

FORMS FOR MONUMENTS TO COMPLEX HISTORIES



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Forms for Monuments to Complex Histories

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INTRODUCTION

This document presents a discussion of forms for monuments to complex histories. It is designed to be read alongside ***Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner: The involvement of Aboriginal people from Tasmania in key events of early Melbourne.***

That booklet discussed the historical significance of the stories connected to *Tunnerminnerwait* and *Maulboyheenner*. It has established that their lives are connected to key aspects of Aboriginal history in the city and beyond.

Because they are so historically significant, there is a strong case that these stories should be interpreted to the public through some form of commemoration and related community education activities.

The community-based *Tunnerminnerwait* and *Maulboyheenner* Commemoration Committee has held a commemoration at the sites of their execution and burial each year on 20 January for the last eight years and has advocated for the City of Melbourne to support a permanent commemoration.

The working group which guided the research for ***Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner: The involvement of Aboriginal people from Tasmania in key events of early Melbourne*** considered the forms that a 'monument' to such a history may take and unanimously agreed on a conceptual framework for commemoration that is suitable for a history of this nature, complexity and gravity. This framework takes into account developments in the ways that publicly important histories can be commemorated.

The reinvention of the monument by artists and some architects over time has offered interesting and engaging forms of commemoration. If it were recommended to publicly commemorate these stories, the issues detailed below should be considered. They could be used in a brief to artists and part of a process of commissioning a work.

Further, there are several factors which suggest a cross-platform response by Council would be appropriate. These factors are: the low level of existing public knowledge; the relevance to multiple aspects of the city's history; and the extraordinary content of the history itself. A cross-platform approach could include the following: commissioned monument/site-specific installation, online, book, theatre, exhibition, open studio, educational materials and lectures.

THE REINVENTION OF MONUMENTS

There are many ways to commemorate people or events. Familiar forms for monuments include large, heavy, authoritative monoliths or figures located in one central public location. This 'language' has generally been deployed for subject matter such as official history and particular types of people: long-serving governors, explorers, founding fathers and so on. However, over time, a greater variety of people and histories have been the subject of public commemoration. The forms that monuments have taken has also changed, so that commemoration can be expressed in ways other than a figurative statue of a notable person.

This evolution in the forms and subject matter for monuments has at times sparked controversy, but has also generated greater public interest in and knowledge about cities' histories. Some observers have pointed out that nineteenth century monuments, while familiar, are non-neutral in that they project a certain view of the past and admit no questioning. While ubiquitous in the city, many monuments are barely noticeable (Morris, 2001). This may be because in some monuments the intended meaning is straightforward and the monument does not really ask anything of the public. The reinvention of monuments is therefore a welcome response to the great challenge of creating something that generates ongoing interest and engagement by the public.

Artists as well as architects have always been at the forefront of finding new forms for monuments and new ways to express commemoration; new forms that can challenge which histories are remembered and how we commemorate them. The relationship

of new to conventional monuments is sometimes expressed in terms of subject matter, by bringing hidden and marginalised histories into view, and/or in terms of form, by being small, multiple, dispersed and relatively open-ended in terms of the 'take home message'. They are sometimes temporary or ephemeral if that is appropriate to the subject matter. The importance of open-endedness in the meaning conveyed by a monument is that it invites debate and ongoing interpretation. This promotes a sense of something living and on-going that can pose questions to and continue to stimulate passers by over time. That said, the trait of permanence in a monument can be important for conveying the sense that the history they deal with matters.

For narratives and stories that are about resistance or alternatives to grand imperial events and histories, the new language for monuments is appropriate. They offer members of the public an interesting and sometimes even arresting view of their city and can provoke people to think differently about the places they inhabit and frequent.

Examples of non-figurative monuments in the conventional language abound throughout Victoria and include the Pioneer's monument in Flagstaff Gardens, the Monument to Angus McMillan in Boisdale, and the monument "In memory of the Aborigines of this district..." in Camperdown Cemetery.

All of these have the same basic shape of a square, stone base and a vertical column which tapers slightly as it rises to about 3 to 5 metres in height.



Left to right: Aboriginal monument in cemetery, Camperdown; Angus McMillan Monument, Boisdale; North Melbourne; Pioneer's Memorial, Flagstaff Gardens. All images from the J.T. Collins Collection, La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria.

EXAMPLES OF MONUMENTS TO RELATED HISTORIES



Lie of the Land, Fiona Foley (1997), sandstone. Photo: Colin Beggars. The work, monumental scale slabs of stone, is shown in its temporary location in front of the Melbourne Town Hall, Swanston St, Melbourne, where it included an element by the sound artist Chris Knowles. The work is permanently housed at Melbourne Museum.

Of the approximately 525 monuments erected in Melbourne, there have been five related to Indigenous people (see <http://monumentaaustralia.org.au/>). Two of these have been partially or wholly de-commissioned or moved to less prominent sites. Likewise in Tasmania, the number of monuments to Indigenous people is far outweighed by the number of monuments to settlement, exploration and colonial government.

The City of Melbourne has previously supported a commemoration of the hanging of *Tunnersminnerwait* and *Maulboyheenner* as part of the 'Another View Walking Trail: Pathway of the Rainbow Serpent,' constructed in 1995.¹ The walking trail project, realised by artists Megan Evans, Ray Thomas and researcher Robert Mate Mate, received significant material support from the City of Melbourne in the form of coordination, funding and maintenance until it was decommissioned some years later. This support from Council was a response to the first report of the Council on Aboriginal Reconciliation. That said,

the City of Melbourne apparently struggled to balance competing views of the history represented in the walking trail, which it reportedly modified prior to construction (Morris, 2001). The walking trail intended to provoke debate about the way in which the city's history was represented in existing monuments by installing alternative representations next to those monuments. Some installations along the trail also fell into varying degrees of disrepair prior to being decommissioned. Council considered advice that the interpretation of the hanging of *Tunnersminnerwait* and *Maulboyheenner* offered by the Another View Walking Trail could have been more in-depth.

Fiona Foley's *Lie of The Land* is one of the best examples of a new monument, or counter-monument, that Melbourne has experienced and deals with the early years of the city. Monumental-scale slabs of stone, inscribed with the words blankets, flour, knives, scissors, tomahawks, referring to the items John Batman claimed he exchanged with Wurundjeri elders under the terms of his Treaty, were installed outside the Town

¹The trail places 'provocative small-scale installations or trail markers in proximity to various kinds of urban "monuments"', in an attempt to deface a colonialist representation of Melbourne's history and present. 'The installation [relating to T and M] itself is comprised of a small group of metal and wooden poles in the style of traditional Aboriginal burial poles. On the metal poles, which feature transparent perspex sections filled with dioramas and an assortment of objects, screenprinted images depict the first public hanging in the colony of Victoria, on 20 January 1842... [A noose] sits behind perspex inside one of the metal poles that make up the installation.' Its situation outside the Old Melbourne Gaol and the old Russell St police station brings issues of violence endured by Aboriginal people at the hands of the justice system in both the colonial and contemporary eras into play (Morris, 2001).



Library, 1995, Bebel pl. Berlin, Micha Ullman (1995).

Hall, becoming that building's counter-monument.

The monument provoked questions about the meaning, interpretation and relevance of the Treaty in the present and future life of the city. The work is now located at Melbourne Museum, a site which does not serve to accentuate the meaning, intensity and visibility of the work (Attwood and Doyle, 2009).

Other Aboriginal artists engaged in similar practices include Brook Andrew and Jonathan Jones. Brook Andrew's *Jumping Castle War Memorial* is a full-scale jumping castle that mixes fun and macabre elements. It presents a garish provocation to jump up and down on the subject matter, the memory of those Aboriginal people who died in the war of resistance to colonization.

Jonathan Jones proposed to plant a corridor of wattle trees all the way along the Yarra River between the National Gallery of Victoria in central Melbourne and the site of the Coranderrk reserve, near Healesville, as an artwork to honour the Wurundjeri leader and artist, William Barak and to serve as a constant reminder of important histories. The annual flowering of the wattle is a way to remember Barak's death,

...the monument is always moving and different, according to the appearance of the sky

which, as he predicted, would occur when the wattle bloomed. Barak, and larger delegations of people from Coranderrk, walked to Melbourne several times, particularly during their campaign of the 1880s.

The form of Jones' proposed monument – the way that the boundary between the monument and the real world is not clear – suggests that there is also no clear line between our lives and our past. Jones' as yet unrealised work is an example of another development in artists' thinking about forms for monuments: that of the living, always changing botanical form.

Seven Thousand Oaks, a work by the German artist, the late Joseph Beuys, is perhaps the most famous of such botanical monuments. It began as a huge pile

of basalt stones arranged in the shape of an arrow, pointing to a single oak tree planted by the artist, with the announcement that the stones could not be removed unless more trees were planted. It now consists of 7000 oak trees and a reduced mass of stone, and like many other monuments based on the idea of tree planting, both invokes the long tradition of planting trees as memorials, and, in its scale, and has involved significant public participation. While never stated by the artist, Beuys' monument is understood as a reflection on the German historical experience of the twentieth century.

The Japanese artist Tatsuo Miyajima amplified the work of a tree-doctor to turn an accidental monument to the revival of the city of Nagasaki after the atomic bomb of 1945 into a world-wide, growing project for peace. The *Revive Time Kaki Tree* project involves propagating and planting trees that originated as cuttings from a lone, surviving kaki tree from Nagasaki. Kaki trees have now been planted in at least 136 sites in 20 countries in a living, expanding project involving thousands of school children.

There are many other international artists currently active in creating and thinking about new forms for monuments. This work has generated some of the most interesting and effective commemorations of difficult histories. For instance, several of the best examples deal with the histories and legacies of Nazi Germany.

Built into a plaza, *Library, 1995*, an underground room of empty bookshelves, is a memorial to the 1933 Nazi book burning, the 'Night of Shame', which took

...monuments that are deliberately horizontal focus attention on the ground on which we walk.

place at that site. The thick glass sheet through which the room is visible in part reflects the sky, so the monument is always moving and different, according to the appearance of the sky, and the room itself appears ghost-like, amidst the reflection of clouds and the image of onlookers. Unlike the classical monument, whose vertical appearance is designed to accentuate its visibility, Ullman's monument is only noticeable at a distance indirectly through the clusters of people gathered together, looking downwards, and only becomes visible directly at a more intimate viewing distance.

Stolpersteine ('stumbling blocks' or 'cobble stones') are small, cobblestone-sized brass memorials. Each one is a memorial to an individual victim of Nazism, mostly Jews, but also including representatives of all the other persecuted communities. *Stolpersteine* are set into the pavement in front of the last address of choice of the victim and records the fate of those deported. It is an ongoing project with over 30,000 *Stolpersteine* laid in several countries in Europe so far, making it the world's largest memorial.



Stolpersteine, Gunter Demnig (1997). Photo Karin Richert.

Both of these examples are monuments that are deliberately horizontal rather than vertical like a classical monument or statue, and focus attention on the ground on which we walk: what is fundamental to us, what has happened there, and how we cannot escape being involved in the implications of these events through our inhabitation of the place where they happened.

Another such monument is the challenging Jochen Gerz work, which is set into the square in front of the parliament of a provincial German town, Saarbrücken. The work is invisible, but everyone knows it is there. It consists of 2,146 cobblestones which were secretly dug up from the square by the artist and many student volunteers, engraved with the names of the 2146 Jewish cemeteries that were in use in the country before the Second World War, and replaced, engraved side down. The work was initially conducted without any kind of permission, but retrospectively gained the approval of the provincial parliament, which renamed the square *The Square Of The Invisible Monument (Platz des unsichtbaren Mahnmals)*. Its own deliberate invisibility allows Gerz finds a way with this monument to deal with a history that was about making something invisible: obliterating all Jewish people, and through the destruction of most of those 2146 cemeteries, all traces of their long existence as Germans. The monument also works very differently from the classical form for

monuments which are designed to be highly visible. The reinvention of monuments into these radically different contemporary forms addresses the irony that that because classical monuments supply the viewer with an obvious and completed message they in fact attain a kind of invisibility: we simply walk past them. Gerz's work relies on the interaction between a public space and a mental space - the place of imagination - as the means for his work, perhaps reflecting the place where these histories most powerfully live and act upon us: in our thinking.

...we cannot escape being involved in the implications of these events through our inhabitation of the place where they happened.

MONUMENTS AND RITUALS

A feature of public commemoration that has survived the many changes in form and subject matter for monuments is their association with other rituals. For example, the unveiling of a monument may be celebrated with the commissioning of a piece of music or the delivery of a speech or the planting of a tree. Monuments may be reactivated annually via a procession or march.

The Shrine of Remembrance and the Australian War Memorial are the locations for annual dawn services. A commemorative service is held annually at the site of the monument to the Myall Creek Massacre (a plaque on a large granite rock, unveiled in 2000) each June long weekend. By placing and adding stones there, people have created a cairn alongside the monument.

Israeli artist Yael Bartana's monument to the Holocaust and what it means for all who live in Germany today exists only as a ritual. Inspired by the Israeli national holiday and Memorial Day that commemorates the victims and resistance fighters

of the Holocaust in which sirens blast and the entire population observes two minutes of silence, Bartana transposes the ritual to the major German city of Cologne. The meaning each individual makes while they undertake *Two Minutes of Standstill* is up to them, but everyone is provoked to think (or refuse to think) about the consequences of the Holocaust in the present day.

There are many other possibilities for a living, on-going ritual associated with a permanent work. These include commissioning a play, developing walking tours, annual talks or Melbourne Conversations, providing a workshop or open studio for members of the public to create their own monument to the histories concerned, and web-based forms yet to be imagined.

The adoption of more than one element for a public commemoration, including on-going opportunities for interpretation, has the advantage of addressing the problem that for histories of great complexity and significance, a single monument will not suffice.

CONCLUSION

This document discusses forms for monuments to complex histories. It is to be read alongside ***Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner: The involvement of Aboriginal people from Tasmania in key events of early Melbourne.*** Together, these works explain the importance of the stories connected

to *Tunnerminnerwait* and *Maulboyheenner*, and establish a conceptual framework for forms of commemoration which could deal with their complexity.

Together, they are intended as steps towards greater public knowledge of these stories and their eventual substantial commemoration.

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