

Brigitte Sion discusses memory and methods of commemoration.

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The Speaker

Brigitte Sion is Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at New York University. A writer, editor, and translator, Sion has studied memorials and the performance of memory.

Review Questions

CHAPTER 1: *Sion discusses the challenges inherent in the creation of memorials, and the history of commemorating through memorials.*

1. In Sion's view, why is controversy inevitable in the process of creating a memorial?
2. As memorial-making has evolved, why has the inclusion of names in memorials taken on increased importance?

CHAPTER 2: *Sion describes the goals of a memorial and its obligations to visitors.*

1. How can architectural elements help visitors come to terms with the tragedy being commemorated?
2. What methods does Sion describe as influencing visitors' responses to memorials?

CHAPTER 3: *Sion describes how the Berlin Holocaust Memorial balances its emotive and informational elements.*

1. Why did Peter Eisenman initially resist the inclusion of an informational exhibit at the Berlin Holocaust Memorial?
2. How does Sion suggest that emotional and informational aspects work together in memorials to create a powerful visitor experience?

CHAPTER 4: *Sion talks about the power of memorials created at the actual site of an atrocity, and the political and civic motivations for building and visiting memorials.*

1. How might proximity to the site of an event affect a visitor to a memorial commemorating that event?
2. Describe the potential motivations, apart from commemoration, behind creating a memorial.

CHAPTER 5: *Sion describes how memorials can explore the historical and social context of their creation, and how a culture's relationship with an event being memorialized can evolve.*

1. How can a memorial act as an indicator of the political and cultural climate in which it was created?
2. What are "counter monuments"? Describe the examples Sion gives of this type of memorial.
3. How can memorials lose their power to have impact on visitors?

Key Figures and Vocabulary

Memorial Park, Buenos Aires, Argentina

Memorial Park honors the victims of the Argentinean military government which held power from 1976 to 1983. According to human rights groups, as many as 30,000 people, many government critics and activists, disappeared, having been tortured and killed. In 1998, the city legislature approved a law to commemorate the victims of the dictatorship through the creation of Memorial Park in Buenos Aires.

Berlin Holocaust Memorial (Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe)

The Berlin Holocaust Memorial was designed by architect Peter Eisenman and engineer Buro Happold, and was dedicated in 2005 to honor the Jewish victims of the Holocaust. The Memorial consists of the Field of Stelae, which is made up of 2,711 rectangular stones laid out over a sloping hill to convey the enormity and the horror of the Holocaust, and an underground information center.

Didactic

Designed or intended to teach.

Maya Lin

Born in Athens, Ohio, in 1959, Maya Lin was an undergraduate at Yale University when she submitted her winning design to the national design competition for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. During the design and construction of the memorial, she was a consultant to the architectural firm, Cooper-Lecky Partnership.

CHAPTER 6: *Sion talks about the process of creating a memorial, pointing to the challenges that faced the creation of the Memorial Park in Buenos Aires, Argentina.*

1. Describe some of the obstacles planners and designers of Memorial Park in Buenos Aires, Argentina, encountered.

CHAPTER 7: *Sion discusses memorial strategies for recalling individual victims, and the transition from mourning to remembrance.*

1. How can the presence of individual names on a memorial change the memorial's impact, as well as visitors' understanding of the event being commemorated?
2. Why does Sion believe it is important for a memorial to leave room for additional information?

Questions for Further Discussion

1. Why does Sion make a distinction between the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and other American war memorials? Do you think the outcome of an event being commemorated shapes the creation and intended purpose of a memorial?
2. In creating a memorial to an event, why might it be important to consider not only the history of that event, but the way people remember that event today?
3. What do you think is the right balance between didactic and emotional aspects in a memorial? Does it depend on the event being commemorated?
4. How does a memorial speak to the politics of the community in which it is built? Pick a memorial and describe what it suggests to you about the political and social climate surrounding its creation.
5. Do you think a memorial built today to commemorate a contemporary event can retain its full meaning one hundred years from now? Why or why not?

Recommended Resources

Berlin Holocaust Memorial (Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe) website: www.holocaust-mahnmal.de/en.

Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum website: www.tuolsleng.com.

Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund website:
<http://www.vvmf.org/118.cfm>.

Key Figures and Vocabulary (continued)

Pedagogy

Strategies or styles of instruction. The term can also refer to the study of teaching.

Peter Eisenman

An American architect, Eisenman was born in 1932 in New Jersey, and, through his work, focused on “liberating” architectural form from meaning. Eisenman designed the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, winning a design competition in 1997.

Tuol Sleng Prison, Cambodia

Formerly a high school, Tuol Sleng prison was used by the brutal Khmer Rouge regime from 1975-1979. Some estimate that as many as 20,000 people were imprisoned, tortured or killed at the prison, which is now the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum.

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial

The Vietnam Memorial, dedicated in 1982, honors the men and women of the U.S. Armed Forces who died or were unaccounted for in the Vietnam War. The design, created by Maya Lin and chosen through a national design competition in 1981, features a wall of mirror-like polished black granite, upon which over 58,000 names are inscribed.