*Memorial Museums: The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities*. By Paul Williams. Oxford and New York: Berg. 2007. viii + 226 pp. £19.99 paperback. ISBN: 9781845204891.

*Memorial Museums* seeks to interpret critically 'the emerging but under-explored field of memorial museums' (p. 22) and to provide an international survey and evaluation of historic site museums that document, commemorate, and represent events of human atrocity. Such a study has been long overdue. However, *Memorial Museums*, which could have made a significant contribution to this 'global institutional development' (p. 8), provides neither a systematic examination of the history and types of memorial museums that now exist, nor a theoretically sophisticated study. Instead, this random collection of superficially described examples must be judged a missed opportunity.

The two dozen or so case studies for *Memorial Museums*, range dramatically in terms of their histories and functions, from the mostly NGO funded Perm-36 Gulag Memorial Museum in Russia, a historic site museum of conscience that remains isolated in the country, to the well-visited Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocidal Crimes in Cambodia, established as a Vietnamese tool of state propaganda following the demise of the Khmer Rouge regime. In the introduction, we learn that case studies were selected if they were not Holocaust-related, offered more than the voyeuristic thrill associated with 'dark tourism', and were lesser-known sites of violence (p. 20) – this despite the fact that Williams begins with the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum (established in 1955) and ends with the World Trade Center Memorial in New York (established in 2009).

More problematic than the lack of coherent selection criteria are troubling comparisons made according to *forms* of how loss, suffering, or violent events are represented. For example, in

Chapter 3 on 'photographic memory', Williams uses 'headshot photography' as a self-explanatory category to compare: personal portraits that protesting Argentinean mothers taped onto their bodies (while marching in the Plaza de Mayo and in turn being photographed); photographs of the 17,000 people interred at the S-21 secret prison in Phnom Penh taken by the 'Democratic Kampuchea' regime of the Khmer Rouge (that would become part of the Vietnamese-established exhibition at the Tuol Sleng Museum); and images of missing loved ones on the more than 100,000 flyers posted following 9/11 (that would later be photographed and exhibited). Only one descriptive paragraph is given to each case study to argue that: 'headshots possess a distinctly unsettling, uncanny status' and 'the way they are contextualized and narrated [in memorial museums] is vital' (p. 64). No further discussion or analysis is given. To assert that these three examples are of the same type or that they are unsettling because they are 'uncanny' is inaccurate and superficial. There are significant distinctions between the contexts and reasons for the production, uses, and circulation of these images that warrant a more thoughtful discussion.

Only at the end of the book does the author identify the qualities of memorial museums: 'their display of sensitive artifacts and images requires ethical attention to issues of emotional effect; their geographic location is often more critical; they are more directly implicated in political controversy; visitors are often directly situated in relation to the event; memory and testimony have a comparatively enlarged status; their pedagogy has a weightier gravitas' (p. 190). Nonetheless, the author discusses other memory sites – public art projects, cemeteries, churches, parks, and architectural features – because they 'properly highlight salient museum issues. Indeed a goal of this book has been to allow the variety and complexity of my examples to enlarge standard concepts of the museological' (p. 181). Had *this* goal been clearly articulated and used to organize the book, the final product may not have been so haphazard.

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