

Introduction

We usually think that once a monument is conceived by an artist and constructed, it should remain in its actual space and in the imaginary of a culture as a document for eternity, as a support for “heroic” values, according to specific political circumstances. On the other hand, revolution can knock down the material as if it were destroying ideas and ideals, historic and cultural values. It is hardly the task of an artist “to brush history against the grain” when in the performance of an official State commission. However, an artist can incorporate some subliminal sign of dissent, as well as create a disruption within the traditional artistic form of cultural memory representation, through acts that call for direct or symbolic destruction. Or, moreover, construct a form, in such a way that the material constitution itself is as ephemeral as a performance. This, while cementing in the memory that which is transitory, and thus a critical example of the impossible task of creating permanent cultural values, runs contrary to the everlasting material.

Thinking of the colonial past of any country, for instance, and some art movements opposed to the memory of the oppressor-colonizer whose identity is displayed in many national monuments as a result of the union of arts and politics, it is possible to see an explicit counter-action on the verge of raging vandalism. There are those who adopt anti-monumental strategies which can run contrary to the principles of traditional monuments, or those who interfere with a specific existing monument and the values it represents.

The inspiration for this issue stems from Walter Benjamin’s Thesis VII, *On the Concept of History*:

There is no document of culture which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. And just as such a document is never free of barbarism, so barbarism taints the manner in which it was transmitted from one hand to another. The historical materialist therefore dissociates himself from this process of transmission as far as possible. He regards it as his task to brush history against the grain.¹

¹ W. Benjamin, “On the Concept of History”, [in:] idem, *Selected Writings*, Vol. 4, 1938–1940, eds. H. Eiland, M. W. Jennings, Cambridge–Massachusetts–London 2003.

Memory, therefore, is constituted by the transmission from each generation, not only through what is visible in monuments and architecture, but in its linguistic form, through fiction, literature and films, connected to our cultural references in a positive and heroic semblance, or, conversely, in a negative and violent aspect. The ambiguity of historical narratives could be undone when, under the Benjamin critique of historicism, a temporal distinction to history is laid. If there is no progress to praise and to seek for, another form of narrative may arise. The one that is not linear, idealistic or utopic, but one that deals with the intersection of time in immobilizing images of the past in the present. In the *Arcades*, Benjamin conceptualizes the difference of the understanding of history as interruption of time from the historical narrative based on linear and progressive history. "It is not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on the past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation."²

In this special issue, one can read essays that form a constellation of different images. They come either from concrete monuments, from memorials, or from fiction based on historical facts, especially the ones that deal with the ambiguity of memory and truth, crystallized in stone, marble, painting, writings or films. Some of them deal with intertwining concepts, these being destruction, barbarism and catastrophe. These concepts form the basis for discussing memory and monuments, related less to the construction of monuments and more to artistic and political interventionist cases capable of re-evaluating their memory in connection with its meaning.

The cover of this issue displays a depiction of the installation "Minimum Monument" by the Brazilian artist Néle Azevedo.³ Although not referred to in the articles, we would like, nonetheless, to acknowledge the deep relationship of the issue's subject with Néle Azevedo's work as a remarkable example of counter-monument. Her intentional subversion of the traditional idea of monuments is described as follows:

In place of the grand scale widely used as ostentation of power, I have proposed a minimal scale. Instead of the face of the hero from historical narratives, I have paid tribute to the anonymous observer, to the passerby, who identifies himself in the process,

² Idem, *The Arcades Project*, trans. H. Eiland, K. McLaughlin, Cambridge–Massachusetts–London 2003, p. 462 [n2a, 3].

³ Néle Azevedo is a Brazilian artist who, since 2005, has been exhibiting her Ice Sculptures' installations and the conception of Minimum Monument in Brazil and various countries in Europe, as well as in the USA. Several articles have been written on her work. These are available on: <https://www.neleazevedo.com.br>

as a celebration of life, of the recognition of the tragic, of the heroic in each human trajectory. In place of durable materials, I have installed the ice sculptures that last for about thirty minutes. They have fluidity and movement and revive the original idea of monuments: to remind us that we all must die.⁴

We would like to acknowledge Marília Furman's⁵ *Untitled (Bengala)* sculpture (2011), a gentleman's long walking cane in wood and silver, with a steel hammer head at the top. The hammer can be seen as a tool employed either for construction or deconstruction, but apart from the head, the long and elegant cane puzzles us, making us wonder at its utility. However, beyond any formal appearance lies a subtle political significance, suggesting a contrast in symbols representing two social classes: the proletariat for the hammer head and the bourgeoisie cane for the body. The fusion of the symbols could express either their interdependence or an impossible junction, because, although physically joined, they serve no useful function, maintaining their symbolic contrast.

We would like to express our gratitude to Néle Azevedo and Marília Furman, for having so kindly giving their permission to publish the depiction of their respective sculptures.

This volume, given away into the hands of the reader, results from the collective work of many people: patient authors, reliable and helpful reviewers, and two editors as well, who have established a good and inspiring relationship in spite of their geographical and cultural separation. We hope the articles in this volume will be seen as an interesting and polyphonic reflection on the subject of memory, memorials, and human history inscribed in works of art.

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⁴ Néle Azevedo, [online] <https://neleazevedo.com.br>

⁵ Marília Furman is a Brazilian artist who has been presenting exhibitions, in both collectives and individually, in Brazil and abroad. Her works are concerned with politics and social contrasts. Among her many works was APPEARS, INVERTS—AND AGAINST, which was exhibited at the PSM Gallery in Berlin, in 2015.

