout the world, and Tonkin and Laurence add, “*and usually [commemorate] a past involving violent death*” (Tonkin & Laurence, 2003, p. 48).

This chapter extends the contextualisation of this study introduced in Chapter two, and grounds the enquiry within the established discourse of memorialisation and design interpretation. Focused on introducing the key research areas of memorial design and design interpretation, this chapter extends the investigation of this study through the continuation of contextual discourse contributing to the discussion on the role of site design in shaping Euro-Western experience and interpretation of international genocide memorials. Through an introduction to the terms ‘memoryscape’, ‘memorial form’, and ‘memorial texture’, this chapter continues the discussion on the process and practice of design interpretation, as described by Juan Pablo Bonta in his defining work ‘An Anatomy of Architectural Interpretation’, published in 1974.

3.2 MEMORY & MEMORIALISATION

Sarah Steele of Flinders University School of Law, suggests “*that, as the corporeal form of ‘memory’, memorialisation is a complex and multifaceted process, which acts as a ritual, a sacred behaviour authorising a connection to the past, and a rite of passage, wherein narratives impressed on the site promote metamorphosis in the present and future*” (Steele, 2006, p. 2). As memory is not a static process but one that is continuously reconstructed, memory as a concept that is represented via memorials has come to present various challenges for those working within the field of memorialisation.

3.2.1 MEMORY & MEMORIALISATION - A DISCUSSION ON DEFINITION

Memory is much more than the recall of past stimuli. “*It involves emotion, will and creativity in the reconstruction of the past to serve present needs*” (Field, 1999; cited in Naidu, 1994, p. 5). As opposed to history that is revised through time seeking to gain understanding in all its complexity, memory is passed through generations and often coalesces in places, objects, sites and memorials (Blight, 2002). The French philosopher Serge Thion suggests, as opposed to memory, history is the reconstruction of the past based on documents and material evidences. Memory on the other hand, is a tale of the past based on personal remembrance and subjective feelings (Thion, 1993, pp. 181-182). With regard to a study such as this, where the effects of time, politics, economics and culture are seen to shape, direct and dictate the representation and interpretation of history, the ‘message’ portrayed through memorial design is often better described as ‘memory’ rather than ‘history’, as multiple levels of remembrance and interpretation have taken place through time.

Arthur Danto, philosopher and art critic wrote “*We erect monuments so that we shall always remember, and build memorials so that we shall never forget*” (Danto, 1998, p. 153). Paul Williams, in his 2007 book *Memorial Museums* describes how some scholars distinguish between ‘memorial’ and ‘monument’. He writes, although “*some writers distinguish between memorials and monuments based on their political function – memorial often signifies mourning and loss, whereas monument signifies greatness or valour – we often see measures of both in any single structure, making this distinction fuzzy*” (Williams, 2007, p. 8). Within this study therefore, I use the term ‘memorialisation’ as an umbrella term for anything that serves the ‘memory’ of a person or event. Memorialisation may therefore proliferate in numerous forms from permanent expressions such as cemeteries, museums, art works, transcripts, literature or film, or as impermanent gestures such as ceremonies, theatre, song or dance (Steele, 2006, p. 3).

3.2.2 MEMORIALISATION – AIMS & OBJECTIVES

As will be discussed in the chapters that follow, the aims and objectives of memorialisation are far-reaching, complex and multi-levelled. Often spaces influenced by external pressures ranging from local expectation to national and international politics, memorials, in the context of time and culture must speak to visitors from this, and future generations who do not ‘know’ through immediate experience. *“It is the very intensity of human emotion evoked by the memory of atrocity that renders it so effective as an instrument in the pursuit of various political or social goals”* (Ashworth & Hartmann, 2005, p. 3). Waging war on forgetting however, whatever the ‘memory’, is a key task of all memorials where different concepts and representation collide (da Costa Meyer, 2006, p. 47). As Paul Goldberger, architectural critic for *The New Yorker* discussed on the 2006 WNYC Show ‘What Have We Learned: Memorial’, creating a memorial is enormously challenging because you need to create a physical form that conveys emotion and meaning, and yet at a time when our society is so fractured and so factionalised, its very difficult to find a form that has the authority and the sense of a common language that a memorial really needs to have to be meaningful. For Goldberger, the most important thing about a memorial right now, is that it tells a story that is meaningful to those who do not have memory of the event, of course not forgetting or disrespecting those family and friends directly affected also. The memorial needs to be able to speak to generations who were not there. . . it must speak in a public way for the next generation who will not have been there, who will not have those memories (WNYC – New York Public Radio, 2006). James E. Young, Professor of English and Judaic Studies at the University of Massachusetts Amherst agrees . . . the memorial needs to serve both a personal function – a place for the families to come and mourn, but it also needs to serve a civic role or a civic function for people who were not there, and for generations who don’t have direct memory of the event (WNYC – New York Public Radio, 2006). The construction of memorials within societies who have experienced tragedy is often rationalised by this need for education of future generations. *“This preservation-for-education practice sees remains, objects and sites . . . as capable of instructing and unifying the society around knowledge of what has come before”* (Hughes, 2006, p. 271). In the words of Alex Krieger, a child of Holocaust survivors, and professor of architecture, active in the creation of Boston’s Holocaust memorial:

It’s not for my parents that I pursue this endeavour. . . . This memorial will be for me. Because I was not there, and did not suffer, I cannot remember. Therefore, I very much need to be reminded. This memorial will be for my six-month-old daughter, who will need to be reminded even more. It will be for her children who will need to be reminded still more. We must build such a memorial for all the generations to come who, by distance from the actual events and people, will depend on it to activate [memory] (Krieger; cited in Young, 1993, p. 285).

Remembrance of genocide continues to resist representation however, and Mirzoeff, Professor of Arts and Comparative Studies at Stony Brook University, suggests that in doing so, threatens to retreat into invisibility (Mirzoeff, 2005, p. 37). It is within this complexity of remembering and forgetting that Ereshnee Naidu, of the Centre for the Study of Violence and

Reconciliation, in South Africa states, that “*by actively constructing and attempting to ‘represent’ the multiple stories of victims and survivors of conflict that memorialisation has the promise of promoting human rights*” (Naidu, 2004, p 5). Whatever shape a memorial or commemorative space assumes within our global society today, it must address what Marion Weiss calls ‘the terror of forgetting,’ - the fear that lies behind all memorials. “*They must ask you and subsequent generations to re-evaluate the event in your own culture and your own time*” (Kulman, 2001).

Outlined below is a description on terms pivotal to the discussion that follows within this study. Describing the key research concepts of ‘memoryscape’, ‘memorial form’ and finally ‘memorial texture’, the discussion below will highlight the use, context and meaning attributed to each term within the presentation of research that follows.

3.2.3 MEMORIAL FORM & TEXTURE

The term ‘Memoryscape’ refers within this study to the encompassing approach to the physical representation of memory in relation to a specific geographic or cultural area. Likened to the term ‘cultural landscape’, in the effect that it is often the physical expression of multiple external influences, the memoryscape, when considered in relation to the physical expression of memory is often a highly emotive, political, or social statement. Below is a discussion on memorial form and memorial texture, two concepts introduced within this research to describe the phenomenon of memorialisation.

3.2.3.1

MEMORIAL FORM

The Viennese modernist architectural theorist, Adolf Loos, once said “*that the only true architecture, the only pure architecture, was that of the memorial – one which had no function other than memory*” (Loos; cited in Heathcote, 2006, p. 50). As has been established, we are today in the midst of a worldwide obsession with memorialisation “*From the crosses and flowers left by the roadside as transient memorials to the accidentally dead, to the transformation of “the world’s largest building project” – the rebuilt World Trade Centre – into a huge functioning memorial, everywhere are found new spaces dedicated to the commemoration of the past*” (Tonkin & Laurence, 2003, p. 48). Focused here on ‘designed form’ in terms of both built work and space, four types of ‘permanent’ ‘memorial form’ have been identified, that are referred to, and discussed in detail throughout this study – ‘*mass grave*’, ‘*monument*’, ‘*museum*’, and ‘*memorial landscape*’.

A ‘*mass grave*’ is the term given here to a place containing multiple, usually unidentified human remains. Mass graves are commonly associated with, or are, memorial sites.

A ‘*monument*’, as discussed by James E. Young, is a subset of memorials: “*the material objects, sculptures, and installations used to memorialize a person or thing*” (Young, 1993, p.

4). He continues, “A memorial may be a day, a conference, or a space, but it need not be a monument. A monument, on the other hand, is always a kind of memorial” (Young, 1993, p. 4).

Paul Williams defines a ‘museum’ as an “institution devoted to the acquisition, conservation, study, exhibition, and educational interpretation of objects with scientific, historical, or artistic value” (Williams, 2007, p. 8). A ‘memorial museum’ however, is a subset within museumification and relates specifically to a “kind of museum dedicated to a historic event commemorating mass suffering of some kind” (Williams, 2007, p. 8). It is this ‘type’ of museum form that is considered within this study.

The term ‘*memorial landscape*’ is identified here to describe a specific and bounded physical location, designed or allocated to serve a commemorative function. The term ‘memorial landscape’ is used here to describe a memorial space that provides opportunity for remembrance and commemoration that may be either directed or undirected. Interpretation of site may be experienced through sensory components that extend beyond the traditional orientation of the ‘visual’. Figure 3.1 below illustrates the relationships between the proposed components of memorial form, discussed within this study.

MEMORIAL AS FORM

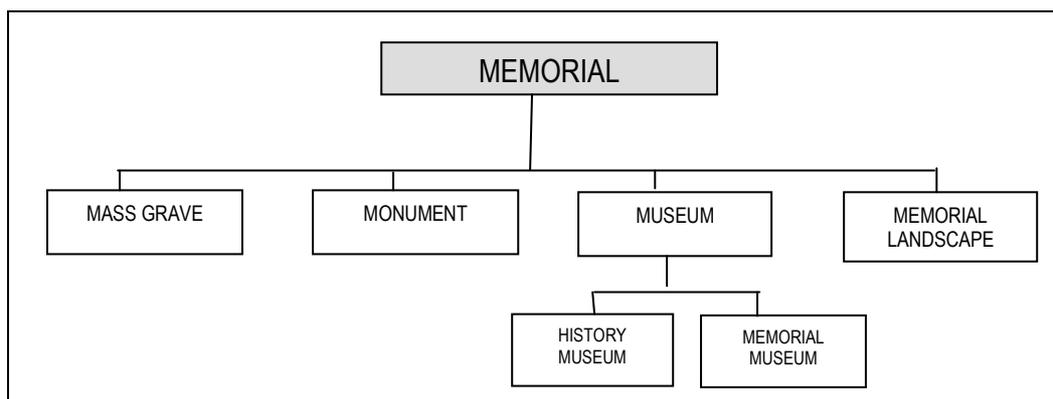


Fig. 3.1

3.2.3.2

MEMORIAL TEXTURE

To introduce the concept of ‘*memorial texture*’, I turn to Susan Cook, Linguistic Anthropologist and comparative genocide scholar who, in undertaking research in Rwanda during 2000, observed three activities relating to the remembrance of the 1994 genocide – *preservation*, *documentation* and *memorialisation*. As stated above however, I use the term ‘memorial’ or ‘memorialisation’ within this study as an umbrella term that encompasses any and all practice of commemoration, of which preservation and documentation are part. I therefore propose to use these two activities of *preservation* and *documentation*, introduced by Cook as individual ‘memorial textures’, alongside two additional memorial textures - *education*, and *abstraction / non-representation*. Outlined below is a brief introduction to the use of each term within the limits of this study.

In her 2006 article *'The Politics of Preservation in Rwanda'*, Cook relates the act of preservation to that of restoration, introducing the idea that *preservation* entails making necessary changes to revert something to a previous state that can then be maintained. She states *"Preservation entails halting the natural processes of change and actively maintaining something in a frozen state – a sort of dynamic stasis"* (Cook, 2006, p. 296). She continues, *"With reference to the aftermath of genocide, then, preserving genocide sites entails making decisions about what to preserve (bodies, buildings, weapons, documents), and at what moment in their history. As a field of practice and study, the preservation of genocide sites is located at the intersection of historic preservation/restoration and forensic anthropology"* (Cook, 2006, pp. 296-297). As crime scenes of international interest, genocide sites often contain important 'first-hand' evidences that need to be retained and preserved.

Documentation, as stated by Cook, is the effort to establish an authoritative account of a particular event or events based on primary sources, and may serve a legal, scholarly, or political purpose. *"Usually conducted by trained scholars, documentation projects are most often aimed at establishing the facts of a particular event or period so that they may be studied, analyzed and established for posterity"* (Cook, 2006, p. 298). Together these two memorial practices are listed under the term '*memorial texture*', alongside the additional proposed practices of education and abstraction/non-representation. These two additional textures are described below in relation to the limits of this study.

Education is the third *memorial texture* introduced in this study, and relates to the process of learning, or the acquisition of knowledge. Often an 'outward' consideration in memorial design, the educational opportunities presented by a memorial project are far-reaching, influenced by societal, cultural, political and economic agendas. In terms of genocide memorialisation, educating visitors about the event or people concerned is often a key consideration and can take many forms. There is today however a growing consensus that education for the prevention of genocide is essential to contributing to both the reduction of human rights violations and the building of a free, just and peaceful world (United Nations, 1997, p. 5). Human rights education, as defined by the United Nations, refers to the training, dissemination and information efforts aimed at the building of a universal culture of human rights through the imparting of knowledge and skills and the moulding of attributes which are directed towards:

- (a) *The strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms;*
- (b) *The full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity;*
- (c) *The promotion of understanding, tolerance, gender equality and friendship among all nations, indigenous peoples and racial, national, ethnic, religious and linguistic groups;*
- (d) *The enabling of all persons to participate effectively in a free society;*
- (e) *The furtherance of the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.*

(United Nations, 1997, p. 5)

As this study will show, all three memorial textures discussed so far are continually at risk of succumbing to political, economic and societal pressure. ‘Realist’ in appearance, this study will show that memorialisation orientated around the memorial textures of preservation, documentation and education resist a critical level of interpretation, in their outward claim to provide evidentially correct data, particularly by way of on-site information, and presentation of first-hand evidences.

The fourth memorial texture proposed within the scope of this research is that of *abstraction / non-representation*. Discussion about these concepts within design professions are on-going and diverse. With regard to the representation of tragedy in design and architecture, Tonkin and Laurence, in their 2003 article written for *Architecture Australia*, describe how contemporary memorials today reflect a shift in memorial design, from realist to abstract (Tonkin & Laurence, 2003, p. 49). Such memorials are part of the larger restructuring of the sense of space, time, memory and identity, in our age of mass media, and globalisation. Figure 3.2 below illustrates the relationship between preservation, documentation, education and abstraction/non-representation under the umbrella term of memorialisation.

MEMORIAL AS TEXTURE

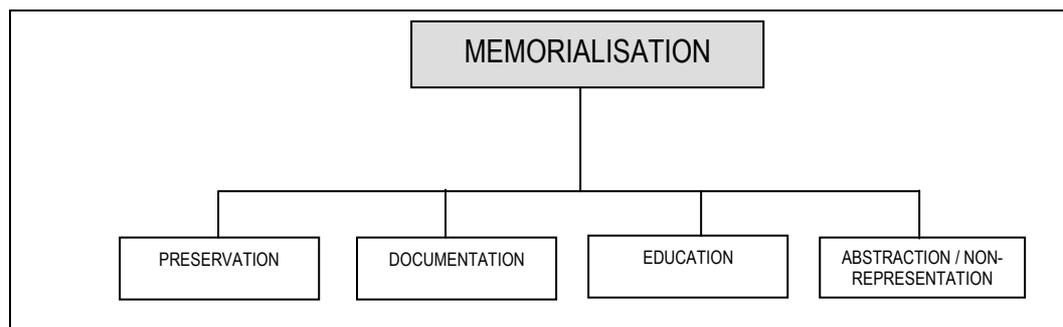


Fig. 3.2

The ‘*Memorial Development Model*’ outlined below indicates the relationship between ‘*Memorial form*’ and ‘*Memorial texture*’. Referred to and developed throughout the course of this study, the *Memorial Development Model* is ultimately used as a tool to express the relationship between memorial design and memorial interpretation, as will be discussed below.

3.2.4 THE MEMORIAL DEVELOPMENT MODEL

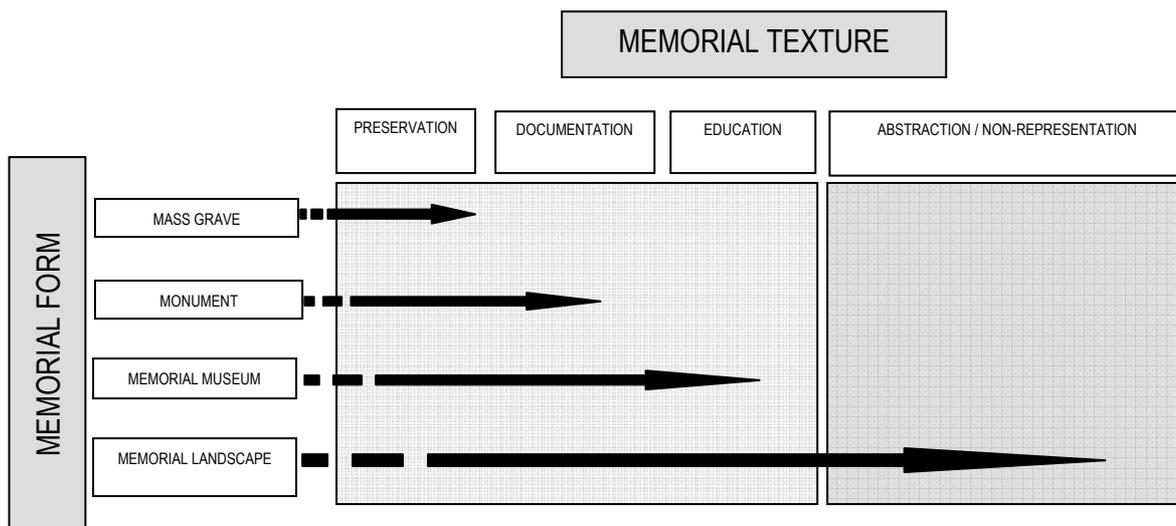


Fig. 3.3

As the diagram above, figure 3.3, indicates, memorial form and texture have a corresponding relationship in that the practice and extent of memorial texture depends on the memorial form. For example this research proposes that a memorial site such as a mass grave is primarily orientated around the memorial texture of preservation, whereas a memorial site such as a memorial museum includes three memorial textures - preservation, documentation and education. Fulfilling different roles and needs, memorial form, and therefore texture is seen within the research undertaken in this study to ultimately inform site interpretation. This concept will be discussed in detail throughout the study that follows.

3.3 DESIGN INTERPRETATION & THE MOVEMENT OF MEANING

Today, the frequent social act of memorialisation – the physical embodiment of memory – the physical expression of life and death (Tonkin & Laurence, 2003, p. 48), sees ‘tragedy’ investigated as a genre of design, of cultural process. A genre that has historically been deep rooted in literature, the contemporary memorialisation of tragedy today demands a broader perspective. Placing the design of architecture and landscape in a wider historical and cultural context, cultural significance and individual interpretation is better understood. *“The romantics thought that memory bound us in a deep sense of the past, associated with melancholia, but today we think of memory as a mode of re-presentation, and as belonging ever more to the present. The instigator, the designer, the viewer – each individual must take on their own death and mortality”* (Tonkin & Laurence, 2003, p. 48). Considered in this way, the act of design interpretation with regard to memorialisation therefore means memorials are indeed as much about the present as they are the past.

Making ‘tragedy’ visible through memorialisation is a task that has seemed difficult to approach within the framework of traditional memorial design. The design and subsequent interpretations of a memorial is critical to the development of a ‘post tragedy’ narrative. Described below is an introduction to the literature and established discourse regarding design interpretation.

3.3.1 DESIGN INTERPRETATION - A DISCUSSION ON DEFINITION

As will be discussed throughout this study, the interpretation of design changes with time, which shows that the ways in which forms are perceived never depend solely on the forms themselves, or can be simply equated with what the designer wanted to communicate. *“Interpretation becomes semiotically more relevant than the design or creation of the form. Designers may have definite intentions about meaning, but they cannot assume that form will be interpreted with the same code as the one operating at the time of designing”* (Bonta, 1974, p. 75). The word ‘interpretation’ is used in many situations to describe a range of things. From the Online Oxford English Dictionary, the word ‘interpretation’ means *“the action of explaining the meaning of something”* or *“an explanation or way of explaining something”* (Oxford Dictionaries, 2009). In terms of site design and critique, ‘interpretation’ is used here to describe a particular ‘view’ of something – whether that be of space, design, architecture or art. Interpretation of design is often influenced by what Martin Heidegger termed ‘pre-understanding’, a concept that acknowledges the fore-structure of understanding that precedes and grounds any activity or interpretation, or what we bring with us, unreflectively to a reading, in the case of design (Payne, 1997, p. 440).

3.3.2 DESIGN & THE TRANSPOSITION OF INTERPRETATION

Architectural historian William Whyte (2006) suggests that architecture – and the interpretation thereof – comprises a series of transpositions, where meaning is ascribed not merely through ‘reading’ a design as simply a language tool, but understanding its changing meaning, or transposition, through time – from concept, design and construction to multiple interpretation. Whyte’s argument rests upon three assumptions. The first is that architecture, like all meaningful human action, is capable of being understood. Secondly, architecture and architectural interpretation involve a wide range of media and genres, and lastly, as a structure evolves through time, from conception to construction and then to interpretation, both the intention of the creator and the meaning comprehended by the interpreter may change (Whyte, 2006, pp. 154-155). *“These three assumptions provoke two conclusions. First, that the historian [critic] should attempt to understand the evolution of a building as a series of transpositions: with meaning in each transposition shaped by the logic of the genre or medium in which it is located. Second, it can also be argued that these multiple transpositions – these manifold texts – together make up the work of architecture itself”* (Whyte, 2006, p. 155). Whyte concludes that the role of design critique is to indeed trace these transpositions, and in that way uncover the many meanings of design, *“architecture should not be studied for its meaning, but for its meanings”* (Whyte, 2006, p. 153).

Juan Pablo Bonta, former professor of the Universities of Buenos Aires, and Maryland, elected in 1974 to work with Mies van der Rohe’s German Pavilion at the Barcelona Exposition (1929), to show how meaning is ascribed to architecture over time, through the transpositions of interpretation. Identifying nine categories of interpretation from ‘blindness’ through ‘dissemination’ to ‘re-interpretation’ Bonta’s anatomy of architectural interpretation introduces a process of design critique where the meaning of design is investigated through, not what architecture should mean, but what it actually means for real people in real time, and furthermore, about the ways in which designs reach their meaning (Bonta, 1974, p. 57). A detailed discussion of Bonta’s Anatomy of Architectural Interpretation will be outlined in Chapter five.

3.4 CONCLUSION

Genocide, by its very nature is a highly controversial and sensitive topic that for many goes beyond what we think possible as human beings. A grave reality however, genocide is part of our world, and is part of us as human beings. Genocide memorialisation, the process by which memory and commemoration of such tragic events manifests itself in a physical location, is therefore also a highly debatable topic.

This chapter has explored the broad context in which genocide memorialisation and memorial interpretation are located. Setting definitions and investigating the key research threads of memorialisation and design interpretation, this chapter has explored the process and practise of memorial design, and has also introduced the concepts of design interpretation and the transposition of interpretation through time, by looking at the work of Bonta and Whyte. A design critique-based thesis, this, like Chapter two before it, has laid the foundation stone from which many of the key discussions stem in relation to case study investigation regarding the post genocide memoryscapes of Cambodia, Rwanda and Germany that follow in the chapters to come.