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# cultural geographies in practice

## Monumental geographies: re-situating the state

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A radical review of the proposed memorial at the site of the destroyed World Trade Centre was under way yesterday after it emerged that the current plans could cost \$1bn (£540m) to complete. ... The New York Daily News condemned the \$1bn figure as 'unaffordable, impractical [and] rather shocking'. The New York Times, which obtained a confidential memo revealing the estimate, called it 'breathtaking'.<sup>1</sup>

In the light of such a revelation that the cost of the proposed memorial to the immediate victims of '9/11' was double earlier estimates, and in view of ongoing controversy over its format and style, the 'big picture' of official memorials and associated narratives of memorialization remains in critical focus. The former site of the 'twin towers' will inevitably attract much more scrutiny in years to come. The memorial there will become emblematic of what is widely seen as a defining moment of the new century. In this, a voluminous critical literature on monuments and memory will no doubt be drawn upon. In tandem with historians and cultural critics, cultural and political geographers have long scrutinized other monuments as embodiments of official memory and mission. Memorials and monuments in sites as widespread as South Africa, Russia and Scotland have been examined as icons of nation-building.<sup>2</sup> This work has explored the ways in which the entire layout and function of a capital city, its distribution of monuments and public buildings, can very often become an exercise in national ideology and power. Such monuments are invariably designed to be substantial and permanent structures: in Nuala Johnston's words, they are national artefacts 'cast in stone'.<sup>3</sup> This codification is what makes changes in their function, or outright destruction (by insurgents during a war or revolution), such potent symbols of the struggle for and expression of power, and is the reason why their meaning is frequently contested.<sup>4</sup>

The focus on such official memorialization rightly remains important. Moving beyond these, however, David Simpson has recently examined the wider culture of

commemoration around 9/11 in the United States, looking beyond official statements, acts and sites to the popular imagination (hence his study of obituaries for 9/11 victims that appeared in the *New York Times*). Simpson is concerned with:

the location of 9/11 within the longstanding rituals and short-term political strategies that it embodies and enables: so we have *sacred ground*, *Ground Zero* ... to the *Freedom Tower* itself. All of these terms, and others like them, have already been naturalized and pass without question in the national media and popular imagination.<sup>5</sup>

In broader terms, Kenneth Foote explores varied landscapes of violence and tragedy in America (disasters, battles and murder) noting how their sites are variously designated, sanctified, venerated, rectified or obliterated in complex manoeuvres and contests of memory and forgetting.<sup>6</sup> Yet it remains very easy to overlook those forms of memorialization which both lack official sanction and sponsorship and are temporary. The 'memorial' at the wire fence surrounding the reconstruction site at 'Ground Zero' is one example (Figure 1).<sup>7</sup> Celebrating an Anglo-American commonality and alliance, evoking a past and future alliance, this 'memorial' has (in common with many others, as it turns out) a personal and temporary character. This impromptu memorial has something in common with a flower at a grave or a funeral, but it is placed at what is not (yet) an official site of memory, grave or memorial. In its unauthorized and public character, the 'memorial' has something in common with graffiti (which has been examined by geographers as a manifestation of dissent and transgression<sup>8</sup>), yet it is clearly not reducible to that genre. Nor is it simply a personal memorial (in the style of flowers at the site of a fatal accident or at a favourite site where a named deceased person once enjoyed being), yet nor is it wholly separate from (by virtue of its location) official memorializations.<sup>9</sup> This 'memorial' will have gone long before these words and the reproduction of it appear here, only to be replaced by other similar artefacts. Through its reproduction here, it also acquires a digital and printed permanence, along with thousands of other images which extend the memorialization through time and space (something which will remain largely beyond our scope here).<sup>10</sup> It is, however, one of hundreds of others that have – in their collective presence – become part of the memory of 9/11 (see Figure 2). As Robert S. Nelson and Margaret Olin noted:

Attached to the barricades around 'Ground Zero,' or placed on bus stops, hospitals and other public surfaces, fliers of the 'missing' appeared, beginning on the day of the attack. Soon, makeshift memorials formed beneath and around these photocopied photographs. Scraps of paper were added, containing messages. Flowers, too, were taped to them. ... Two months after the attacks, some ideas for permanent memorials began to make reference to these.<sup>11</sup>

With these (and other analogous) artifacts in mind, we might therefore propose a typology of monuments and memorials. This is done in the hope of shifting the balance of scrutiny somewhat towards the temporary and unofficial and away from a *de facto* hierarchy in which all that seems to matter is the official and the state. Thus, we might propose (with caveats about overlaps and hybrids) that critical attention be given to a broad range of memorial artefacts. At least five overlapping styles and forms might be identified.

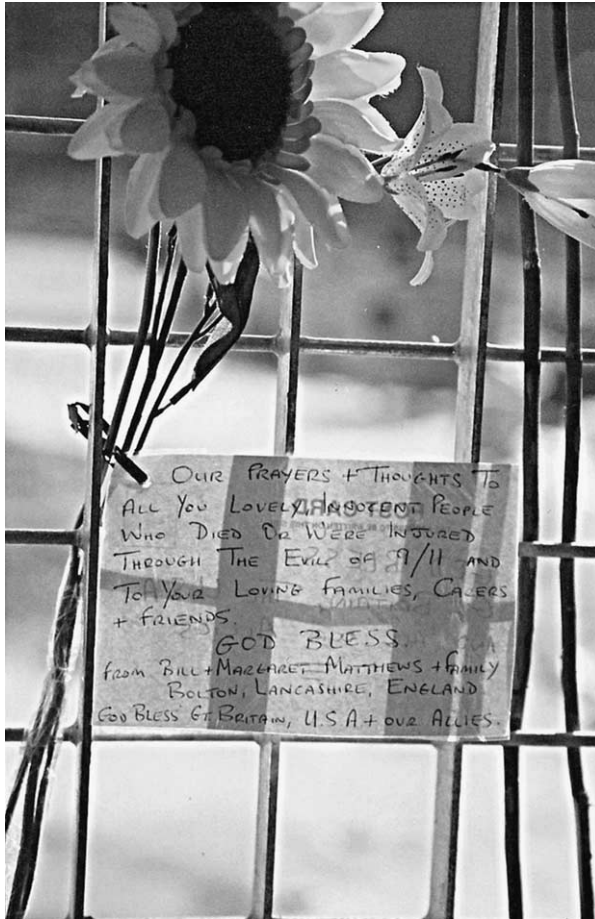


FIGURE 1 The 'memorial' at the wire fence surrounding 'Ground Zero'

First, there are the official or 'public' monuments, cast in stone, which have long been the focus of most critical work. A monument to Kemal Atatürk (the founding figure of Turkish nationalism), for example, proclaims the good fortune of being a Turk (Figure 3). Turkey contains thousands of such statues; however, this one is located in the 'Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus' (a territory whose sovereign status is not formally recognized by anywhere other than Turkey). Second, however, are the informal collective monuments, which nevertheless bolster a hegemonic ideology and are tolerated by the state. One example is a memorial, located near the centre of Nicosia, to Greek Cypriots who disappeared in 1974, during the Turkish invasion and occupation of northern Cyprus (Figure 4). On occasion, this genre merges with advertisements and corporate cultures. In tandem with these (and this is the third 'category') are unauthorized collective monuments, placed as a protest or challenge to official memory. The classic example was the 'Goddess of Democracy



FIGURE 2 'Ground Zero' memorials

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FIGURE 3 Monument to Kemal Atatürk

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FIGURE 4 Memorial to Greek Cypriots who disappeared in 1974

and Freedom' that appeared in Tiananmen Square, Beijing, during the demonstrations of 1989, of which only images and reproductions now remain.<sup>12</sup> The Republican political murals in Northern Ireland are related to this genre.<sup>13</sup> A more ambiguous case (since it is tolerated by authorities and has been a site for church-sanctioned acts of memorial, for example) is the shrine-like memorial, to Jean Charles de Menezes at Stockwell tube (underground railway) station in London, near to the site where this Brazilian electrician was shot and killed on 22 July 2005 by the police (who later claimed to have mistaken him for a terrorist about to detonate a bomb). Fourthly, there are unauthorized individual monuments. These may relate to, but are not simply reducible to, the hegemonic ideology (as in Figure 1). Finally, there are also more anti-hegemonic 'individually' made monuments, which make some form of critique and which might often merge with graffiti.

Inevitably, this range is schematic, and many artefacts will cross the boundaries, or will not fit neatly in any single category. Moreover, categories such as individual and collective, public, private, and state are both fluid and highly debatable in critical analysis; indeed, one promising domain of critical analysis is to examine how

they exist in complex relationship to each other. As Habermas reminds us, the usage of the words 'public' and 'public sphere' betrays a multiplicity of concurrent meanings.

We call events and occasions 'public' when they are open to all, in contrast to closed or exclusive affairs ... But as in the expression 'public building', the term need not refer to general accessibility: the building does not even have to be open to public traffic. 'Public buildings' simply house state institutions and as such are 'public'. The state is the 'public authority'.<sup>14</sup>

This attentiveness to the diverse meanings of the word 'public' could be fruitfully coupled with a reconsideration of the dominant focus on state led and official memorializations. Foucault famously argued that in our political analysis we are yet to cut off the king's head: that our critical horizons remained focused on the holding of state power. Foucault turns instead to the modes by which power is expressed 'through progressively finer channels, gaining access to individuals themselves, to their bodies, their gestures and all their daily actions'.<sup>15</sup> Taking this seriously means that the state is thereby resituated in critical scrutiny of monuments and memorials. While typologies are useful devices for recognizing the distinctiveness of the particular, there is much to be gained from opening our eyes and sensibilities to a fuller range of memorial artefacts where the public and private, the geopolitical and 'personal', interact, affect and are performed.<sup>16</sup>

## Biographical notes

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> O. Burkeman, 'Ground Zero rethink after cost soars to \$1bn', *Guardian* (6 May 2006), p. 19.

<sup>2</sup> For accounts from Italy, South Africa and Scotland, see: D. Atkinson and D. Cosgrove, 'Urban rhetoric and embodied identities: city, nation and empire at the Vittorio Emanuele II Monument in Rome, 1870–1945', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 88 (1998), pp. 28–49; A. Crampton, 'The Voortrekker monument, the birth of apartheid, and beyond', *Political geography* 20 (2001), pp. 221–46; C. Withers, 'Place, memory, monument: memorialising the past in contemporary highland Scotland', *Ecumene* 3 (1996), pp. 325–44.

There are dozens of other case studies. In a related vein, others have investigated how broader architectural projects/plans are frequently pervaded by national-political expressions: see D. McNeill and M. Tewdwar-Jones, 'Architecture, banal nationalism and re-territorialization', *International journal of urban and regional research* 27 (2003), pp. 738–43.

<sup>3</sup> N. Johnston, 'Cast in stone: monuments, geography, and nationalism', *Environment and planning D: society and space* 13 (1995), pp. 51–65.

<sup>4</sup> For an example of such contest, see H. Muzaini and B. S. A. Yeoh, 'War landscapes as "battlefields" of collective memories: reading the *Reflections at Bukit Chandu*, Singapore', *Cultural geographies* 12 (2005), pp. 345–65.

<sup>5</sup> D. Simpson, *9/11: the culture of commemoration* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 17.

<sup>6</sup> K. E. Foote, *Shadowed ground: America's landscapes of violence and tragedy* (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1997).

<sup>7</sup> The photographs in Figures 1–4 were taken by the authors, James D. Sidaway and Peter Mayell. In a key case study that also contains a broader review of relevant literatures than can be made here, Simpson and Corbridge study 'the period between the [key] event and its public memorialization – between what might be called the signifier and the signified. During this time memorial practices grew out of numerous private and small-scale projects ...' See Simpson, E. and Corbridge, S. The geography of things that may become memories: the 2001 earthquake in Kachchh-Gujarat and the politics of rehabilitation in the prememorial era, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 93 (2006), p. 566.

<sup>8</sup> T. Cresswell, *In place/out of place: geography, ideology and transgression* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

<sup>9</sup> D. Hook, 'Monumental space and the uncanny', *Geoforum* 36 (2005), pp. 688–704, is a suggestive account of the relationships between monuments and the production of subjectivity.

<sup>10</sup> e.g. <http://911digitalarchive.org/> and <http://www.sep11photo.org/>

<sup>11</sup> R. S. Nelson and M. Olin, eds, *Monuments and memory, made and unmade* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press), pp. 322–3.

<sup>12</sup> Outside China (where the site is blocked), images of this may be viewed at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goddess\\_of\\_Democracy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goddess_of_Democracy).

<sup>13</sup> Examples may be viewed at <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/murals>.

<sup>14</sup> J. Habermas, *The structural transformation of the public sphere* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1989), pp. 1–2. Habermas goes on to problematize and historicize categories such as public, private, intimate, family, individual, civil society, and the state. A similar gesture characterizes Althusser's exploration of 'ideological state apparatus'.

<sup>15</sup> M. Foucault, *Power/knowledge: selected interviews and other writings 1972-1977*, ed. C. Gordon (New York, Pantheon, 1980).

<sup>16</sup> The notion of 'affect' as a critical shorthand for the emotive-psychological level of being and politics has recently and productively been explored in the geopolitical arena by G. O' Tuathail, 'Just out looking for a fight: American affect and the invasion of Iraq', *Antipode* 35 (2003), pp. 856–70, and S. Carter and D. P. McCormack, 'Film, geopolitics and the affective logics of intervention', *Political geography* 25 (2006), pp. 228–45. Nigel Thrift had earlier called for critical work on geopolitics to move beyond a focus on 'the big picture' to consider more mundane and apparently trivial moments within geopolitical discourse and action: 'It's the little things', in D. Atkinson and K. Dodds, eds, *Geopolitical traditions: a century of geopolitical thought* (London, Routledge, 2000), pp. 380–87. Suggestive work on performance and psychogeography might also be brought to bear here. For two paths of

departure, see D. Pinder, 'Ghostly footsteps: voices, memories and walks in the city', *Ecumene* 8 (2001), pp. 1–19, and B. Reid, "'A profound edge": performative negotiations of Belfast', *Cultural geographies* 12 (2005), pp. 485–506. See too Robert Macfarlane's critical review of Iain Sinclair's London psychogeographical excursions, *Times Literary Supplement* (7 Oct. 2005), pp. 3–4.