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of Aesthetics



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# The Polish Journal of Aesthetics

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“Minimum Monument”, art intervention by Brazilian artist Néle Azevedo  
(photography by Henk Niemann, 2007);  
“Untitled” (*Bengala/Cane*) sculpture by Brazilian artist Marília Furman (2011)

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# Memory and (Counter) M O N U M E N T S

Editors of the Volume:  
Carla Milani Damião  
and Natalia Anna Michna



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## ***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.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 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."<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup> 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,

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

<sup>3</sup> 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>

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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.<sup>4</sup>

We would like to acknowledge Marília Furman's<sup>5</sup> *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 Nêle 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.

*Carla Milani Damião & Natalia Anna Michna*

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

<sup>5</sup> 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.





Sadia Aziz\*

## **Mosque, Memory and State: A Case Study of *Jama Masjid* (India) and the Colonial State c. 1857**

### Abstract

This paper discusses how *Masjid-e-Jahan Numa* (Masjid with world vision, popularly known as Jama Masjid) constructed by Emperor Shahjahan, the fifth Mughal ruler in India, shaped the popular memory of people in Delhi and the ruling State alike until the late nineteenth century, two centuries after its construction. This mosque which was built in 1656 became the site of contestations between the Muslims of Delhi and the British Colonial State when the former was involved in a revolt against the latter in 1857 A.D., which is generally known as the Indian mutiny. The memories of violating this monument did leave a drastic impact on the minds of the people for whom this mosque was the symbol of piety, authority and moral prestige.

### Keywords

history, memory, mosque, Mughal India, Colonial State

### Introduction

Monuments have always occupied an important place in South Asian history, particularly for the medieval kings who constructed magnificent monuments and buildings as signatures of their reign. Grand monuments were erected in order to perpetuate the memory of their 'prosperous' empires. These splendid monuments and buildings were also used as political tools that at times decided what should be retained in the memory of people in the future. Grand constructions in the Indian sub-continent marked imperial ideologies, political agendas and the history of their families. Imperial monuments hold

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strong memories of the past and have the ability to provoke reactions that transcend cultural and societal boundaries. They also encapsulate the desire of those who see themselves in some way as custodians of their pasts to cultivate and encourage emotions and reactions that transcend temporal and spatial realms.<sup>1</sup> In significant ways, the constant presence of such tokens of the past in the form of monuments and texts run through popular memories and reproduce popular knowledge and subjectivity in the present. Through the cultural and inter subjective engagement with manifestation of the past, some of these monuments also “bridge old distinctions such as global-local, individual-cultural, history-memory and even past-present-future.”<sup>2</sup>

In this paper I have attempted to discuss how one such monument of seventeenth century India, *Masjid-e-Jahan Numa* (Jama Masjid)<sup>3</sup> constructed by Emperor Shahjahan, the fifth Mughal ruler in India, shaped the popular memory of the people and the ruling state alike till the late nineteenth century, two centuries after its construction. The mosque complex, right from its inception in the seventeenth century, had enjoyed being a cultural locus and has been the focal point of the socio-political and religious landscape of Shahjahanabad (currently known as *Purani Dilli*) in India. This mosque became a site of contest between the Muslims of Delhi and the colonial state in the wake of the former’s involvement in the revolt against the latter in 1857 A.D. The memories of the violation of this monument did leave a deep impact on the minds of Muslims for whom Jama Masjid was a symbol of their piety and moral prestige. This paper attempts to study how a Mughal monument was used by the British authorities to assert their hegemony and discipline a particular community of faith.

### **Relationship between memory and history**

Before going into the factual details of how the interplay between the colonial state and the Muslims manipulated the memory of Jama Masjid in the nineteenth century, it is first important to theoretically understand the space that history shares with popular memory. Memory becomes important for the writing of history because it reflects on the psychological sentiments attached to historical events.

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<sup>1</sup> K. Birth, “The Immanent Past: Culture and Psyche at the Juncture of Memory and History”, *Ethos*, 2006, 34, 2, Special Issue: The Immanent Past, p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Ibidem, pp. 1–2.

<sup>3</sup> Jama Masjid means Congregation Mosque where a large number of devotees can assemble in congregation for prayers.

If we study memory in relation to history then it symbolises a call for thinking through the interrelation between psychological and ideological processes as well as for thinking through the relationship of knowledge that is transmitted orally versus knowledge that relies on literacy for its reproduction.<sup>4</sup> In contrast to “history” the study of memory seems more local, sentimental and psychological: “It depicts an immediacy that has been lost from history”. Memory is associated with the “personal” and the “subjective” whereas history is associated with the “public” and the “objective.”<sup>5</sup> History is based on factual evidence but remembering the events and their memories are more powerful than the written word. These memories—representing self and others—are produced through monuments, cultural spaces, and emotional symbols.

Memory is primarily a social phenomenon linked to the identity of social groups. Every social group develops a memory that highlights its own past and its unique identity. Religious monuments play crucial roles in cultivating and nurturing such identity based on memory. This is later strengthened by inventing such a memory based tradition where social memory has been considered as central to national identity. It was raised by the elites in the respective communities to instil emotive bonding through the memorials, art museums, art galleries, monuments and the public rituals.<sup>6</sup> When social memories become social capital, they tend to get connected to the centres of power, particularly of the state. Then the state plays calculated roles in either cultivating or destroying such social memories surrounding communities.

The monument under study in this paper, the Jama Masjid also became one such site and we witness a transition in the way this mosque was perceived, treated and memorised by the actors of the state and common people. The Mughal Empire that constructed it in 1656 A.D presented it as a monument of its imperial authority and piety. However, the British colonial state, after the uprising of 1857, treated the same monument as a site to be confiscated in order to destroy any social memory of the former Mughal ruling class. Thus, memory in this case became an intense idea which was moved and shaped by commitments and loyalties to various actors in con-

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<sup>4</sup> K. Birth, op. cit., p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> J. Sian and Lynette Russell, ‘Archaeology, Memory and Oral Tradition: An Introduction’, in *International Journal of Historical Ideology*, Vol. 16, No. 2, Archaeology, Memory and Oral Tradition: An Introduction, (June 2012), p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> S. Jones, L. Russell, “Archaeology, Memory and Oral Tradition: An Introduction”, *International Journal of Historical Ideology*, 2007, 16, 2, p.3.

flicts. A detailed history of this monument and the way it became a subject to the British colonial policies which tried to jeopardize the memories associated with it has been dealt with in the subsequent sections.

### ***Jama Masjid (Congregational Mosque)***

Throughout the history of Muslim Empires—The *Ottomans* (Turkey), *Safawids* (Iran) and *Mughals* (Indian subcontinent)—construction of monuments was an intrinsic principle to exhibit imperial ideology and a way to connect a viewer to the centre of power. In fact the creation and maintenance of monuments sometimes involved a great deal of attention being paid to the discursive messages that accompany the sensory impression.<sup>7</sup> The same attraction and attention was conceived by the mosques of India after the arrival of Muslim rulers from Central Asia for their political establishments in the Indian Subcontinent. Many of the magnificent mosques in India such as *Qutb Minar*, *Jama Masjid* of Delhi, *Moti Masjid* of Agra etc. have been built from the funds and treasuries of the emperors. The mosques were built by Indians not only for the purpose of worship but also to attract Arab merchants in order to expand their trade overseas. Construction of a mosque was not an activity undertaken only by the State but also by the elite class—princes, nobles, rich merchants—bearing their own names.

The *Masjid* (mosque) is an Arabic word which frequently appears in the Quran that technically means ‘place of prostration.’<sup>8</sup> It is the place where Muslims bow their heads to the ground in respect of God which is also an important act required in their everyday ritual of prayer called *namaz* in order to express their faith towards their God. The expansion of the *Masjids* was the outcome of the conquest of different lands which led Muslims to build their own space for worship. Eventually, for the consolidation of their new rule the concept of the construction of congregation mosques or *Masjid-e-Jami* or *Jama Masjid* also originated by as early as the eighth century. For Muslims the *Quran* represented a comprehensive revolution of their history, society and intellect and hence for that they established a formal system of worship and gave it the shape of a mosque.

By the end of the seventh century, the concept of congregational mosques also known as *Masjid-e-Jami* or *Jama Masjid* took a formal shape and their functions and typology were also formalised. The term *Masjid-e-Jami* means

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<sup>7</sup> K. Birth, op. cit., p. 15.

<sup>8</sup> M. Hattstein, *Islam: Art and Architecture*, Konemann Verlagsgesellschaft mbH, France 2000, p. 40.

'the mosque of the community' was a space for the collective particularly for all male Muslims in an open space which also expressed as Friday mosque. Markus Hattstein, in his book *'Islam: Art and Architecture'* has also mentioned that the building and upkeep of mosque was the responsibility of the state, because its primary motive was the maintenance of the cohesion of the community of the faithful. With this motive and with the emergence of new Muslim countries, the mosques flourished beyond being mere places of worship.

### ***Masjid-e Jahan Numa in Delhi (India) before A.D. 1857***

The foundation of Jama Masjid was laid down on 10<sup>th</sup> of Shawwal, 1060 A.H. (6<sup>th</sup> of October 1650 A.D.) under the supervision of *wazir* (Prime Minister), Saadullah Khan and *khansaman* (head of Shahjahan's household establishment), Fazil Khan at the cost of ten lacs of rupees.<sup>9</sup> It was placed on a hill called '*Bhojla Pahari*' and was a thousand yards away from the palace-fortress, the Red Fort of the Mughal Empire in their newly established capital, Shahjahanabad. Bernier, a French physician and traveller who visited Delhi in 1659 A.D. noticed that "the back of the Masjid was cased over to the height of the rock with large hewn stones which hide inequalities and gave a noble appearance to the building."<sup>10</sup> According to Carr Stephen the Masjid was a specimen of the Byzantine Arabic style;<sup>11</sup> its length and width is about 261 feet long and 90 feet wide and its roof is surmounted by three domes decorated with stripes of black and white marble. There is also a marble square tank in the centre of Masjid, which was about 15 yards in length and 12 yards in width, that was used for ablution (*wudu*) by the Muslim worshippers before their prayers.

Jama Masjid has three gates; northern, southern and eastern, of which the eastern gate was the *Shahi* gate meant only for the Emperor, who came in procession with the princes, the nobles and their retinue from the Red Fort every Friday and on *Eid* days. The northern gate of the Masjid was inhabited by stalls kept by cooks, bakers, story tellers etc. To the northern side of the Jama Masjid was the Imperial Dispensary called *Dar-ul-Shifa* and to the south was the Imperial College called *Dar-ul-Baqa*. Though both of these

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<sup>9</sup> I. Khan, *Shah Jahan Nama*, eds. W. E. Begley and Z. A. Desai, Delhi, Oxford University Press, Oxford-New York 1990, p. 530.

<sup>10</sup> F. Bernier, *Travels in the Mughal Empire 1656-1668*, Low Price Publications, Delhi 1934, p. 85.

<sup>11</sup> S. Carr, *The Archaeological and Monumental Remains of Delhi*, Aryan Books International, New Delhi 1876, p. 144.

structures were in a dilapidated state before the uprising of 1857; however, they were completely demolished after an uprising by the colonial authorities along with the *madrassa* (school) that was adjacent to this masjid for being the symbols of the former royalty attached to them.

The Masjid was known by two names, the first being the royal one bestowed by the Emperor '*Masjid-i-Jahan Numa*', of which '*Jahan*' means 'world' and '*Numa*' means visible, signifying figuratively a structure that commands the view of the whole world. The second name '*Jama Masjid*' meaning 'collective or congregational masjid' emerged out of social consciousness of the people which eventually became more popular than the first name. The congregational masjid was considered to be a closed structure at the time of a prayer where people remained dissociated from the larger external world. It was considered a structure without class barriers and distinctions, a structure emanating solidarity and brotherhood among the *qaum* (community).<sup>12</sup> In the same manner, the centrality of a congregational masjid, the Jama Masjid in the social life of the populace of Shahjahanabad was also an established fact. It was more than a place for prayer. It formed the locus of urban community life of Shahjahanabad and was a place for meeting; also a variety of relationships could get cemented within and through this structure and its epigraphic programme. Equally important were its political functions as a place where the *khutba* (Friday sermon) was read and legitimacy accorded to the ruling emperor.

Being an architectural masterpiece, it was considered a *padshahi* (sovereign) masjid which symbolised the imperial aura, authority and ideology in Shahjahanabad. Expert craftsmen were called to construct this noble structure not only from India but also from other countries like Arabia, Persia, Turkestan and Europe. The structure is a commendation to the engineering skills of Shahjahan's reign with great proportioned and symmetrical works. This is the largest masjid in India and was the only structure in the city with the mass and presence to challenge the pre-eminence of the palace-fortress.

### **British policies in the City of Delhi before and after the uprising of 1857**

Places of worship under the custodianship of any State are targeted by the regime that replaces it. Similarly, the reuse of the pillaged material like pillars, columns and carvings has also been a well-known phenomenon or a tool of establishing new political might. Following somewhat the similar

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<sup>12</sup> M. Juneja, *Architecture in Medieval India: Forms, Contexts, Histories*, Permanent Black, New Delhi 2001, p. 81.

historical pattern, the city of Delhi was taken over by the British Colonial State in 1803 in a *de facto* manner while the Mughal emperor remained the ritual imperial head. This diarchy provided enough space to the East India Company to expand its base in civil society. The efforts like repair of the abundant canal, waterworks, undertaking repair and even renovation of the Mughal Masjid were the attempts through which the Colonial authorities were trying to give a message that they are in a process of replacing 'the Mughal authority' in an altogether different manner.

This phase of 'camaraderie' came to an abrupt end during the uprising of 1857. The British authority was totally uprooted from the city of Delhi where their families were butchered to death by the rebels/sepoys. When British authority was restored in mid-September 1857, a reign of terror was unleashed against the people of the city. The Muslim population was specifically targeted as the British perceived the uprising of 1857 as a 'Muslim conspiracy' against them. Consequently, numerous masjids in the city of Delhi were demolished, leaving no trace of their existence. Various options were discussed in higher official circles as far as the fate of the Jama masjid was concerned. Plans ranging from its demolition to converting it into a Church or a more 'secular' college, floated in the bureaucracy. But finally, the plan to make it as a barracks for the Sikh soldiers from Punjab, who in turn deliberately desecrated its sanctity by undertaking prohibited activities was passed.

After this initial plan of action/reaction, the Colonial state tried to use this Masjid as a monument to bargain with and to win over the support of the Muslim citizenry of Delhi. Over the period of time we find enough data from the Colonial records at the National Archives of India and Delhi State Archives which indicate that the slow process through which the masjid was returned to the Muslims was not spontaneous and smooth but it was a protracted and a well calculated move by the Colonial administrators to make it as an object of their bargain with the Muslim community and to perpetuate control over the management of the Masjid.

### **The colonial administration and the Masjid after the uprising of 1857**

This masjid remained a locus for the inhabitants of Shahjahanabad (present old Delhi) for the subsequent two centuries, serving not only as a religious space but also a social space where people would gather in large numbers barring any class distinctions. In such an inclusive setting, political and intellectual issues of the city were largely discussed within the premises of this

masjid. This masjid in a way was the breeding ground of the social, political and identity consciousness of the people of Delhi right from its inception. This Masjid continued to evoke communitarian and religious sentiments of the people of the city even as it witnessed the capture of Delhi by Lord Lake in 1803 A.D.

During the uprising of 1857, like all other buildings of the city—religious and secular—Jama Masjid too had to face the tyranny of the post-mutiny apathy at the hands of the British. The 1857 rebellion was perceived by the British to be masterminded by the Muslims of the city and they believed that the *ulama* of the city had a special role to play in the uprising of 1857. For this reason, this Masjid became the symbol of the religious class of the city and especially of the *ulama* of the city for whom Jama Masjid was a centre of piety and their religious and intellectual traditions. As a result, during this period after the city's recapture by the British, all the Masjids in the city of any significance were confiscated by the Colonial State and religious prayers were stalled.

Other smaller Masjids of the city were still spared from the proposal of being demolished by the British but Jama Masjid, having become the symbol of the rebel *ulama*, was time and again considered to be demolished. However, the idea that at least the Jama Masjid should be demolished as a symbol of the British victory was abandoned and it was felt that there was a need for some other symbolic actions.<sup>13</sup> As a result of the conscious policy of insulting the emotions of the Muslim inhabitants, the British soldiers danced inside the Jama Masjid and Sikhs lit victory fires close to the Masjid's holy *mihrab* (lectern from where the Imam leads the prayer).<sup>14</sup> It became the cantonment of the European guards and the Sikh regiment of the Colonial army. Along with Jama Masjid the other magnificent public buildings which became the barracks of the European guards were *Diwan-e-Aam* (hall of Public audience), *Diwan-e-Khas* (hall of private audience) and *Eidgah* (congregational masjid which was used specially for *Eid* prayers usually located at the outskirts of Delhi). On the other hand one of the British officials, Lord Canning, was prepared to make concession to the Hindus, when he argued that 'small temples' which were within the area to be cleared for the stay of the soldiers be allowed to remain.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> M. Pernau, *Ashraf into Middle Classes: Muslims in Nineteenth Century Delhi*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi 2013, p. 288.

<sup>14</sup> W. Dalrymple, *The Last Mughal: The Fall of a Dynasty*, Penguin Books, Delhi 1857, p. 384.

<sup>15</sup> N. Gupta, *Delhi Between Two Empires 1803–1931: Society, Government and Urban Growth*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi 1981, p. 28.



In the following years of the stay of the soldiers inside the Jama Masjid, arose several contestations regarding the convenient stay of the soldiers, which was against the basic tradition of the mosque. This can be substantiated by the letter of the former chief engineer of the Punjab asking the former Chief Commissioner of the Punjab for the removal of the ablution tank, which was located at the centre of the square of the Jama Masjid at Delhi for the conveniences of drilling the thirteenth Punjab infantry that was quartered there. In reply to this, chief Commissioner of Punjab wrote on 11<sup>th</sup> November, 1858, that he could not authorize this measure as the Government did not intend to appropriate the Jama Masjid permanently.<sup>16</sup> The Chief Commissioner was averse to the continued occupation of the masjid by the colonial troops and he desired to relocate the troops to another place, as for him the continued occupation of a religious place was objectionable.<sup>17</sup> Permanent occupation of the Masjid could not have been rightly proposed for the fear of invoking anger of the remaining Muslim population of the city. Hence, there was a power play at work by the colonial state to play with the sentiments of the Muslims and create a demoralising effect in them by threatening them from time to time to demolish the masjid or to block the arches or to break the ablution tank.

Consequently, several proposals ranging from the permanent occupation of the masjid by the troops to converting it into Delhi College<sup>18</sup> or others wanted that a Christian cathedral to be built in its place came up from time to time and became the subjects of diverse debates within the colonial bureaucracy, but these suggestions were not materialized. The British troops stationed in Delhi having earlier faced a military encounter with the rebels had their own anguish against the ex-King and everything that symbolised his rule that included the city of Shahjahanabad, its landscape, its buildings—especially mosques and madrasas—and also its people. Bringing Delhi and its People to dust seemed their prime motive. Hugh Chichester, one of the military officers stationed at Delhi after the revolt wrote in his letter:

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<sup>16</sup> Delhi State Archives, 1858, 5, Commissioner Vol. II, "Restoration of Jama Masjid to the Muhammadans", A letter from the then chief engineer of the Punjab to the then Chief Commissioner of Punjab.

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>18</sup> For the history of this college see: A. Haqq, *Marhum Dihli College*, Delhi 1989 (reprint); M. Pernau, *The Delhi College. Traditional Elites, the Colonial State, and Education before 1857*, Oxford University Press, Delhi 2006.

There are several mosques in the city most beautiful to look at, but I should like to see them all destroyed. The rascally brutes desecrated our churches and graveyards and I do not think we should have any regard for their stinking religion...<sup>19</sup>

Charles Raikes, another military officer had other plans for the this mosque, where he wanted the Jama Masjid to be saved, but converted into a church, each stone of it should be named after a Christian martyr that would continue to remind the people of the city about the supremacy of the British.<sup>20</sup> This was their attempt to commemorate their victory through this monument in the memory of the inhabitants of Delhi. In fact to flatten Delhi to grounds was a well-planned campaign on the part of the British officers and the same campaign was also being popularised in the local English magazines of the time such as *Lahore Chronicle*, where the editorial articles initiated the campaign of deserting Delhi to dust. Moreover, such magazines also brought out the mood of the local English people towards Delhi, its ex-King, and also its people. In reply to the editorial of this magazine which initiated the campaign to bring Delhi to dust, one of the readers wrote to the editor:

Having just seen your issue of the 18<sup>th</sup> instant, in which you most properly, as in most of your late issues, uphold the necessity for the destruction of Delhi 'in toto' and no sparing of the Jumma Masjid etc for fear of offending the Moslem, I consider it a duty to my country, as it should be of all Englishmen, to assist you in the national cry of a "A bloody revenge" and "Down with Delhi."<sup>21</sup>

Converting Jama Masjid to Delhi College were not merely practical or administrative steps, in effect it signifies the attempts of the British to negate the religiosity and piety attached to the building and impose a 'secular' character to the building, hence manipulating the social memories attached to it. There is a letter which proves this fact from A. H. L. Fraser, Secretary of Government of India to the Chief Secretary of Government of Punjab stating that the Jama Masjid was not only a popular place of worship for Muhammadans (Muslims), but was also undoubtedly a great national monument. Before the Mutiny when it was in the hands of the King of Delhi and was exclusively under Muhammadan control, it was open to all comers subject to

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<sup>19</sup> Letters of Hugh Chichester, letters to his father, Delhi, 24<sup>th</sup> September 1857, cited from W. Dalrymple, op. cit., p. 408.

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>21</sup> Ibidem.

no restriction. Since then it has remained an object of interest to visitors from all parts of the world.<sup>22</sup> A. A. Roberts, an official who had worked in Delhi in the 1840s did not want the Masjid to be returned to the Muslims: "Let us keep them as tokens of our displeasure towards the blinded fanatics..."<sup>23</sup> However, giving the Masjid back to the Muslims was also one of the proposals, but in the immediate circumstances this idea was against their political agenda. The restoration was not only an administrative or a political issue, in fact for the British, Jama Masjid symbolised their 'lost' prestige. And restoring the same to the Muhammadans meant a further blow to their already feeble prestige after the revolt of 1857 among the indigent population.

They wanted to play with the basic religious identity of the Muslims through this Masjid. This can further be substantiated by a letter from Financial Commissioner for the Punjab to the Secretary of the Punjab Government in which he stated that *Jama Masjid*, *Eidgah* and the tombs of *Humayun* and *Safdarjung* and apart from these several other buildings should from then on be considered as State buildings.<sup>24</sup> He also opined that under any circumstances neither Jama Masjid nor the Eidgah would be restored to the Muhammadans. He intended to make them as grand but silent monuments of the success, which was conferred on them in September 1857. He made the episode of confiscation a matter of dignity and a token of displeasure towards the blinded fanatics as he believed that these blinded fanatics along with their bigoted King conspired in the Masjids for British failure. On moral, political and religious grounds he argued that no Muhammadan should ever be permitted to enter the Jama Masjid and worship there again. He stated that there were several Masjids within the city and in its suburbs which were sufficient for their worship and would supply their demands without affecting the prestige of British. He recommended that none of the state places of worship be ever restored to the Muslim population and asked civil and military officers to orchestrate measures for removing the troops from the Jama Masjid to more suitable residences and when the Masjid be vacated it would convert into Delhi College.<sup>25</sup> This letter proves the fact that the British tried to demolish the sanctity and piousness of the religious insti-

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<sup>22</sup> Delhi State Archives, Commissioner, 1895, 77, Vol. II, "Jama Masjid Rules".

<sup>23</sup> C.C.O, F. 238-Vol. II/1858, Financial Commissioner to Secretary, Government of Punjab, No. 899.

<sup>24</sup> Delhi State Archives, 5/1858, Commissioner, Vol. II, "Restoration of Jama Masjid to Muhammadans".

<sup>25</sup> Ibidem.

tutions of the city as well as to destroy the religious emotions and sentiments of the inhabitants of the city to propagate their agenda of 'desacralization' of the buildings of Delhi.

Debates were held in the Jama Masjid in the 1860s between the *maulvis* and the Christian missionary society. These debates were not prohibited by the Resident as were the lectures of *wahabi* leader Shah Mohammad Ismael.<sup>26</sup> Son of Shah Waliullah, a veteran scholar, Shah Abdul Aziz declared that "in this city the *Imam-al-Muslimin* wields no authority, while on the other hand the decrees of the Christian leaders are obeyed without fear."<sup>27</sup> Muslim notables and Muslim inhabitants of the city petitioned the colonial state on the occasion of the viceroy's visit to Delhi in 1860 A.D. and requested for the restitution of the Masjid and to allow them to resume prayers in the Masjid.<sup>28</sup> It was also done to cease the 'impure' practices that became common in the vicinity of this 'pious' establishment. The petitions were not considered favourable by the colonial administrators as they claimed that the signatures on the petitions were forged. They also claimed that if any time 'respectable Muhammadans' of Delhi would ask for the restoration of the Jama Masjid and were equipped 'to make proper arrangements for keeping it in repair,' their request could be granted and the Masjid would be restored to the Muhammadans.<sup>29</sup>

### **Episodic developments in the restoration of the Masjid to the 'muslim community'**

In order to protect this monument and also to protect the memories of a golden bygone era, the Muslim community continued to petition the British Government to return the monument under their custody and to restore prayers in it. Consequently, after three years in 1860, the Government of Punjab wrote to Commissioner Delhi Division that it was considered desirable that the Government should interfere in the regulation of the Masjid as little as possible and only through the managing committee.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> N. Gupta, op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>27</sup> Ibidem, p. 27.

<sup>28</sup> National Archives of India, Foreign Part A, April 1860, 259-262, "Proposed restoration of the Jama Masjid at Delhi to the Muhammadans".

<sup>29</sup> Delhi State Archives, Deputy Commissioners Office, 1860, 11, Vol. I, "Restoration to Muhammadans of the Jama Masjid".

<sup>30</sup> Ibidem.

An *Ikrarnamah* or agreement was then signed on 26<sup>th</sup> November, 1862, between the ten members as managers of the Jama Masjid Managing Committee, who signed the petition, and the British administration, while embracing the following points:<sup>31</sup>

1. The committee's representatives took responsibility that there should be no disturbances, disagreements or quarrels within the Masjid premises.
2. If any question should arise in connection with the Masjid or religion they will state it privately between themselves.
3. No act should be committed inside the Masjid which may tend to show contempt of or disloyalty to the Government. If any such thing took place and which might be beyond their power to check or control, they should bring it to the notice of the Deputy Commissioner.
4. They would do repairs to the buildings of the Masjid, whenever it was necessary to do so and should keep up regular accounts of shop rents and of the endowed property.
5. If a vacancy was caused among the managers for any reason they would appoint successor by agreement among themselves.
6. If anything done or committed contrary to the wishes of the Government, they recognized that the Government should be at liberty at all times to close the Masjid or make other arrangements for its management.

There is no information in the sources available as to how the members of the Managing Committee were appointed. The observation that they were "elected by the majority of the *Musalman* inhabitants"<sup>32</sup> can hardly be understood in the sense of a formalized electoral procedure. The British consulted those people whom they considered suitable representatives of the Muslim community, but we find no records and sources available for these discussions. Mirza Ilahi Bakhsh who was an ally of the British in the uprising of 1857 became the chairman of the managing committee. According to Margrit Pernau, before the managing committee was established the Masjid's administration was regulated by the *mutawallis*, but later with the managing committee it worked as a kind of collective *mutawalli*. The Masjid was then returned to the inhabitants on 28<sup>th</sup> November, 1862 A.D., by the colo-

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<sup>31</sup> Ibidem. Translation of original agreement entered into which the Managers of the Jama Masjid, Delhi, dated 26 November, 1862.

<sup>32</sup> Delhi State Archives, Delhi Commissioner Office, 1860, 11, "Restoration to Muhammadans of the Jama Masjid, Rules for the Custody of the Jama Masjid".

nial state with the employment of several rules and regulations to be followed by the worshippers. The rules were not favourable to them as the European officers and gentlemen, civil and military were allowed to enter without a pass and not required to take off their shoes while entering the Masjid. They were also allowed to take their dogs inside this pious structure. It was followed by several petitions from the managing committee to revise these rules and regulations which made this Masjid a site of contest. Finally, the revised rules were hung up at the gate of Jama Masjid in Persian and English, which were as follows:<sup>33</sup>

1. No one is permitted to remain in the Masjid at night except the appointed *Khadim*, the *Muazzin* and individuals specially authorized by the managing committee.
2. European officers, gentlemen and ladies are required before entering the Masjid to put on coverings provided by the committee at the door over their shoes.
3. European soldiers are not allowed to enter without a pass from the district/brigade officer or the commanding officer.
4. Non-Musalman Asians were not allowed to enter the Masjid without a pass from the Deputy Commissioner or from the managing committee. The *darwans* will indicate where such passes can be obtained.
5. No smoking is allowed in the Masjid. Visitors were forbidden to bring inside the Masjid: dogs, Hukkas, musical instruments, bottles of liquor or any other article prohibited by Musalman doctrine within the Masjid. A drunk person is also prohibited from entering. It was expected by the European ladies and gentlemen that they would observe the religious etiquettes of the Masjid. Persons who desired to take a photograph within the Masjid must obtain special permission from the managing committee.
6. Visitors must not pass or stand in front of Muhammadans engaged in prayer and are required to remain in the eastern portion of the Masjid during the hour of prayer.
7. No benches or chairs can be taken into the Masjid without the special permission of the managing committee and if any are taken in without permission, they must be removed as soon as the ceremony for which they were allowed has ended.

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<sup>33</sup> Delhi State Archives, Commissioner Office, 1858, 5, Vol. II, "Restoration of Jama Masjid to the Muhammadans".

8. No religious discussion is allowed in the Masjid nor is any assemblage allowed except for the purpose of prayer. Preaching in Masjid is forbidden except with the permission of the managing committee.
9. Two constables will be detained for duty at the north and south gates that will be responsible for seeing that the above rules are observed.

## Conclusion

The main objective of this paper was to study the change in the treatment that a Masjid got from the two different ruling powers—the outgoing Mughal rule and the upcoming Colonial rule—the one being its patron and originator and the other being its executioner. The focus in the paper remained on the colonial archival material pertaining to this mosque as it was through this documentation, though ironically, the memory of the confiscation of this monument still persists as the contemporary Urdu literature hardly mentions this incident, perhaps due to the fear of persecution. The basic theoretical premise of this paper lies in the proposition that the study of any building should not be done only in terms of its architecture or utility, but also in the context of the history of the political situations that shaped the very existence and survival of that building. What is important here is to understand first that any building if considered in its material terms is nothing but an artful amalgamation of bricks, mortar and sandstone, but what makes it important and eternal is the cultural interpretation of these buildings and the social memories cultivated around such buildings by the societies over time.

The perceptions, notions, emotions and memories that are attached to them in the course of time and the human reaction that these buildings can generate are all marked by historical occurrences. They are culturally constructed, bearing direct interference from the contemporary state and power centres. As the centres of power shift from one regime to another regime, these perceptions and the memories attached to them are altered.

To trap this shift was the key consideration behind the decision to use the building of *Masjid-e Jaha Numa* or *Jama Masjid* of Delhi to tell the story of how the mosques in India survived with the transfer of power from the Mughals to the Colonial rule. This has provided a varied and layered history of this monument beginning from the sacred identity of it as the *Masjid-e Jahanuma* or *Jama Masjid* to an architectural marvel celebrated by art historians to a symbol through which the Muslim community was disciplined and controlled in the aftermath of the uprising of 1857.





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**Sonia Campaner Miguel Ferrari\***

## **Memory, Monuments and Resistance: São Paulo—Paris—São Paulo**

### Abstract

In colonized countries such as Brazil history begins when colonizers arrive and impose themselves on a territory, which for them is “new,” with history brought from afar. For those who already inhabit this territory, the past no longer exists. The *Bandeirantes-pioneers* contributed in the construction of this history, which was based on violence against the natives and the usurpation of their territory. In the modern city of São Paulo, the local bourgeoisie established an ideological identification linking the inhabitants of the city, seen as entrepreneurs and tireless workers, with the pioneers of the sixteenth century. Some concepts of the German philosopher Walter Benjamin enable us to understand this process.

### Keywords

history, memory, monuments, resistance, Walter Benjamin

### **Paris—São Paulo and the image of the *Bandeirantes-pioneers***

In previously colonized countries, a story is told starting from the arrival of settlers. Despite general statements made about images, they are very important for impressing a certain conception of identity and history, which stamps itself on the mind and conveys an unquestionable version of the history of such a place. Walter Benjamin's *Thesis VI* points to a characteristic of a method of historicist empathy: the establishment of an “eternal image of the past” seeking to describe it “as it really was,”<sup>1</sup> and thus establish an iden-

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<sup>1</sup> Both quotations W. Benjamin, “Über den Begriff der Geschichte”, [in:] *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. I-2, Hrsg. R. Tiedemann, H. Schweppenhäuser, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frank-

tity of a common past as if this past was unique and as if it could be reconstructed by a detailed and meticulous study. Memory, however, is neither “neutral” nor is it “disinterested,” but rather “an organ attached to life.”<sup>2</sup> Images of the past reach the present, which is burdened with demands. In several of his works on art in modernity, notably in the famous essay *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technical Reproducibility* (1935) and in the essay on the Surrealist Vanguard Movement (1929), Benjamin emphasizes the importance of image, not as merely illustrative or referring to perfection of form, but as a “space” that allows for the synchronization between the past and present, between thought and sensation, something that the author evokes as a possibility of liberation:

By close-ups of the things around us, by focusing on hidden details of familiar objects, by exploring commonplace milieus under the ingenious guidance of the camera, the film [...] extends our comprehension of the necessities which rule our lives; on the other hand, it manages to assure us of an immense and unexpected field of action.<sup>3</sup>

Benjamin suggests that through the techniques of image production, whether they are enabled by techniques such as cinema or by the surrealist experience in the city, we can free ourselves from the physical and intellectual constraints that limit freedom.

Gagnebin recalls that the interruption of the official narrative questions the interpretation of the dominant history and its temporality. “It inspires the desire and the possibility of another time and another form of remembrance.”<sup>4</sup> She also recalls that in the *Theses*, Benjamin cites the gesture of the Parisian revolutionaries in July of 1830, which fired at the faces of the city’s monumental clocks, thus marking the beginning of another chronology. Michel Löwy has also commented, comparing<sup>5</sup> the same episode with the protest of Brazilian natives, who during the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the “discovery”<sup>6</sup> of their land in 2000, aimed their bows and arrows at the “count-

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furt am Main 1980, pp. 695–696; idem, *Illuminations. Essays and Reflections*, trans. H. Zohn, Schocken Books, New York 2007, p. 255.

<sup>2</sup> J.-M. Gagnebin, “O que é imagem dialética”, [in:] M. B. R. Flores, P. Peterle, *História e Arte. Imagem e Memória*, Mercado das Letras, Campinas 2012, p. 29.

<sup>3</sup> W. Benjamin “Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner Reproduzierbarkeit”, [in] *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. I-2, op. cit., p. 461; idem, *Illuminations...*, op. cit., p. 236.

<sup>4</sup> J.-M. Gagnebin, “O que é imagem dialética”, op. cit., p. 33.

<sup>5</sup> M. Löwy, *Walter Benjamin: aviso de incêndio. Uma leitura das teses “Sobre o conceito de história”*, Boitempo, São Paulo 2005, pp. 126–127.

<sup>6</sup> The idea of discovery is controversial, that is why it is in quotation marks.

down” clocks that Globo Television<sup>7</sup> had placed in different capitals to count down time to the anniversary of the “discovery” date: the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April.

This protest by the indigenous people allows us to remember that they were from the beginning victims of a genocide that symbolizes the history of the continent. “These events have rarely been recorded”<sup>8</sup> and have remained a blot on our history. As Aguillera et al note:

From the point of view of the indigenous, there was no end to colonization anywhere in the Americas. Post-colonization is a European phenomenon—yes, in those countries that lost their colonies as a result of the struggle of the native peoples of said colonies. In the Americas, the indigenous population continues to be colonized by the descendants of the Europeans who have retained economic and political power.<sup>9</sup>

This exercise still continues in the form of distortion and annihilation of the past.

### São Paulo—Paris—São Paulo

If Paris in the nineteenth-century had its Arcades, a “recent invention of industrial luxury [...] covered with glass and marbled walls,”<sup>10</sup> then São Paulo of the twenty-first century has countless shopping malls that have arisen with great speed over the last thirty years. They do not cross from one street to another through passageways, as those of Paris, but destroy the topography of the city and displace houses, landscapes, and old buildings.

As in the case of the Parisian arcades, shopping malls are elegant or otherwise dependent on the neighborhood in which they are located, as one of the characteristics of shopping malls is that they spread to various parts of the city, representing a kind of democratic inclusion of the masses in consumption.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> From 1997 to 1999 the Rede Globo sponsored copies of a countdown clock in 28 cities of Brazil. Two of them were destroyed during protests, one was badly damaged.

<sup>8</sup> *Imagem, Memória, Resistência*, org. Y. Aguillera, M. C. Santos, Discurso Editorial, São Paulo 2016, p. 10.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>10</sup> W. Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, Hrsg. R. Tiedemann, H. Schweppenhäuser, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 1980, p. 83; *idem*, *The Arcades Project*, trans. H. Eiland, K. McLaughlin. Belknap Press of Harvard Press University, Harvard 2002, p. 31.

<sup>11</sup> P. P. Pelbart, in *Vida Capital: Ensaios de Biopolítica*, Iluminuras, São Paulo 2003, notes that in this new phase of capitalist system “free time has become enslaved time” and that consumption is more a playful activity than a boring one.

The arcades provide an interruption to the intense traffic of the streets. Inside, the wanderer can linger without purpose and have their desires awakened by the offers of the luxury trade. In most cases people drive to shopping malls in São Paulo, and everything is commercial within their precincts. If already in the nineteenth-century Parisian consumers were beginning to feel like one great mass,<sup>12</sup> then now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century we are born with this mark stamped on our foreheads. Benjamin in the work quoted refers to François-Charles Fourier for whom this transformation of the city makes life pleasant, sheltered from weather, and compares the arcades to the phalansteries.<sup>13</sup> It is as if these constructions, whether in Paris or in São Paulo, were enough to make the lives of its inhabitants comfortable and uneventful.

This is a world in which “what sets the tone is without doubt the newest, but only where it emerges from the middle of the oldest.”<sup>14</sup> Fashion forms the new from what has already passed. This gives fashion, and everything that looks like new, the impression of being old-fashioned. For the new is made from the old-fashioned just as malls are from galleries and arcades. These are the beginnings of modern architecture, which still say a lot to today’s inhabitants of the city.<sup>15</sup> Embedded in the buildings of big business and commerce are old dreams waiting to flourish. It is not in vain that Benjamin considers that Loos and Corbusier, modernist architects, make a clean slate (*tabula rasa*) of the architectural language before them: it is better to start again rather than to refer to a dream of the past that has failed to emerge.

The decay, or demolition, and the ruins of the city mark the moment in which the old city disappears to give rise to new constructions. These set the tone for how the inhabitants live and relate. It is in this environment that Surrealism is born. “The father of Surrealism was Dada, the mother was a passage,” says Benjamin.<sup>16</sup> Aragon wrote about the Passage de l’Opera. This work constitutes for Benjamin a reference in which the relation between the old-fashioned and the fallen, the Arcades of Paris, may be considered in the present. There was also a demolition program in Paris (from 1852 to 1870)<sup>17</sup> that removed the places where the participants in the 1848 journeys met from the urban landscape.

<sup>12</sup> W. Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, op. cit., p. 93; idem, *The Arcades Project*, op. cit., p. 43.

<sup>13</sup> Idem, *Das Passagen-Werk*, op. cit., p. 94; idem, *The Arcades Project*, op. cit., p. 44.

<sup>14</sup> Idem, *Das Passagen-Werk*, op. cit., p. 112; idem, *The Arcades Project*, op. cit., p. 64.

<sup>15</sup> Idem, *Das Passagen-Werk*, op. cit., p. 118; idem, *The Arcades Project*, op. cit., p. 67.

<sup>16</sup> Idem, *Das Passagen-Werk*, op. cit., p. 133; idem, *The Arcades Project*, op. cit., p. 82.

<sup>17</sup> The refashioning of Paris by Baron Haussmann.

In ancient Greece, Benjamin tells us, there were places from which one could descend into hell. "Our awakened existence likewise is a land which, at certain hidden points, leads down to the underworld"<sup>18</sup> that opens to dreams, the dreams that are stored, kept in places that retain something of a desire for happiness nurtured in former times.

The still virgin plateau on which the city of São Paulo was born, underwent its first construction in the sixteenth century, when in 1554 a Jesuit college was built.<sup>19</sup> From this initiation, little remains, probably far less than in the beginnings of Paris. But traces of this history can still be found, just as monuments that seek to mark certain moments remain.<sup>20</sup>

The study of memory are mostly based on traumatic events that have recently become a concern of academics, especially of those from the United States and Europe. Most of these traumatic events are related to World War One and World War Two. Authors such as Dominick Lacapra and James Young<sup>21</sup> refer mainly to the traumatic events of World War II, the

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<sup>18</sup> W. Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, op. cit., p. 135; idem, *The Arcades Project*, op. cit., p. 84.

<sup>19</sup> See Fig. 1. The Jesuit priests José de Anchieta and Manoel da Nóbrega went up to the Serra do Mar, in 1553, in order to find a safe place to settle and catechise the Indians. Upon reaching the plateau of Piratininga, they found the ideal spot. It had 'cold and temperate air like those of Spain' and 'very good land with fresh water'. The religious community built a college on a small hill, near the rivers Tamanduateí and Anhangabau, where they celebrated mass. It was on January 25<sup>th</sup>, 1554, the date that marks the anniversary of São Paulo. Almost five centuries later, the town of Piratininga had grown into a city of 11 million inhabitants. Of those times, only the foundations of the construction made by the priests and Indians remain in the Pateo do Colegio. Piratininga took 157 years to become a city called São Paulo, a decision ratified by the king of Portugal. At that time, São Paulo was still the starting point of the *Bandeiras* expeditions that cut through the interior of Brazil. They had the goal of searching for precious minerals, and the imprisonment of Indians to work as slaves in the mines and plantations. In 1815, the city became the capital of the Province of São Paulo. But not until twelve years later would it establish its first law school in Largo São Francisco. From then on, São Paulo became the intellectual and political nucleus of the country. But it would only become an important economic centre with the expansion of coffee cultivation in the late nineteenth century. This official website of the government of São Paulo briefly describes the history of the city, [online] <http://www.saopaulo.sp.gov.br/conhecasp/monumentos/> [accessed: 28.06.2017].

<sup>20</sup> From a history of colonisation whose main characteristic is to impose a culture foreign to the local inhabitants.

<sup>21</sup> D. Lacapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz*, Cornell University Press, New York 1998; J. Young, "Memory and Counter-memory", *Harvard Design Magazine*, Fall 1999, 4, 13.

genocide of the European Jews, or to devastated places (or cities) as in the works of Karen Till.<sup>22</sup>

The reflection presented here marks a difference between these traumatic events and the wounds caused by colonization in the American continent. At the same time, it is possible to identify some similarity in them: namely the use of violence. Lacapra refers to the pleasure German soldiers felt when they killed Jews and to the feeling of having fulfilled an important task as they contemplated a hundred or more corpses lying side by side. The author quotes a speech of Himmler for whom those soldiers faced with the difficult task to be accomplished still maintained their integrity.<sup>23</sup> This same “negative sublime”<sup>24</sup> may be identified in the enslavement and killing of the indigenous people of Brazil. However, no trace remains of the history of the ancient tribes living in the territory that is now Brazil. In his book *A Guerra guaranítica (The Guarani War)* Luis Carlos Tau Golin<sup>25</sup> affirms the attempt to completely erase the traces of an indigenous presence.

As in Paris, the changes in the city's landscape are designed to accommodate the transformations arising from the capitalist system of production and technological development; the enlargement of streets and pavements, demolition of old buildings to make way for new, more modern ones, more in line with the new way of life.

Some of the first elements of the city to disappear were fountains. They were demolished or covered over to make way for the concrete of skyscrapers and viaducts. However, the many chaotic transformations (the growth of Sao Paulo was very fast and disorderly from the 1950s) ended up leaving vestiges in their wake, vestiges of destruction. Benjamin notes: “Because it is only today, when the pickaxe threatens them, that they become effectively sanctuaries of a cult of the ephemeral, which become the phantom landscape of a cult of pleasures and professions cursed, incomprehensible yesterday, and that the future will never know.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> K. Till, “Reply, Trauma, Citizenship and Ethnographic Responsibility”, *Political Geography*, 2012, 31, pp. 22–23.

<sup>23</sup> D. Lacapra, op. cit., p. 28.

<sup>24</sup> Ibidem, p. 28 ff.

<sup>25</sup> He narrates in his book how indigenous troops from the region of Sete Povos das Missões (in the south of Brazil), supported by Jesuit priests, blocked the advance of Portuguese and Spanish missions that had the function of redesigning the borders between the two countries after the signing of the Treaty of Madrid. The rebellious natives resisted from 1754 to 1756, when they were defeated by the troops of Portugal and Spain.

<sup>26</sup> W. Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, op. cit., p. 140; idem, *The Arcades Project*, op. cit., p. 87.





Fig. 1. Pateo do Collegio today.

Source: "Pateo do Collegio", [online]

<https://www.pateodocollegio.com.br/> [accessed: 28.06.2017].



Fig. 2. Borba Gato statue in the 1960s.

Source: "Monumento de Borba Gato", [online]

<http://www.saopauloantiga.com.br/borba-gato/> [accessed: 28.06.2017].



Fig. 3. "Borba Gato" statue today.

Source: "Monumento de Borba Gato", [online]  
<http://www.saopauloantiga.com.br/borba-gato/> [accessed: 28.06.2017].



Fig. 4. Monument of *Bandeiras*, dubbed "Push-Push" by Paulistanos.

Photo by Lucas Salles, 2008. Source: "Monumento às Bandeiras",  
 [online] <http://parqueibirapuera.org/areas-externas-do-parque-ibirapuera/monumento-as-bandeiras/> [accessed: 28.06.2017].



Fig. 5. Cantino's Planisphere (circa 1502), showing the meridian of Tordesillas and the result of the voyages of Vasco da Gama to India and those of Colombo to Central America, and of Gaspar Corte Real to Terra Nova and Pedro Álvares Cabral to Brazil.

Source: Estense Library, Modena.



Fig. 6. The Tordesilhas Treaty's line on the current map of Brazil.

Source: "Mapas do Tratado de Tordesilhas", [online] <http://estudosavancadosinterdisciplinares.blogspot.com.br/2015/02/mapas-do-tratado-de-tordesilhas.html> [accessed: 28.06.2017].



Fig. 7. The Borba Gato statue sprayed on 30.09.2017.

Source: “SP: monumento às Bandeiras, Borba Gato e Secretaria da Educação são pichados”, [online] <https://noticias.uol.com.br/cotidiano/ultimas-noticias/2016/09/30/monumento-as-bandeiras-borba-gato-e-secretaria-de-educacao-sao-vandalizados.htm> [accessed: 28.06.2017].



Fig. 8. Monument of *Bandeiras* sprayed with paint on 30.09.2017.

Photo by Marcelo Gonçalves, Estadão Conteúdo.

Source: “Monumentos amanhecem pichados com tinta colorida em SP”, [online] <http://g1.globo.com/sao-paulo/noticia/2016/09/monumentos-amanhecem-pichados-com-tinta-colorida-em-sp.html> [accessed: 28.06.2017].



Fig. 9. Tagging of Bandeiras monument in 2013 in protest against the Proposed Constitutional Amendment 215 concerning the demarcation of indigenous lands. The inscription at the base of the monument reads "Bandeirantes murderers".

Photo by Felipe Rau, Estadão Conteúdo.

Source: "Monumento às Bandeiras é pichado com frase contra PEC 215", [online] <http://g1.globo.com/sao-paulo/noticia/2013/10/monumento-bandeiras-e-pichado-com-frase-contra-pec-215.html> [accessed: 28.06.2017].





Fig. 10. "A work of art cannot be worth more than a single drop of blood". In this affirmation lies the key to understand the high degree of inventiveness and aesthetic-political value of the Guarani intervention.

Source: "Empurra-empurra! Sobre a morte das estátuas", [online] <http://www.revistaforum.com.br/2013/10/07/empurra-empurra-sobre-a-morte-das-estatuas/> [accessed: 28.06.2017].

This is a quote of Aragon used by Benjamin, which emphasizes the old-fashioned aspect and decadence of the arcade along with the dream that cradled the nineteenth century: that of the happy life provided by technical development applied to the production of goods.

But if Paris during the nineteenth century was the city that cradled the dream,<sup>27</sup> São Paulo still lived at that moment with the problems of a newly independent colony in a country that still dreamed of becoming the epitome of imperial culture. Traces of this history remain in the city, but not necessarily in the buildings and pavements, nor in catacombs as in Paris, but at the level of concealment and effort to worship the forgetfulness of the violence with which Brazilian history was created, along with another history that seeks to permeate the gaps and possible spaces.

The monuments were built in São Paulo in order to remind us of a certain past, we are going to speak here of the monument to the Bandeirante-pioneer Borba Gato<sup>28</sup> in the neighborhood of Santo Amaro and the *Bandeiras*<sup>29</sup> Monument in Ibirapuera Park, and to make it credible that this past transmitted to the "Paulistas"<sup>30</sup> the legacy of being a pioneer and entrepreneur. But they make us forget that the *Bandeirantes-pioneers* were brutal and violent men who left the township for the interior of the country, enslaving indigenous people and devastating regions in search of gold and precious stones. The statue of Borba Gato first came under construction in 1957, and was completed six years later in 1963. The work's architect was the sculptor Júlio Guerra, a São Paulo plastic artist whose work is widespread, notably in the neighborhood of Santo Amaro. At the time of the artist's birth in 1912, Santo Amaro was still an independent municipality, neighboring the City of São Paulo. The Monument to the *Bandeiras*, located in Armando Salles de Oliveira Square, in front of Ibirapuera Park and the Legislative Assembly, is a work of the sculptor Victor Brecheret in homage to the Bandeirantes-pioneers of São Paulo. It was installed in 1954, facing the park, in commemoration of the 400 year jubilee of São Paulo. The work made of blocks of granite is 50 meters long and 16 meters high.

In the Paris of the nineteenth century the arcades are like thresholds, portals that give entrance, and by passing through them one can perceive the difference in attitude of the people, as though if they were about to make

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<sup>27</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>28</sup> See Fig. 2 and 3.

<sup>29</sup> See Fig. 4.

<sup>30</sup> The people who are born in the province of São Paulo are known as Paulistas, and those born in the city of São Paulo are "paulistanos".

a decision.<sup>31</sup> What protected the thresholds of the arcades were machines: “weighing machines, slot machines, the mechanical fortune teller,”<sup>32</sup> the modern version of “know thyself” as if these places corresponded to the Greek oracles. This might suggest that even when arriving at the city with an imperious force, the transformations were imposed on a past that remained, even though it was veiled by new forms.

But in confrontation with the monuments and constructions of São Paulo, nothing gives us such an experience. Everything is hard and rigid as concrete just like the monuments, which glorify a past of expropriation, plunder, and violence. On the other hand, a past covered by streets and monuments is a past that loses its voice and form: the voices of indigenous people, silenced by religious preaching, and its past, transmitted orally from generation to generation, is almost lost in the middle of the concrete forest.

In a quotation from the Conferences of the Library of Warburg on arches and triumphal arches, Benjamin comments on the location of the Arch of Scipio in Rome, by saying that its character is “purely monumental,”<sup>33</sup> implying it is of mere cult significance. This statement for Benjamin has a double meaning, since the monumental character has both the function of glorifying and remembering the honored, as well as of serving as a passage or threshold. When crossing the arch, the traveler has the impression of crossing a border. In the monuments of São Paulo, we do not have that aspect. The monumental character here is solely to honor the Bandeirantes-pioneers as heroes.

If Paris is a modern myth for the existence of basements and undergrounds, São Paulo seems to have no mysteries: the discrepancy between the poor and the wealthy, regions reserved for mansions, large office buildings and service companies, shopping malls and the periphery is evident. It suffers all manner of deficiencies: paving, sewerage, health services, public transport, schools.

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<sup>31</sup> W. Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, op. cit., p. 142; idem, *The Arcades Project*, op. cit., p. 89.

<sup>32</sup> Idem, *Das Passagen-Werk*, op. cit., p. 141; idem, *The Arcades Project*, op. cit., p. 88.

<sup>33</sup> Idem, *Das Passagen-Werk*, op. cit., p. 52; idem, *The Arcades Project*, op. cit., p. 97.



## Memory, history and monuments

Few people know that the Greeks, who invented many arts, invented an art of memory, which like their other arts, was passed on to Rome whence it descended into the European tradition. This art seeks to memorize through a technique of impressing 'places' and 'images' on memory. It has usually been classed as 'mnemotechnics,' which in modern times seems a rather unimportant branch of human activity. [...] Mnemosyne, said the Greeks, is the mother of the Muses; the history and training of this most fundamental and elusive of human powers will plunge us into deep waters.<sup>34</sup>

Thus, Frances Yates, researcher of the Warburg Institute at the University of London, begins her extensive work on memory. In this context we are able to glimpse where this study leads us; both for the choice of places and images elected to make the connection between past and present, as well as the origin of choices and refusals. According to the author, also mentioned by Jeanne-Marie Gagnebin<sup>35</sup> (2012), the art of memory was invented by the poet Simonides de Ceos.<sup>36</sup> It is Cicero in *De oratore* who tells the story of the banquet in which Simonides participated. In brief, we reproduce here the account: at the banquet given by the host Scopas, Simonides chanted a poem in honor of both the host and the twins Castor and Pollux. Scopas tells Simonides that he will pay only half of the arranged fee and that the poet should charge the rest to the twins. Later, Simonides receives a message saying that two young men are outside the house wishing to talk to him. During his absence, the house collapses killing all the guests, rendering them unrecognizable. Simonides recalled the exact places they had occupied, so that their relatives were able to identify and bury them. This is how the poet "invented" the art of memory, thus relating the training of this capacity with places and images.

This art held sway for a considerable time but has lost its significance in the modern age. Thinkers like Descartes and Bacon consider the methods of memorizing in the Renaissance, the magical and occult memory of Ramon Llull, as illegitimate, because for them there is no connection "between the emergence of modern science and that mediaeval art, so frantically revived and occultised in the Renaissance."<sup>37</sup>

Jeanne-Marie Gagnebin, citing the Simonides narrative and referring to Wordsworth's sonnet, which mentions the story of the invention of memory, adds that what stands out in the poem is no longer the technique of recollec-

<sup>34</sup> F. Yates, *The Art of Memory*, Routledge, London 1999, p. XI.

<sup>35</sup> J.-M. Gagnebin, "O que é imagem dialética", op. cit., pp. 21-34.

<sup>36</sup> F. Yates, op. cit., pp. 1-2.

<sup>37</sup> Ibidem, p. 375.

tion, "but something more fundamentally human, namely piety towards the dead, an essential feeling in human and historical memory."<sup>38</sup> This feeling would be linked to the need to give the dead an adequate funeral. The author also notes that the decline of this language-based tradition on memory, as indicated by Frances Yates, springs from the "birth and development of another form of knowledge that substitutes the poetic emphasis by the epistemological and asks about the degree of fidelity that guarantees the memory and the imagination."<sup>39</sup>

The important aspect of the concept of memory for Frances Yates is that it expresses the need for remembering to do justice to the dead, but we can also mention that remembering is resistance to forgetfulness. And that a trauma needs to be remembered so that it can be forgotten.<sup>40</sup>

In his *Theses on the Concept of History*, his extensive work on the Arcades of Paris, and yet again in the essays on Baudelaire and Proust, Benjamin discusses another possible relation with the past and with memory. In the theses, history has the privilege of being the discipline that studies and researches the past, but as Benjamin points out, it not only narrates the past as it was, but remembers and interprets it. This is how Benjamin understands the substitution of the historical gaze for the political, an assertion present both in the *Theses* and in his text on "Surrealism." As Benjamin notes: "To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it 'the way it really was' (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger."<sup>41</sup>

Here Benjamin emphasizes that remembering and writing history are not spontaneous activities, but contain within them the intention of the writer: the one who writes is the one who articulates the past with the present. In the essay on Surrealism Benjamin recognizes that this avant-garde movement "was the first to perceive the revolutionary energies that appear in the 'outmoded.'" They did not see in these objects' elements for a nostalgic memory, but converted this nostalgia by "blowing up the powerful atmospheric forces" hidden in them. The trick for this to be possible consists in "the substitution of a political for the historical view of the past."<sup>42</sup> It is also

<sup>38</sup> J.-M. Gagnebin, "O que é imagem dialética", op. cit., p. 23.

<sup>39</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>40</sup> J.-M. Gagnebin emphasises this relation in her book *Lembrar, escrever, esquecer*, São Paulo, ed. 34 letras, São Paulo 2006.

<sup>41</sup> W. Benjamin, "Über den Begriff der Geschichte", op. cit., p. 695; idem, *Iluminations...*, op. cit., p. 255.

<sup>42</sup> Both quotations in idem, "Der Surrealismus", [in:] *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. II-1, Hrsg. R. Tiedemann, H. Schweppenhäuser, Frankfurt am Main 1980, p. 299; idem, *One-*

worth appealing to the *Theses* on three important aspects that will guide our reflection: empathy with the victors, the appropriation of spoils by the victors, and an awakening.

In order to address the concept of appropriation of the spoils and transmitted memory the Simonides narrative outlined above raises one aspect of memory, which is to give the dead a proper funeral, to do justice to the dead and to not let them be forgotten. In the same *Thesis VI* Benjamin affirms that only the materialist historian “will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious.”<sup>43</sup>

In this context it is important to refer to the history of Brazil, more precisely that of São Paulo, a colonial province of Portugal, where the Portuguese arrived in 1500. In *Thesis VIII* Benjamin refers to the historicist method of empathy, which he defines as: “a process of empathy whose origin is the indolence of the heart, acedia, which despairs of grasping and holding the genuine historical image as it flares up briefly.”<sup>44</sup>

The nature of the feeling of sadness arising from this method is more easily understood when one answers the question: who does the historicist historian empathize with? It is with the victor. It means telling the story as it occurred as if this course was necessary and natural, and that the winner earns the right to win and take everything they can. And they appropriate not only material and riches, but culture and memory too. The story they tell is the only one possible. The theme of awakening is in the *Arcades Project*:

It's 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. In other words, image is dialectics at a standstill (zero hour). For while the relation of the present to the past is a purely temporal, continuous one, the relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical: is not progression but image, suddenly emergent.—Only dialectical images are genuine images (that is, not archaic); and the place where one encounters them is language. 'Awakening.'<sup>45</sup>

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*way street and other writings*, trans. E. Jephcott, K. Shorter, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, London 1978, pp. 229–230.

<sup>43</sup> Idem, “Über den Begriff der Geschichte”, op. cit., p. 695; idem, *Iluminations...*, op. cit., p. 255.

<sup>44</sup> Idem, “Über den Begriff der Geschichte”, op. cit., p. 697; idem, *Iluminations...*, op. cit., p. 257.

<sup>45</sup> Idem, *Das Passagen-Werk*, op. cit., pp. 576–577; idem, *The Arcades Project*, op. cit., p. 462.

The awakening alluded to here is that produced by the relation between the past and the present through images that flash in the collective imagination.

As mentioned above, the field of memory studies has expanded recently. This means that our age has become conscious that certain aspects of obtained history require revision, just as the monuments that pay homage to the past must be redefined.

### **Some reflections on history and monuments: to whom do they pay homage?**

In a text entitled "Literary History and the Study of Literature"<sup>46</sup> (1931) Benjamin presents his conception of history emphasizing, as he would again in the *Theses on the concept of history*, the linear aspect of the histories of the sciences, as if each of them had an autonomous development, contained therein:

Scholars attempt again and again to present the history of individual disciplines in terms of one self-contained development. They like to speak of "autonomous disciplines." And even though this formulation initially refers only to the conceptual system of individual disciplines, the idea of autonomy easily spills over into the historical domain. It then leads to the attempt to portray the history of scholarship as an independent, separate process set apart from overall political and intellectual developments. If, as is maintained in what follows, literary history is in the depths of a crisis, this crisis must be seen as part of a much broader one. Literary history is not only a discipline in its own right; in its development, it is also a moment of history in general.<sup>47</sup>

The text deals with the history of literature, but can be applied to every narrative that is intended to be taken separately from history in general. But, as we have seen before, this story typically is the story created and told by men in the same manner as the culture of the past and the past itself is appropriated by the present. To proceed to this appropriation the "victors" use the images of the past in their favor, and with them write a history most favorable to themselves.

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<sup>46</sup> Idem, "Literaturgeschichte und Literaturwissenschaft", [in:] *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. III-1, Hrsg. R. Tiedemann, H. Schweppenhäuser, Frankfurt am Main 1980, p. 283; idem, *Selected Writings*, Vol. 2, Part 2: 1931–1934, eds. M. W. Jennings, G. Smith, H. Eiland, Belknap Press, 2005.

<sup>47</sup> Idem, "Literaturgeschichte und Literaturwissenschaft", op. cit., p. 459.

The monuments referred to above (Fig. 2, 3 and 4) were as we have said, erected in homage to the *Bandeirantes-pioneers*. They participated in expeditions called *Entradas* and *Bandeiras*, which were organized to explore the interior of the territory of the Portuguese colony in the 16<sup>th</sup> century in search for mineral wealth such as gold, silver, and precious stones as well as for hunting animals, and indigenous peoples for slavery.

They began in 1504, shortly after the “discovery” of the South American continent. The *Entradas* expeditions declined in the early seventeenth century with the emergence of the first *Bandeiras* expeditions from the townships of São Vicente and São Paulo. The first *Bandeiras* expeditions took the form of pursuing and capturing Indians in order to sell them as slaves to sugar producers in the Northeast. Their main target were Jesuit missions, where a large number of the indigenous population lived. This was also the cause of conflicts between the Jesuits and *Bandeirantes-pioneers*. In the 1640s the *Bandeirantes-pioneers* expelled the Jesuits from São Paulo. The decline of the *Bandeiras* came with the replacement of the Indians by African slaves. The *Bandeirantes-pioneers* also encroached beyond the frontier of the treaty of Tordesillas<sup>48</sup> that divided the land of the continent between Portugal and Spain (Fig. 5 and 6), which resulted in an expansion of the territory of what would later be Brazil. The stories of the expeditions of the *Bandeirantes-pioneers* to unknown territories gave rise to epic narratives, and these men were praised as heroes and regarded as valiant men, who forged the character of the inhabitants of São Paulo, a tireless and hard-working people. Carlos Berriel, in an interview for the newspaper of the University of Campinas<sup>49</sup> states that what “installs the *Bandeirantes-pioneers* as builders of Brazil is part of a speech presiding over the year 1922.”<sup>50</sup> It is a later construc-

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<sup>48</sup> The Treaty of Tordesillas was an agreement signed on June 4<sup>th</sup> 1494 between Portugal and Spain. It earned this name because it was signed in the Spanish city of Tordesillas. It aimed to resolve the territorial conflicts related to the lands discovered in the end of the fifteenth century. According to the Treaty of Tordesillas, an imaginary line running 370 leagues north from Cape Verde would serve as a reference for the division of land between Portugal and Spain. The lands west of this line were ceded to Spain, while the lands to the east belonged to Portugal. This treaty ceased to exist only in 1750, with the signing of the Treaty of Madrid, where the Portuguese and Spanish crowns established new territorial divisional boundaries for their colonies in South America. This agreement was intended to put an end to the disputes between the two countries, since the Treaty of Tordesillas had been respected by neither party.

<sup>49</sup> A public University in a city of the province of São Paulo.

<sup>50</sup> C. Berriel, “A origem da ‘superioridade racial’ dos Paulistas”, [online] <http://www.geledes.org.br/carlos-berriel-a-origem-da-superioridade-racial-dos-paulistas/#axzz2bHaiTYMT> [accessed 24.06.2017].

tion made by the São Paulo coffee producing bourgeoisie that aims to glorify the Paulista culture and justify a given ideology.<sup>51</sup> Thus the people of São Paulo become heir to those men considered heroes. While reality is different, these monuments may tell another version of history.

On the morning of the 30<sup>th</sup> of September 2016, the two aforementioned monuments emerged daubed (Fig. 7 and 8) with pink, green and yellow ink. The news in the media was announced briefly and with some amazement, followed by comments such as “the reason for such an attitude is unknown.” In social media, blogs and web pages, it was attributed to leftists, or vandals (words that are synonymous for some), disdaining the story itself. Shortly later the action was effected by a debate between the candidates for São Paulo city hall, broadcast by a television network, which mentioned the problem of graffiti, tagging and vandalism. The *Bandeiras* Monument had been tagged previously (Fig. 9 and 10) in 2013 when the National Congress proposed the Amendment to the Constitution (PEC), 215, the theme of which was the demarcation of indigenous lands.

Many of the complaints against these political actions and those who considered them vandalism forget that such monuments were erected to remind us of only one aspect of history. As Carla Damião wrote:

Thinking of the colonial past of any country, for instance, and some art movements against the memory of the oppressive-colonizer, whose identity is displayed in many national monuments as a result of the union of art 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.<sup>52</sup>

The events on the 30<sup>th</sup> of September 2016, those of 2013, and the attack on the clocks in 2000 are not just “coincidences.” On the contrary, when we consider the events of 2000 and 2013, it becomes clear that the motifs of the interventions are not vandalism or inconsistent left-wing attitudes. The reason for the interventions in the monuments, mainly in Victor Brecheret’s work, a landmark of the city, was not only to express the claim of freedom for graffiti and tagging, but was also a political manifestation against the homage paid to the pioneers of the colonization. This monument, as we have said, represents the *Bandeirantes*-pioneers, and is associated with the pro-

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<sup>51</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>52</sup> C. M. Damião, “Memory, Truth and Monuments”, Oral presentation at the London Forum of Aesthetics, supported by the British Society of Aesthetics in 07/11/2016.

gress of the country and the expansion of Brazilian territory. Those who defend the monument do so because they associate it with progress and the modernist homage accorded to the city of São Paulo. Marcos Tupã, coordinator of the Guarani Iyurupá commission, says that for the indigenous people, the monuments are offensive. The Bandeirantes are not heroes, he says. The intervention made by the Indians in the monument aimed to draw attention to the continuance of maltreatment undergone at the hands of the large landowners. Renato Cymbalista considers that the subject is complex and that it is necessary to discuss the meaning of the monument with society as a whole. Luis Carlos Tau Golin, as referred to before, denounces the systematic destruction of documents, maps, and ceramic pieces that prove the existence of the indigenous people in south Brazil.<sup>53</sup>

The artist Guto Lacaz says that if we were to take down all the monuments that bear witness to the cruelty of history there would be none left standing. This statement leads to the question of counter-monuments,<sup>54</sup> which would be works made to remember death and destruction, and therefore have nothing monumental and cultic; they indicate the absence of what has been destroyed. It would be necessary to dig<sup>55</sup> deep to find the past of those peoples who had their history interrupted and were prevented from transmitting it.

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<sup>53</sup> Ibidem and "São Sepé, o Tiarajú, e o apagamento dos indígenas da memória da formação do RS", [online] <http://www.ihu.unisinos.br/78-noticias/570141-sao-sepe-o-tiaraju-e-o-apagamento-dos-indigenas-da-memoria-da-formacao-do-rs> [accessed: 28.06.2017].

<sup>54</sup> J. Young, op. cit.

<sup>55</sup> "He who wishes to approach to his own buried past must act like a man who digs", W. Benjamin, [in:] K. Till, "Fragments, Ruins, Artifacts and Torso", *Historical Geography*, 2001, 29, p. 70.

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Sílvia Faustino\*

## March into the Unknown: Violence and Faith in *The Backlands*

### Abstract

This article constitutes an interpretation of the narrative of war found in the third part of the book *The Backlands* by Euclides da Cunha. The main objective is to approach the narrative in the aspect in which it appears as the representation of a march to war towards an unknown target, in a procedure in which the position of the narrator, situated spatially on one side of the struggle, places the reader in the same perspective as that of the advancing attack. It is also intended to show that, from the ideological construction of the enemy to its inexplicable and prolonged intangibility, the narrator elaborates on the tragic subject of the alliance between violence and faith, which will erupt in the clashes at the forefront of the battle. Finally, Glauber Rocha's film, *Black God, White Devil*, will be approached as an evocation of Euclides da Cunha's book, especially regarding issues involving faith and violence in the backlands of northeastern Brazil.

### Keywords

The Backlands, violence, faith

This campaign is remembered through the ebb of the past  
And, it was, in the true sense of the word, a crime.  
Let us denounce it.

Euclides da Cunha, *Os sertões*...<sup>1</sup>

*The Backlands: The Canudos Campaign (Os Sertões: Campanha de Canudos)* by Euclides da Cunha (1866–1909), one of Brazilian literature's most important works, was first published in late 1902. The book tells the story of

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<sup>1</sup> E. da Cunha, *Os sertões: Campanha de Canudos*, Edição crítica de Walnice Nogueira Galvão, Ática, São Paulo 2003, p. 14.

the Canudos war, a campaign which in 1897 resulted in the destruction of a settlement comprising of approximately five thousand and two hundred dwellings and the extermination of a community led by the charismatic Antônio Conselheiro. In addition, during a campaign spread over four expeditions, the Brazilian army suffered five thousand casualties. Euclides da Cunha witnessed, for just over fifteen days, merely the final moments of the massacre: he traveled to the state of Bahia, as a correspondent for the newspaper *O Estado de São Paulo*, in order to cover the Canudos war. After the war, he spent four years writing *The Backlands (Os Sertões)*, a work that traverses literature, history and science.

Leopoldo M. Bernucci, who makes reproduction a central topic to Euclides da Cunha's poetic narrative, recognizes the "literary side of the world and imagery" of *The Backlands*, and states that when he "abandons the historian's pen to take up that of the writer," his interest rests more in the "artistical narrative potentialities" of the episode itself, rather than in producing a precise report. Luiz da Costa Lima considered it "inappropriate to speak of *The Backlands* as a work of fiction," since it was predominantly a "sociological work." Years later he admitted that in the discursive texture of the book there is a "mimesis machine," which is understood as an imaging device that bursts into the main disposition to describe the facts for the purpose of engaging in science. Berthold Zilly, the translator of *The Backlands* into German, observes that the work contains two contradictory discourses regarding the backlanders (*sertanejos*) and the nation itself: on the one hand, it is a "scientific essay" with academic, deductive, and racist argument. On the other hand, it is a "disturbing poetic and rhetorical historiography in the exasperating struggle against oblivion."<sup>2</sup> According to these authors, distinct and even opposing discursive tendencies constitute the possible meanings of Euclides's work: fictionalisation and historiography; factual description and mimetic/imagery discourse; the scientific essay and poetic and rhetorical historiography. With this in mind, it can be said that the daring historical narrative of *The Backlands* oscillates between the scientific impulse (marked by evolutionism and the positivism of the time), and the creative impulse, which moves the hand of the writer to use both rhetorical and poetic resources. This work is part of the treatment of historical discourse in alliance with the creative impulse in that it intends to explore: i) the narration of the ideological character of the discursive construction of Canudos as a target object to be eliminated (the narrator's rhetoric that shows the rhetorical

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<sup>2</sup> B. Zilly, "Sertão e nacionalidade: formação étnica e civilizatória no Brasil segundo Euclides da Cunha", *Revista Estudos Sociedade e Agricultura*, UFRRJ/CPDA, 1999, n. 12, p. 37.

character of ideology); and ii) the narration of the struggle for the imitative procedure of a march to war (the poetic imitation that binds the reader to the target's aim).

In the third part of the book, entitled "The Fight," the narrator tells the story. Among the multiple possible ways of interpreting the rich plot presented in this part, I intend to follow the narrative thread that first exposes the contingent and illusory character of the process by which Canudos becomes the target of war: a real target whereby an imaginary, ideologically determined, and politically appropriate cause was created through force. I then emphasize the descriptions of the ethical-religious drama attributed to the soldiers at the front of the combat, and show how these characters symbolize, with their inner experiences and behaviors, perhaps the greatest contradiction of the Republican values on whose behalf that war was waged: it is at the front of the battle that the fratricidal aspect of war is more clearly delineated. Based on what is seen, and standpoints punctuated throughout the text, I emphasise a formal trait in the constitution of the narrative focus by the manner in which the reader engages in a representation in which the focus of the narration intermingles with the focus of the actual marching of the infantry towards the target. In the final part, I discuss elements of the plot and characteristic aspects of the characters in the film *Black God, White Devil* by Glauber Rocha, as allegorical evocations of Euclides da Cunha's book, in order to explore in a new light, the same alliance between faith and violence in the backlands of northeastern Brazil.

### **The Target and the Fraud**

Among the narrative factors leading to the outbreak of war, one draws particular attention: the fanciful and fraudulent process by which Canudos is turned into a target of war. At the beginning of "The Struggle," we find the claim that the Canudos campaign was determined by a "disgraceful incident:" Antônio Conselheiro purchased some wood in the town of Juazeiro in order to complete the construction of a new church in Canudos. The material, although paid for, was not received as promised. The breach of the agreement intentional, according to the author led to rumors that Antônio Conselheiro and his followers would invade the town to seize the wood by force. This prompted a Juazeiro judge to request state intervention against that community, taking the initial step towards the formation of what would become the first of four expeditions. In quoting "Make history, affiliated to official documents"<sup>3</sup> the author reproduces the message of the governor of

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<sup>3</sup> E. da Cunha, *Os sertões...*, op. cit., p. 191.

Bahia to the president of the Republic. In it, the governor refers to the inhabitants of Canudos as "bandits" and the need to "prevent them from invading the town."<sup>4</sup> It can be said that here we confront the first of the many great incongruities revealed in the work, but perhaps one of the most significant, insofar as it highlights the genesis of the conflict, i.e. the eagerness of those who were violated to assert their ownership rights of the pre-paid goods. Thus, Antônio Conselheiro and his followers are transformed into invading brigands. The plan was accordingly given strength: the idea that the invasion of the Canudos settlement was also necessary in order to eradicate "the stirring of moral decomposition" that had taken root there in "blatant discredit to authority and institutions." It was on the basis of such judgment that the state government began to intimate "a threat to state sovereignty shaped as a scarecrow" by the "unpunished turbulent [people]."<sup>5</sup> Employing the image of a threatening scarecrow, a visible target was put in place, through which an opposition formed of local ethical and political forces was established. But the process of forced fabrication of the targeted object is generalized: rapid publicity of events leads to the intervention by the nation as a whole, and in a very short time Canudos becomes a national target.

At the time of the second expedition, such a situation appears so magnified that it is identifiable with the dimension of civilization itself with its "portentous weapons." And to the "magic words Homeland, Glory, and Liberty"—which, according to the narrator, "spoken in all tones, contain all the raw material of the reverberating periods," a need is added: a great example had to be made and a lesson given to the "unrepentant ruffians;" requiring an energetic corrective so that they might "suddenly enter through the portals of civilization through punishment."<sup>6</sup> As the narrative proceeds, the assortment of agents who acted in the fabrication of Canudos as a justified target is delineated and comprises: "Brazilian society," which in 1897 had a "high degree of receptivity to the intrusion of all revolutionary and dispersive elements," the "people" who had shown non-adaptability to the "superior legislation of the newly inaugurated political system." The "civil government," founded in 1894, which "had not had the essential basis of an organized public opinion" and "had been unable to correct a situation which was neither frankly revolutionary nor normal, equally repudiated the extreme resources of force and the serene influence of laws;" A "society that

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 192.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 209.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 217–218.

progressed in leaps and bounds from maximum laxity to maximum rigorism." And to complete the picture: an "imperfect intellectual organization" and an "incomprehensible political organization."<sup>7</sup>

In the case of Brazil, Walnice Nogueira Galvão emphasizes the "extraordinary pioneering" by which newspapers, before the era of electronic communication, were the vehicle for manipulation on behalf of political tendencies interested in "creating panic and concentrating opinions around a single enemy." The Canudos war earned itself a fixed spot on the front page, in addition to invading "editorials, chronicles, reports, advertisements, even the cartoon pages."<sup>8</sup> The process of the discursive construction of the target object is attested by the scholar Adriana M. C. Johnson who describes in letters (both private and public) and newspaper articles the emergence of a "prose of counter-insurgency" for which Canudos, transformed into a site of inscription and projection of a variety of tensions and fears, is exclusively seen through the bias of a discourse whose central focus is state security.<sup>9</sup> According to this author, in the construction of this "dense textual web about Canudos" a "hegemonic discursive formation" is revealed, tending to repress other forms of conceptualization.<sup>10</sup> In the narrative of the *Backlands*, the ideological character of the forces that consolidate the war, displays itself in a manner in which the discourses of the existing powers are rhetorically assembled and used to promote violence against the insurgents.

It is at this moment of generalization of a political framework, and of its agents, that the narrator speaks of an "extremely vulgar case of collective psychology:" the passive and neutral majority of the country was taken by surprise, given to the "inheritance of remote biological predisposition" and, thanks to a kind of "psychic minimalism," they adopted a similar "moral feature to that of the mediocre adventurers who took the lead." Apart from the use of psychic determinism, I am interested in emphasizing this societal state that gave rise to selfseeking mediocre leaders and to the predominance of "political fetishism" which, as our narrator tells us, at that particular moment, demanded "uniformed idols." Under these conditions, Colonel Antônio Moreira César, elevated to the role of a "new idol," was chosen as commander of the third expedition. The third expedition is thus clearly commanded by forces of political fetishism by way of apathetic public opinion,

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<sup>7</sup> Ibidem, pp. 245–246.

<sup>8</sup> W. N. Galvão, *Gatos de outro saco: ensaios críticos*, Brasiliense, São Paulo 1981, pp. 71–72.

<sup>9</sup> A. M. C. Johnson, *Sentencing Canudos: Subalternity in the Backlands of Brazil*, University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh 2010 (e-book), pp. 90–91.

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem, pp. 96–97.

both steered by mediocre opportunists, who lack the slightest insight in the country's situation, "courted" the army, and are "illogically" erected as a balancing element amidst national agitation. The narrator gives the reader the idea of a great scenario aided in its fabrication by fetishes and scarecrows with a paradoxical anchor in the institutions perpetuating the false moral and political basis for the fatal harassment of Canudos.

For the narrator, colonel Moreira César "was unbalanced" because of a "biological fatality," namely epilepsy.<sup>11</sup> Influenced by the prejudices of that time, our author places great emphasis on the unstable, impulsive, wild and nervous aspects of the colonel's behavior. Prone to fits, alien to affection, and subject to fleeting delusions, the head of the third expedition, with its shaky and degenerate intelligence, emerges as the most perfect symbol of the irrationality of that war. But the complicity between society and its psychotic leadership becomes clear: instead of the "straitjacket," he became an idol.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, Moreira César is presented as the protagonist of the order and as "exponential in the neurosis" of the combatant soldiers.<sup>13</sup> Under his command, "hurried" missions took place, attached to "fantastic triangles" and "ramblings."<sup>14</sup> Under his command widespread irregular misconduct was carried out, in which combatants, for example, would cross long stretches of *Caatinga* brushland in mid-summer, obliged to carry in vain an artesian pump to sink a well "as if they who ignored the surface itself could be familiar with the deep underlayers of the earth; and as if there were among their ranks ardent diviners, capable of marking, with a mysterious divining rod, that exact spot from where the stream of liquid flowed..."<sup>15</sup> More often than in other parts of the narrative, the march of the army appears to be heading "into the unknown,"<sup>16</sup> towards an "imaginary enemy."<sup>17</sup> So much so, that the soldiers, suddenly seized by a great fear, felt the threat of a serious setback: that of "coming across a settlement that is deserted." In these passages on the third expedition, the references to the completely altered psychic states of the combatants in the war intensify; the narrator refers to "dangerous mental inebriation," "panic," "crazed bravery," "the extreme fear and extreme audacity" of the soldiers; to "vertigo," to "tormenting neurosis,"

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<sup>11</sup> E. da Cunha, *Os sertões...*, op. cit., p. 249.

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem, p. 253.

<sup>13</sup> Ibidem, p. 272.

<sup>14</sup> Ibidem, p. 254.

<sup>15</sup> Ibidem, p. 255.

<sup>16</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem, p. 266.

to “the painful anxiety”<sup>18</sup> that afflicted them. With these observations, I intend to show that the use of psychic determinism is not intended to “explain” the facts of war, but to reinforce the incomprehension, perplexity, and psychic instability of those who set out to attack a target created as an absolute fabrication by the prevailing powers in the political game.

### The “mysterious feature” of the struggle

On the evening of the day that Colonel Moreira César was shot, the Backland struggle began, in the narrator's words, “to take on the mysterious feature that would remain until the end.”<sup>19</sup> Having said this, he continues with the following account:

Mostly half-castes, and of the same stock as the rustics, the soldiers, crushed by the counter-coup of inexplicable setbacks in which their reputedly invincible leader had been struck down, were subject to the thrilling image of astonishment; they were imbued with supernatural terror, further aggravated by extravagant comments. The gunman, brutal and thick-set, diluted himself into an intangible goblin...<sup>20</sup>

The mysterious feature of the struggle appears to be linked to the fact that, in addition to most soldiers having failed to see a single gunman, those who had taken part in the previous expedition believed they had seen two or three “insurgents” whom, they said with conviction, had already “perished in Mount Cambaio.”<sup>21</sup> These soldiers now saw their opponents as “ghost fighters; invisible almost.” But what springs most to attention and gives the most mystifying face to the struggle is that these soldiers were also half-breeds and “of the same stock as the rustics.” According to the narrator, most of the soldiers were from the northeast, and had been raised listening to, and surrounded by, the heroes of children's tales; the name of Antônio Conselheiro, “his extravagant legend, his miracles, his feats of unparalleled sorcery.” Now, after the “unexplained setback,” all the legends they had heard seemed to them “verisimilar.” And when, at this moment, the supplications, the “sad litany,” the “crippled and mournful *kyries*” of those enemies descended on their ears, they were amazed and said that there was no manner in which to react against opponents so “transfigured by religious faith.” This is a curious moment in the narrative, because, equally affected by the

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<sup>18</sup> Ibidem, p. 271.

<sup>19</sup> Ibidem, p. 287.

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem, pp. 287–288.

<sup>21</sup> Ibidem, p. 288.

“exciting suggestion of the extraordinary,” the fleeing soldiers the retreat from the field during the third expedition “was a stampede”<sup>22</sup> attributed to the “intangible” enemy a transfiguration by faith, while, at the same time, the narrative itself shows that a “transfiguration” also occurred on the part of the half-caste soldiers. Was the “supernatural terror” felt by the half-caste soldiers provoked by their own faith, or fear of the faith of those whom they fought?

While this “mysterious feature” of the struggle is indeed present from its inception, its characteristics become stronger and sharper as the war proceeds. These features were already noticeable in the first expedition, when the narrator justifies the reluctance of the commander and the soldiers to continue in the fight because of their amazement of the courage and daring in the faces of the settlers. Those backlanders, who had no warlike appearance, guided by their “symbols of peace” the banner of the dove and a large wooden cross and who, all of a sudden “raised the saints and arms,” were nonetheless capable of tenaciously resisting four hours of attack. Haunted by the unexpected assaults of the *jagunços* gunfighters, the commander was “terrified.” Just as the force’s physician had “lost his reason” rendering him useless to the wounded<sup>23</sup> thus was “the feature of the struggle” similarly afflicted. The aspect of the battle that unnerved the commander and the doctor in the wilderness the most was that the backlanders seemed to surrender themselves to the war as if seeking “the decisive proof of their religious souls.”<sup>24</sup> As it was clear that the strength of the backlanders did not come from their weapons, it came from their faith, which the commander, the troops, and the physician of the first expedition were afraid of. I would suggest that, beneath the language of cause and psychic effects, there are always ethical conflicts triggering the actions of the protagonists.

It may be said from the point of view of dramatic construction that the characters of the half-caste soldiers, “of the same stock as the rustics,” are central to the interpretation of Euclides da Cunha’s narrative as a writing that elaborates the trauma of a nationality which he believed to be in the early stages of construction. The republican ideal that espoused extermination was torn to ribbons, absurd and scandalous in the face of the inner drama of those characters who, at the end and before the end of the battle were seen as morally defeated and religiously condemned:

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<sup>22</sup> Ibidem, p. 290.

<sup>23</sup> Ibidem, p. 199.

<sup>24</sup> Ibidem, p. 197.



Silence fell dampeningly on both camps. Then while pressed up against the thick walls of the half-ruined temple, the soldiers listened to the mysterious and vague melancholic cadence of the prayers... That singular stoicism impressed them, and dominated them; and as their superstitions and the same naive religiosity had barely vanished in their own souls, they finally faltered before their adversary, who had allied himself with Providence. They envisioned extraordinary resources.<sup>25</sup>

The strong impression that the rituals of the faith of the inhabitants of Canudos made on the soldiers appears to be linked to the fact that they shared the "same" superstitions and the "same naive religiosity." That is to say, the soldiers *identified* with those backlanders who fought. Despite the fact that the backlanders were the enemy, the soldiers, nonetheless, were unable to eliminate an identification that led them to recognize the value, and to give respect to the same beliefs that seemed so powerful in their opponents. The soldiers were so touched by the same enchantment of the world that their own defeat seemed to them to be the work of an alliance between their adversaries and Providence. But through all those happenings in the backlands, to use Glauber Rocha's inspired expression, it was as if God and the Devil were in the land of the sun. For, that very covenant with Providence which presumably invigorated the backlanders for battle, was also that which enabled them to perform barbarities. For we also see the allies of Providence acting as protagonists in a "cruel drama:" they hung the body of Colonel Tamarindo from a dry branch of a tree; his "dismembered body" was displayed in the wilds as "a terribly lugubrious mannequin" a "demonic vision."<sup>26</sup> The unexpected setback of the third expedition caused a "great national commotion," a "general delusion of opinion," a "complete disorientation of the spirits." In this atmosphere, some began to think that the "turbulent tabargues" were not acting in isolation, and that they constituted a "vanguard," to the fore of unknown phalanges, poised to erupt against the new regime.<sup>27</sup> As a consequence, a united voice was emerging: "it was necessary to save the Republic" with this becoming a kind of "dominant cry against the common outrage." Through the publication of news extracts, Euclides da Cunha shows that those who promoted the view that there was an alliance between the inhabitants of Canudos and "revolutionary monarchism," also played an important *rôle* in the theatrical spectacle of politics, and that just as the nonconformist monarchists, Antônio Conselheiro and his followers aimed to destroy the Republic, together with "the unity of Brazil."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ibidem, p. 363.

<sup>26</sup> Ibidem, p. 294.

<sup>27</sup> Ibidem, p. 297.

<sup>28</sup> Ibidem, p. 298.

Unity can only be destroyed if it has first been consolidated. However, what is shown in *Backlands* is that there was no stable political unity in those early times of the Republic. And the war in Canudos was aggravating the darkened face of its own impossibility. The persecuted backlanders, rather than destroying a union, in reality denied its very existence. Once again, we are faced with a fatal inversion: the possibility of nationhood was destroyed under the false premise that it was already consolidated. The narrator states that “one looked at history through an inverted eyepiece...”<sup>29</sup> This may mean that those in pursuit of a modern ideal of civilization, who ordered the devastation of Canudos, ended up ruining this ideal. In the name of a supposed construction of unity or national identity, what is seen at the bloodiest peak of the war is the total destruction of this ideal, through the basic fact that those of the same simple and religious birth as the people of the backlands were set in the role of mortal enemies.

Experiencing the fratricide was so traumatic that, according to the accounts of the wounded soldiers, there was a movement contrary to that of unified identification: the figure of the “imaginary enemy” is transposed from that of the common mortal and acquires fantastic and mythological traits:

The *jagunço* [gunman] began to appear as a separate entity, teratological and monstrous, half man, half goblin; in violation of biological laws, in displaying inconceivable resistances; hurling himself neither seen nor tangible on the adversary; sliding, invisible, through the *caatinga* bushland, snakelike; tumbling and sliding down the hillside, as though a specter; lighter than the scraping rifle; thin, dry, fantastic, a self-diluted goblin, weighing less than a child, having tanned skin, rough as the epidermis of mummies, glued over bones...<sup>30</sup>

Monster, snake, specter, goblin, mummy an intangible being, invisible, formed of slippery matter, sliding and diluted, not letting itself be apprehended, and yet, resistant. But there is another kind of impalpability that the narrative produces and this one concerns Antônio Conselheiro, central protagonist of the backland resistance, whose powerful presence exists only in the sense of an intense and constant evocation. In this part of the work, narrating the war, the living figure of Antônio Conselheiro appears only once, and is described in six sparse lines. Attired in a long blue tunic flowing over his body in an ungraceful manner, he appears with his “forehead lowered and eyes downcast;” Remaining “still and silent before the hushed and

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<sup>29</sup> Ibidem, p. 387.

<sup>30</sup> Ibidem, p. 401.

reverent congregation,” slowly raising his face, which is suddenly illuminated by a “glowing and steady look”<sup>31</sup> as he preaches. His figure will only reappear as a corpse on the penultimate page of the book. Apart from this fleeting mention, in this crucial part of the work presenting the script of the events of the war, nothing is described, no action, no movement, no practical action in the conflict. Little, almost nothing was known about his thoughts and plans, so that this impalpability was, in essence, a reflection of the ignorance concerning the meaning and purpose of his existence and the existence of those who accompanied him. An ignorance which, let us admit, can not be remedied by the prejudiced features of his personality presented in the earlier part of the work. In fact, it should be noted that at no moment of the tragic narrative do we have a clear expression of the beliefs and values of those who accompanied and defended the Conselheiro. What exists is a silence, an absence of voice. It is no wonder that those who lost their discernment most acutely were those who, at the forefront of the struggle, perpetrated the extermination of this paradoxical “strange entrail:”

It was terribly paradoxical that a motherland sought by its native sons armed to the teeth, enlivened by the sound of war, their entrails drawn by Krupps’ artillery, was completely ignored, they never once having seen it...<sup>32</sup>

### **The narrative focus of the conflict**

After reading *The Backlands*, we can ask: from what perspective is the Canudos war narrated? What is the angle from which the narrated facts are focused? Where do judgments, appreciations, choices of symbols and characters come from, as well as all the options pertaining to the manner in which matter is distributed and treated? With regard to the problem of narrative focus, the narrator of *The Backlands* presents some curious characteristics. If we want to classify him as an “omniscient narrator,” understood as the one who dominates all knowledge of history, and who as a god can scrutinize even the mental life of his characters, then we can not, since his so-called omniscience would have a limit: it never reaches as far as the minds of the Canudos inhabitants. The intimacy of their thoughts, their desires, their way of life remain unknown to us. But the striking feature of the narrator’s focus is the adoption of the first person plural perspective, the position of a “we” that has the effect of creating an opposition between this “we,” and “they,”

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<sup>31</sup> Ibidem, p. 261.

<sup>32</sup> Ibidem, p. 423.

those who are attacked, the hunted, the destroyed. This relationship of opposition, in addition to restricting the narrative focus to the logic of conflict, is a linguistic-formal resource that necessarily places the reader within the perspective of those attacking. Let us establish certain aspects of the complexity inherent in this game in which the perspective of a certain “we,” a certain first person plural is created:

- a) The narrator is included on one side of the “march” to war, his angle of vision obeys the logistics of war.
- b) But this “we,” far from being homogeneous, involves a complicated game of identification, insofar as it includes political and religious authorities, the press, public opinion, the army, all Brazilians who are not inhabitants of Canudos, all those who defend republican ideals, all who support the ideals of the French revolution, and in short, all those who defend modern civilization.
- c) The target of attack, the vector through which the narration is directed, is in many respects used to point out a blind spot. More precisely: the narrative vector is literally confused with a vanishing point, so that everything that lies at the opposite pole of the conflict is presented by those of this and not that side of the struggle. Apart from this one-sided mode of presentation, where the image of the other is always filtered and decoded by visions that are often fraudulent and fanciful, there is the incessant search for a true reference that escapes the gaze of the narrator and the reader.
- d) It can not be said that the narrative is neutral, since it comes from the exclusive point of view of those who won the war. On the other hand, the narrator’s logistical situation does not encourage him to defend the position in which he is included; on the contrary, war is seen as a crime which he intends to denounce. However, it cannot be said that he tells the story of the vanquished, for they are largely unknown to him.

The dramatic narration engages the reader in the representation of the tragic events, forcing him to stand to one side of the struggle, which means that, in the very act of reading, he is induced to experience the same ethical conflict of that war. Through the narrative strategy adopted, the reader experiences the conflict of the war in the struggle with the text itself. The narrative points to a target that is seen only from afar, but which remains always out of reach, delayed, thrust away, postponed. The perspective and progress of the reading is confused with the perspective and progress of the

army: the march is slow and invariably interrupted by the resistance of the attackers who do not allow themselves to be *surrounded*, do not allow themselves to be *captured/taken*. The torpor of war is expressed in the slowness of the narrative plot. The reader struggles against the sluggish and truncated rhythm of a reading that evolves in leaps towards a point that is never reached, a terminal point that the reader longs to arrive at, to get to *know*, to see what it holds an expectation never to be fulfilled. The reader fights this resistance by the backlanders against the attacks, because only the resistance can separate the reader from his cognitive harassment of Canudos. The reader is part of this expedition. When he finally reaches the concluding lines, an uneasy feeling grips him: what he sought was the knowledge of something now destroyed forever, without ever having been known to him.

### Art and violence, monument and memory

One of the most important works in Brazilian literature, *The Backlands* is a book that may be considered as one of the richest and most relevant monuments to historical consciousness, in the same sense in which Walter Benjamin employed this expression in the fifteenth thesis of "On the Concept of History."<sup>33</sup> As well as constituting itself as a work whose complex structure and singular narrative form raises, yet again, careful reflection, this book offers the real possibility of knowledge and revision of the directions and meanings that could be attributed to the constitutive movements of history never peaceful in the consolidation of the republican regime in Brazil, officially established in 1822. The monuments of a historical consciousness, as theorized by Walter Benjamin, do not follow the chronometer times of clocks, but rather the cyclical time of calendars in which the same day returns as a day of remembrance. As Michael Löwy asserts, calendars "are an expression of a historic, heterogeneous time, full of past memory and present times."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> W. Benjamin, "On the Concept of History", [in:] *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, Vol. 4: 1938–1940, eds, H. Eiland, M. W. Jennings, Harvard University Press, Harvard 2006; idem, "Sobre o conceito da história", [in:] idem, *Obras Escolhidas. Magia e Técnica, Arte e Política*, trad. S. P. Rouanet, prefácio J.-M. Gagnebin, Editora Brasiliense, São Paulo 1985, p. 230.

<sup>34</sup> M. Löwy, *Walter Benjamin: aviso de incêndio. Uma leitura das "Teses sobre o conceito de história"*, trad. W. C. Brandt, trad. das teses J.-M. Gagnebin, M. Müller, Boitempo Editorial, Harvard 2005, p. 124.

In the same manner as that of the book *The Backlands*, the film *Black God, White Devil*, by the Bahian film-maker Glauber Rocha, might be considered in the light of the same Benjaminian concept of monument of historical consciousness of a certain type of life as lived, in those times, in the backlands of northeastern Brazil. First released in 1964, at the beginning of the military dictatorship in Brazil, the film explores and presents, making use of an original cinematographic language, the same types of conflicts and impasses that were reported throughout the narrative of the struggle in *The Backlands*. An icon of *Cinema Novo*,<sup>35</sup> the film constructs a backland world through the saga of Manuel and Rosa, in its different and successive phases. Presented as a *Cordel* poem,<sup>36</sup> the story is told by Blind Julius, who accompanies them in this trajectory of their lives, in a predominantly open and absolutely sun-baked semi-desert northeastern landscape. Canudos and Antônio Conselheiro are evoked in the allegorical construction of another story. Apart from explicit references told in words of different characters, pertaining to the massacre that took place in Canudos, one of the central figures of the story recounts what is a clear Antônio Conselheiro allegory: Sebastião, the messianic leader, the “Saint who works miracles” (*santo milagreiro*), grouped with his followers in Monte Santo (symbolic configuration of Canudos), preaching against the landowners, promising miracles and foretelling the fulfillment of the prophecy taken from Antônio Conselheiro’s sermons that “the backlands will become the sea, and that the sea will become the backlands.”<sup>37</sup> As narrated by Euclides da Cunha concerning a Canudos, both empirical and real, as well as in the fiction of Glauber Rocha, the leadership practiced by Sebastião proved troublesome to local landowners

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<sup>35</sup> The “New Cinema” artistic movement emerged in the early 1950s, as a reaction of young filmmakers to the collapse of the great São Paulo film studios. It advocated a more realistic and less expensive film production, in opposition to the mainstream of the Hollywoodian film industry. Inspired by the Italian Neo-realism filmmakers and the French *Nouvelle Vague*, the aesthetics of this cinema movement is characterized by slow displacements, no luxury environments, most of the films being in black and white.

<sup>36</sup> *Cordel* literature is a popular literary genre, characteristic of northeastern Brazil. It has a rhymed form and stems from the oral tradition, printed on leaflets. The name came from the way in which the leaflets were put on sale in Portugal, hung on strings or twine (*Cordel*, or in plural: *cordéis*).

<sup>37</sup> In the words of Antonio Conselheiro: “the backlands will become the coast [sea] and the coast [sea] will become the backlands.” We altered Elizabeth Lowe’s translation. In the original, “sea” (“mar”) is used, not “coast.” E. da Cunha, *Backlands: the Canudos Campaign*, trans. E. Lowe, introduction I. Stavans, Penguin Publishing Group, London 2010, p. 42.

and the Catholic church to such an extent that a priest and a colonel finally commissioned Antônio das Mortes, the “killer of gunfighters (*cangaceiros*),” to wipe out Sebastião and his followers.

In spite of this poetic evocation, the film’s plot bears no direct relation to the contents of Euclides da Cunha’s book. In contrast to what takes place in *The Backlands*, in the film *Black God, White Devil*, messianism and guerilla warfare (*cangaço*) represented through the figures of Blessed Sebastião and Corisco, the “devil of Lampião” are representative characters of ideologically separated primitive cultural sources, whereas, in the book, they are presented as intrinsically united. According to this strategy, messianism might be represented as an essentially hallucinatory and irrational attitude, a characteristic by which it will remain completely unfeasible and unauthorized as a possible solution, since in the film it is presented as pure alienation, passivity, and as old-fashioned; on the other hand, the other line of ideological force, represented by warfare (*cangaço*), appears endowed with a more positive revolutionary connotation, and may be constituted in those dark times as a genuine revolt against the established order. Consider the scene depicting Sebastião sacrificing a young child with a long dagger in order to anoint Rosa’s forehead with that innocent blood, so that her unbelieving soul can be purified; such a sequence in which Manuel participates in an unconsciously solicitous manner shows a follower of messianism engaged in an absolutely unjustifiable act of violence, however it is viewed. Nevertheless, Rosa’s equally violent reaction, where she ends up killing Sebastião with the same knife that he used to strike the child within the plot, this reaction achieves an almost “revolutionary” sense. The same ambiguous treatment will be dispensed via the violent acts of Corisco, the gunfighter who in the figure of a vigilante on the side of the people appears as justified in the face of the supposition of a perverse need to demand that everything be solved based on “the rifle and the dagger” and “not with the rosary.” It can be said that it is Corisco’s point of view that reveals in its highest degree what the author himself called the “aesthetics of violence.” According to theorist and film critic Ismail Xavier, in a book that analyzes Glauber Rocha’s film in the light of his artistic project, the defense of an aesthetic of violence by the filmmaker is taken as a revolutionary way of performing art, in which it is shown that “the violence of the oppressed gains legitimacy as a form of response to institutional violence, often invisible.”<sup>38</sup> As can be seen, Glauber Rocha himself seems to authorize this interpretation in the following interview:

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<sup>38</sup> I. Xavier, *Sertão Mar: Glauber Rocha e a estética da fome*, Editora Brasiliense, São Paulo 1983, p. 123.

On the Cinema Novo: an aesthetic of violence, before being primitive, is revolutionary; that is the starting point for the colonizer to understand the existence of the colonized. Only by raising awareness of its unique possibility, violence, can the colonizer understand, through horror, the strength of the culture he exploits. As long as he does not raise arms, the colonized is a slave; it took the first death of a policeman for the French to become aware of an Algerian.<sup>39</sup>

This discourse defending the aesthetics of violence in its revolutionary aspect seems to echo, in *God and the Devil*, the one of the gunfighter leader Corisco when he says that “man in this land is only of value when he takes up arms to change destiny.”

Now, close to the end of the book *The Backlands*, is the striking account of the effects of the violence of war on a child's face. She was carried by an old lady, her white hair covered in earth, who appeared suddenly, walking shakily, among the huddled miserable masses. The old woman attracted attention wherever she went, for she had with her “a little girl, granddaughter, great-granddaughter, perhaps,” described as follows:

And this child horrified. The left side of its face had been torn open, some time ago, by a grenade splinter in such a way that the jaws were prominent between the red lips of the already healed wound [...] The right cheek smiled. And it was frightening to behold that incomplete and painful laughter shown on one side of the face and immediately extinguished on the other, in the void of a scar. That old woman carried the most monstrous creation of the campaign.<sup>40</sup>

It can be said that this child is the most complete symbol of the violence of a story that is effected through the most absurd brutalities against those who have no possibility of reaction or resistance. This girl of indefinite age one cannot tell whether she is the granddaughter, great-granddaughter or great-great-granddaughter of the old lady is the figure of dehumanization itself, the expression of a denatured face that nevertheless smiles, horrifyingly, with the only part of the face that remains. Sinister metaphor, baleful omen: the creature-saplings of the nation-people, crushed and repulsive, perfectly symbolize the catastrophe, the ruin, and the massacre of a future made impossible. The face not only loses age and identity, but also the human character of its features and its possibilities of expression, forever interrupted by the “vacuum” of a great scar. Here is the tragic irony of a destiny foreshadowed by the torn laughter, an excrescence; disturbing.

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<sup>39</sup> G. Rocha, “Uma estética da fome”, *Revista da Civilização Brasileira*, 1965, I, 3, p. 165; I. Xavier, op. cit., p. 153.

<sup>40</sup> E. da Cunha, *Os sertões...*, op. cit., p. 494.



The purpose of bringing this Euclidean description to the surface is to show that, although it is not possible to speak of an “aesthetic of violence” in *The Backlands*, the game of identifications itself that we attempted to establish in the previous section the soldier with the gunfighter and the reader with the soldier, which through transitivity leads to the identification of the reader with the gunfighter this game or circuit of identifications is entirely permeated by the awareness of a violence embodied in the *télos* of that history. In the complex and ambiguous position of a *The Backlands* reader, who in turn identifies themselves with the oppressor and also the oppressed, there echoes the same idea that, although it is said that it is necessary on both sides, the violence of the oppressed seems to have greater legitimacy. Thus, between Euclides da Cunha’s book and the film by Glauber Rocha one can see then a point of coincidence: the violence of the oppressed in the face of institutionalized violence seems justified.

As for the film *Black God, White Devil*, despite the clear separation between the tendencies of messianism and guerilla warfare (*cangaço*) which also represent two distinct phases of the process of conversions experienced by Manuel, who goes from simple cowboy to blessed, and from blessed to gunfighter messianism and guerilla warfare (*cangaço*), symbolized by the characters of Sebastião and Corisco, are as Xavier says: “two sides of the same metaphysics, accentuating, in the symmetry of their inversions, their profound unity.”<sup>41</sup> It is the metaphysics of Good and Evil, of God and the Devil, that regulates the fate of the backlander’s soul in its unknown religiosity, diffused and permeated with legends and superstitions. The word ‘destiny’ is uttered repeatedly in the film, by almost all its characters. Fate always means something greater, transcending death itself and is part of the divine plan, which also includes redemption and damnation. At the beginning of the film, after Manuel’s mother was executed by a henchman of the former chief, he admits that “it was not from the death of God” that he lost her, and reflecting on what happened he declares that it was “God’s own hand” that summoned him to the “path of misfortune,” in as much as through this tortuous path he would find the Good. The image of a God who compels misfortune is that which places him in a transcendent order which recognizes and justifies Evil as one legitimate obstacle to be overcome in order to arrive at the true Good.

This is also seen in the long and extended scene where Manuel climbs a staircase with a stone on his head at the moment of his religious conversion. This sequence of images is paradigmatic in the sense of showing an

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<sup>41</sup> I. Xavier, op. cit., p. 98.

ethos of the backlander very close to that portrayed by Euclides da Cunha: the ethos of the human being who, by assuming a practically impossible task, nevertheless manages to accomplish it by the force of faith which enables him to surpass the natural limitations of his own condition. For faithful Manuel, striving to the end of his physical strength, must first keep the stone on his head and then carry it up the hill. He tries many times, he sometimes falls, but he prays and tries again until he can finally overcome all normal limitations, as though only the inner strength of his faith moves him. When he attains success in this literally Herculean task, he is filled with a happiness whose only meaning is that he has succeeded in overcoming the superhuman effort that was imposed upon him by the necessity of a transcendent order: the enigmatic fate from which he flees, and at the same time seeks. This sequence shows the ethos of a people able to unite the effort of messianic resignation with the use of rifle and dagger in a combination that produces and preserves a natural disposition and is secretly available for the manifestation of the revolt. It is the very way of life understood as the interweaving of determinations of nature with the force of culture that calls for violence as an already costly resistance in the most basic existential plane of the people of the backlands, because it is part of his being and his continuing to be driven by the hardness of the stones, the dryness of the climate, the caustic light of an imperiously permanent sun. It is not a question here of making an appraisal of determinism, but rather of recognizing that, in Rocha's film as in Cunha's book, the world of the people of the backlands cannot be depicted when material conditions are neglected, even when and especially when they mean to emphasize ethical and aesthetic aspects. Thus, in the film, scenes of crossing and procession through the semi-arid regions, gain more pungency amidst the cacti, which seem to open their dry and prickly branches like lean arms and evoke the infinite. It is a form of life in which weaponry is held in hand, with rosary beads round the neck, and in which divine praises echo to the sound of bells and gunshots, with the bullets directed towards the sky, in exaltation of sublime desperation.

In light of the above, it may be concluded that, as Walter Benjamin claims, the film *Black God, White Devil* actualizes the awareness of the possibility of blasting the continuum of history by a revolutionary action, represented allegorically by the flight of Manuel and Rosa to a backlands that turns into sea. However, in Euclides da Cunha's book, the sea never reached the backland. There is no redemption, no dream, no possible revolution, only a historical teleology in deep acute crisis. However, in both works of art, the question seems to reverberate: are violence and war inevitable? And both works seem to respond in a certain way: they are inevitable whenever a so-called

‘civilizing’ process rather than incorporating alternative forms of life and social projects into their structures is dedicated to massacring them, exterminating them, incorporating certainly a barbarity, which continues to be called “construction.”

*Translated by Robert Neil Wall*

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#### Film

*Black God, White Devil (Deus e o Diabo na Terra do Sol)*, dir. G. Rocha, Brasil 1964.



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## **Monument, Memory and Destruction: Voices from the Past and Cries in the Present**

### Abstract

Monuments, tombs, statues, artistic performances and digital images, driven by the issue of memory, through the movement of criticism and destruction, are the key concepts of this article, which was composed as a joint (two-author) essay. These concepts are intertwined with Walter Benjamin's thought and inferential examples, mostly connected to the politics of the past and its echoes in the present. The political issues quoted in the essay are related to colonial times as well as to the present, accentuating the racial mixture of the Brazilian people expressed through an allegorical type: the *caboclo/cabocla*.

### Keywords

monument, tomb, memory, destruction, *Cabocla*

### Introduction

In this article we explore Walter Benjamin's concepts on memory and monuments and argue that Benjamin's philosophy is woven through an intertwined relationship between monument and tomb, glory of the victors, and the history of those whose names are not remembered—and, often, those without a grave. Our aim is to answer the question of how one builds another historical transmission (in German: *Überlieferung*) under the so-called great tradition (glorious tradition) of the victor.

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In the first section, we look at the relation between the monument, the monumental, monumentality, as well as the relation between tomb, sign, and memory. The second section reflects on the notion of “destructive character” and its role in the conception of counter-monuments. Here, we take some monuments in Brazil—which allegorize the colonial age—as examples in order to show the creative mimesis of the racial mixture allegory of the *caboclo*<sup>1</sup> in defense of the past in the present.<sup>2</sup>

The empathy of historicism with the victors, as exposed in Thesis VII, is the key to understanding many aspects that will be highlighted in this article. A key, in view of all Benjamin’s discussion and interpretation on Brechtian epic theater, that points to the understanding that the effect of estrangement (*Verfremdungseffekt*) deals precisely with the interruption in the feeling of identification—via empathy—with the scene. The movement of “awakening” has the same effect as the epic theater and in the work of historical materialism proposed by Benjamin in the composition of a non-linear narrative of history. The epigraph of this thesis is rightly taken from Brecht’s *Threepenny Opera*.

Many monuments are, originally, allegories of “heroic” historical events. In this sense, and different from a personality displayed in a bust, a figure of a beautiful woman, e.g., one showing her breasts, would represent the “spirit” of revolution. We will take an example of a monument where the heroic value is allegorically expressed as the wish for freedom, a wish that belongs to a series of gestures connected to mimicry and critical destruction. This example comes from historical colonial struggles for emancipation, up to a post-colonial situation, through political and artistic interventions, evoking the allegory of the “cabocla.”

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<sup>1</sup> *Caboclo* (masculine) or *cabocla* (feminine) from Brazilian Portuguese, perhaps ultimately from Tupi Guarani, “kaa’boc,” is related to a person who has a copper-coloured skin, mixed Indigenous Brazilian and European. It should be different from mixed Indigenous Brazilian and black ancestry, the name of which being “cafuzo.” But, as we will see, sometimes in the popular festivities the three races are mixed.

<sup>2</sup> The cult of the caboclo’s monument in Salvador, the original capital of Brazil, in the state of Bahia, represents, in an aggressive way, the struggle for independence from colonizers. The aggressive attitude (later moderated for July 2 celebration parades) depicted in the caboclo’s allegory, has been recaptured in recent art and political interventions against the real estate speculation in the old center of the city. The old center itself is a physical monument and displays the colonial memory through its buildings and thoroughfares, as well as being a representative model for Brazilian culture and colonial memory in literature and filmography. From a Benjaminian perspective, we understand that the aggressiveness contained in those images, allegorically conceived and unfolded, carries the effect of estrangement, resulting in a breach with the feeling of empathy for the winners.

This article was compiled in the form of a composed as a joint (two-author) essay. Its central theoretical axis was composed and directly inspired by the following Benjamin Writings: *Theses on the Concept of History* and *The Destructive Character*. Monuments, tombs, statues, artistic performances, and digital images stem from this axis driven by the issue of memory and through the movement of criticism and destruction, which is related to a mimetic-reflective construction. The radial force that stems from this axis is the social relations created between images and the narratives of historiographies, constructed from the perspective of the victors—to which a feeling of empathy corresponds—in contrast with the opposite image and the elevations of voices that echo the past in the present. The irradiation of the conceptual axis through evoked cases seeks the point of equilibrium in the axial relations that arise between them in order to create an adjusted movement of their parts.

### **Monument, *sèma*, *sôma***

When Hector, perhaps the Iliad hero closest to us, called upon an Achaean warrior to engage in a duel, thus putting an end to the slaughter between the two opposing armies, the demand for respect for the *Achaean* corpse (in Homeric Greek "*sôma*," a word that was only later to signify the living body) arose, along with the wish to sustain the memory and glory of dead heroes, accomplished through the erection of a tomb—in Greek, "*sèma*" (a word that only later came to mean sign). If he were defeated, he would request that his body (*sôma*, at the beginning of verse 79 of the 7<sup>th</sup> Chant of *Iliad*) be handed over to his own people, and committed himself, by the same gesture, to returning the body of his vanquished opponent to the Achaeans. In the latter case, the slain might be buried by the sea, in such a manner that his tomb (*sèma*, the beginning of verse 86 of the same Chant) be visible, from a distance to the sailors who would exclaim: "Look, it is the tomb of a hero of old/ a valiant man; slain by the splendid Hector."

The connection between *sôma* and *sèma* is strong: the dead must be remembered, the bodies must be identified and buried; the tomb is the primary monument, it is the sign of remembrance. Worthy of note is the fact that Hector—whose demand is inscribed in the setting of fame, of glory, of such essential *kleos* sung by the poets (*aedo*)—not only requested this for himself, but also for his enemy, so that he too might have a tomb. Of course, through this gesture, Hector's own glory would be remembered. Even so, it seems essential that even enemies are to be buried and remembered. This claim will also be made by Antigone, even if her dead brother is declared an enemy of the state. She will follow him to death.

The erection of the tomb, the primary human monument, implies simultaneously the remembrance of death and hope of future glory. This pairing remains alive to this day. In a critical article, the historian Antoine Prost draws attention to this dual function of funerary monuments, in particular monuments erected to the dead of the First World War in France.<sup>3</sup> It is a matter of “weeping for and glorifying” the dead,<sup>4</sup> no doubt, but this mourning is also a glorification of victory, in this case, the victory of France over Germany. Although each French village has its own monument to the dead of the 1914–1918 war, public monuments are almost nonexistent after the French defeat by Prussia in 1871. Would the defeated dead be less worthy of remembrance than those victorious? In his description, Antoine Prost establishes an interesting typification: there are monuments that remind us of the dead, but above all these monuments glorify the Motherland, usually an imposing allegorical woman. There are monuments that are heroic tombs emphasizing the pain of survivors and there are the more sober, or civic—as Prost says—mere stone with the names of the dead.

It seems that the aesthetic and critical reflection on monument, the monumental and monumentality is always stressed by this double origin: of whom, and of what, must sign, *Sêma*, memory be? Of the victorious and their victories, or the dead—even if anonymous? There are many monuments and many contemporary installations remembering the victims of the Shoah; but there are also monuments full of color and life such as the red sculpture by Tomie Othake, in São Paulo’s Guarulhos International Airport, which pays homage to its Japanese immigrants.

One can identify this ambiguity, which is inherent in the erection of so many monuments, namely, that it is not known whether the victors are celebrated (who, as we know, remain the winners to this day, Benjamin, Thesis VII) or the dead remembered. Not to mention that the great majority of monuments celebrates men, not women: in the city of São Paulo, there are some eight monuments that honor singular women as opposed to a total of one hundred and forty statues of “great men.” And often the defeated of today are crushed once again at the foot of the monument of the generals of yore (statue of Duque de Caxias). Viz the “dependents” of the so-called “cracolândia” at the foot of the equestrian statue of *Duque de Caxias*, in *Princesa Isabel Square*, in the center of São Paulo. The current mayor pursues the drug users, aiming to sanitize and clean the area—much coveted by

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<sup>3</sup> A. Prost, “Les monuments aux morts”, [in:] *Les lieux de mémoire*, organizado por Pierre Nora, Gallimard 1984, Vol. I.

<sup>4</sup> Ibidem.



several large real-estate companies—washing the square twice daily with water jets, leaving its inhabitants in the mud. Even in verbiage, the mayor seems to mimic other “ethnic cleansing.” A newspaper photograph shows only the equestrian 48-meter high statue's pedestal, but the knight at the top is reminiscent of the mounted police, who dispersed the “crack zombies,” a new version of the concentration camp’s “Muslims:” killable without the killers needing to be punished, according to Giorgio Agamben.

The photograph of the inhabitants of “cracolândia” at the foot of the duke’s equestrian statue recalls Benjamin’s observation on the “Victory Column” in Berlin’s *Tiergarten* district. It was erected after Prussia's victory over France, sealed in the Sedan pact (1870): “What could possibly come after Sedan anyway? With the defeat of the French, world history seemed to be safely interred in its glorious grave, and this column was the funerary stele,”<sup>5</sup> upon which this column served as a funeral stele and onto which the Victory Avenue opened. Because of its size, the child does not understand the majesty or meaning of the Column; however, he discovers closer figures in its pedestal in which the “vassals” of the sovereigns are portrayed. Vision fairer than any contemplation of victory or allegory of Victory: to allow the parade of triumph, the victors must march upon the dead and the vanquished, for a “great genius” to be able to produce a work of art; the “nameless corvette” of countless contemporaries. The pedestal of the Column rejoins this thesis VII *On the Concept of History* and the child’s suspicious gaze announces the “distant observer” of the materialist historian who cannot regard the past/present as “without horror.”

### Counter-Monuments: the “Apollonian destruction”

As previously stated,

[...] once a monument is conceived by an artist and erected, it should remain in its actual space and in the imaginary culture as a document for eternity, as a support for “heroic” values, according to specific political circumstances. A revolution can demolish the material as though it were destroying ideas and ideals, historic and cultural values. It is hardly the task of artists „to brush history against the grain” when their task is an official State commission. However, an artist can incorporate some subliminal sign of dissent. Thinking of the colonial past of any country, for instance, and some art movements against the memory of the oppressive colonizer—whose identity is displayed in many national monuments as a result of the union of arts and politics—

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<sup>5</sup> W. Benjamin, “Berlin Childhood around 1900”, [in:] idem, *Selected Writings*, eds. M. P. Bullock, M. W. Jennings, Vol. 3, Cambridge–Massachusetts–London 2003, p. 3.

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.<sup>6</sup>

It is very plausible to say that the idea of destruction was not alien, either in Benjamin's writings, and less so in the German tradition since Goethe, and especially after Nietzsche and the bond between creation and destruction in *Zarathustra*. We can hear the echo of Nietzschean "creative destruction" in Benjamin's words, such as: "for destruction leads to such an Apollonian image of the destroyer. This is the great bond embracing and unifying all that exists. It is a sight that affords the destructive character a spectacle of deepest harmony."<sup>7</sup> The idea of destruction in Benjamin seems to be well expressed in the paradoxical or dialectical composition of these extremes: "destruction/construction" and "Dionysian/Apollonian." The reference, however, goes beyond the tradition that Benjamin inherits from German thought, to reach a close dialogue with Brecht, whereby he breaks with the pretension of recomposing symbolic totality through creative destruction.

The Brechtian effect of strangeness (*Verfremdungseffekt*) can be identified in the rupture with the feeling of empathy; an effect reinforced by the idea of destruction, disruption in the temporal continuity expressed in historiography, as well as in narratives constructed in an uncritical way. From the rupture with the continuous temporality, the affirmative concepts of *Jetztzeit* and "dialectical image" arise, bound to the revolutionary act, expressed in the metaphor of "awakening" the historical consciousness. Memory is no longer related to clocks, but to special days in the calendar. These days do not follow a timeline, they jump from linear time, from a movement of destruction, of explosion from the continuum of history, creating a snapshot, as if paralyzing the movement so as not to lead to the reconstitution of paradisiacal utopia, but to catastrophe. Some constructive concepts also arise from destruction, such as the one of "constellation" and the one of "mosaic." The impossibility of recomposing the expression of totality makes allegory the legitimate expression in counterpart to the symbol.

Therefore, the "awakening" is a network of concepts that refers to the moment of destruction, which interrupts the continuum and creates a situa-

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<sup>6</sup> This quotation is taken from the first two paragraphs of Carla Damião and Natalia Anna Michna's introduction to the current issue of *The Polish Journal of Aesthetics*.

<sup>7</sup> W. Benjamin, "The destructive Character", [in:] idem, *Selected Writings*, Vol. 2, Part 2, 1931–1934, eds. M. W. Jennings, G. Smith, H. Eiland, Cambridge–Massachusetts–London 2005, p. 541.

tion not only aporetic or of impasse, but of significance and transition; thus, the dialectical image at a standstill<sup>8</sup> or zero-hour.<sup>9</sup> To reach the dimension of the zero-hour implies to destroy the concept of time as homogenous and linear.<sup>10</sup> In this sense destruction is the “destruction of some false or deceptive form of experience as the productive condition of the construction of a new relation to the object.”<sup>11</sup>

Memory is also “an aggressive act” as Dag T. Andersson summarizes:

The saving aspect of destruction is the hallmark of memory. And memory can have the brutal mark of the destructive intervention when directed against the forgetfulness of the tradition. The story, says Benjamin, is ‘not just a science, but a form of memory.’ Memory gives the past a space in which it is not exposed to progress. Progress is the disaster as ‘the storm’ announced. Past suffering and oppression will not be forgotten for the sake of the future.<sup>12</sup>

The well-known last sentence of this quotation—“Only for the hopeless is the place given,” connects us to the roll of messianism as a fragile and mathematical force, as Peter Fenves, in his “The mathematical Messiah: Ben-

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<sup>8</sup> As we can read in the fragment titled “Awakening” in the *Arcades*: “It’s 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. In other words, image is dialectics at a standstill (*zero-hour*). For while the relation of the present to the past is a purely temporal, continuous one, the relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical: is not progression but image, suddenly emergent.—Only dialectical images are genuine images (that is, not archaic); and the place where one encounters them is language.” W. Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. H. Eiland, K. MacLaughlin, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge–Massachusetts–London 1999, p. 262 [n2a, 3].

<sup>9</sup> The American translator, Dennis Redmond, justifies his translation, saying: “*Stillstellung* was rendered as ‘zero-hour,’ rather than the misleading ‘standstill’; the verb ‘*stillstehen*’ means to come to a stop or standstill, but *Stillstellung* is Benjamin’s own unique invention, which connotes an objective interruption of a mechanical process, rather like the dramatic pause at the end of an action-adventure movie, when the audience is waiting to find out if the time-bomb/missile/terrorist device was defused or not.” Idem, “On the Concept of History, trans. D. Redmond, [online] <http://www.folk.uib.no/hlils/TBLR-B/Benjamin-History.pdf> [accessed: 13.08.2017].

<sup>10</sup> The zero-hour (*Stillstand*) implies a sense of space, in conjunction with the moment as the *Jetztzeit*, related to that “here and now” or the *hic et nunc*, as Benjamin sometimes qualifies it, referring to the destruction of the aura.

<sup>11</sup> P. Osborne, A. E. Benjamin, *Walter Benjamin’s Philosophy: Destruction and Experience*, Routledge, London–New York 1994.

<sup>12</sup> D. T. Andersson, *Benjamins Begriffe*, Vol. I, eds. M. Opitz, E. Wizisla, Frankfurt am Main 2000, p. 179.

jamin and Scholem in the Summer of 1916” considers Benjamin’s theory of experience, as well as the concept of interruption in Brechtian plays, and messianism as a profane model for understanding catastrophe in connection with destruction, ruins, and allegory. Thus, messianism is understood as the open and narrow door for redemption based on a fragile sense of hope. One could say that the interconnected concepts of destruction/construction, barbarism and catastrophe, lead us on to the discussion of memory and monuments, which is less related to the construction of monuments than to artistic and political interventionist cases, capable of re-evaluating their memory, in connection with its meaning. In this sense, the true content of those actions can reveal its artistic value in a material and historical perspective.

### **The monument of the *Caboclo* and its female allegory as an artistic and political act**

The monument of the *caboclo* in a public square in the city of Salvador leads us to reflect on various aspects of postcolonial memory in contrasting aspects. The high column monument, erected in 1895, has at its peak the figure of the “hero” of one of the movements of colonial emancipation. It is not a historical figure, a military hero, winner of some battle, although the column model may resemble that of Admiral Horatio Nelson, located in Trafalgar Square in central London. It is a mixed-race figure, the “caboclo,” a Portuguese and indigenous amalgam. Its existence symbolizes the generation following the arrival of the Portuguese, in the formation of a unique widespread racial type. It also refers to a religious entity present in the syncretism that merged the Christian Catholic religion with the religious cults of African origin. Its representation is not peaceful, since he slays with his spear a dragon that lies beneath his feet.

At the foot of the allegory of the “caboclo,” there are figures representing the peaceful communion between Portuguese and Indians, notably in the figure of the native Paraguaçu. The representation of a beautiful Indian is common in the pacification legends concerning settlers and natives in various parts of the country. In the pacifying myth of the Indian Paraguaçu, who married the shipwrecked Portuguese Diogo Álvares Correia, baptized as “Caramuru” by the Tupinambás, not only does the woman play the role of unification of bodies and social domestication of the “savage” man in the process of colonization, but also the shipwreck had associated Correia with the Tupinambás, having married Paraguaçu, the daughter of the chief of the

tribe, who was offered to him by her father. She later adopted the name of a princess: Catarina. The statue of the *caboclo*, however, depicts an angry expression in the struggle with the dragon, which would represent—in the interpretation of historians—the Portuguese enemy to be defeated. In the figure of the *caboclo*, the confluence of the European and the native is an allegory that shows a rhetorical-religious inversion. The dragon does not represent the pagan or native; instead, it represents the colonizer to be exterminated with fury. This statue is modeled on another one showing a female version, the *cabocla*, on top of a fountain inaugurated in 1856, in honor of the same episode known as “Independence of Bahia” (July 2, 1823).

The date is celebrated with processions and popular festivities to this day. Taught in schools, preserving the memory of the so-called “Independence of Bahia,” it resembles a religious feast, despite its political significance. The image of the *caboclo* became softened in its composition with the Indian *Paraguaçu*, forming a pair of *caboclos* of a darker color, in the fusion of three races: the white colonizer, the indigenous native and the enslaved black. The cultivation of this remembrance—a remarkable date in the calendar of Bahian festivities—is clear in Bahian territory, where the colonial presence still manifests itself in monuments, buildings and the racial mixture that originated there. Conversely, in the rest of the country July 2<sup>nd</sup> has no significance. Independence from Portugal is celebrated on September 7<sup>th</sup> throughout Brazil, in accordance with the narrative of the episode known as the “Cry of Ipiranga”. According to legend—and a painting that ideally represents the scene<sup>13</sup>—Dom Pedro I, the Portuguese monarch, “proclaimed” Brazil’s independence with the cry: “Independence or death!” Hidden from the eye are numerous insurrections, victims of republicanism later “sanctified,” and a whole series of political interests and injustices that every history of struggle entails. The difference, highlighted by historians, is that Bahian independence from Portugal was not elitist and, from the outset, called for an end to slavery, a demand not made by other independence movements within the Portuguese colony.

In an actualized and politicized version, the belligerent *caboclo* is discarded and the original female *cabocla* warrior is reinstated, being used in the social struggle for the preservation of the historic center of Salvador, where several monuments (officially listed by historic patrimony) are located, such as colonial mansions and gold-laden churches. This historical

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<sup>13</sup> The painting (1888), by Pedro Américo, depicting Dom Pedro I in the center of the scene, sword aloft, being saluted by his army—the “Dragons of Independence”—on the banks of the Ipiranga river.

center is bounded by the regions Sé, Pilar, the quarter of Santo Antônio Além do Carmo and Gamboa de Baixo. *Pelourinho*, a name that originally meant the pillar at which slaves were flogged—a legalized procedure in colonial time—is the place most visited by tourists. The region is extremely rich in historical monuments dating from the seventeenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century. Salvador, as previously mentioned, was the first colonial capital of Brazil, one of the oldest cities in the New World, founded in 1549 by the Portuguese. It was also one of the continent's first markets for slaves, forcibly transported on slave ships to work in the sugar plantations, and later in gold mining in the state of Minas Gerais.

Since the 1960s, the historic center has suffered from neglect and greed for space for property development, resulting in the eviction of the most needy residents. The historic center, with so many films set in its midst, as well as a rich literary canon, defends itself rigorously, unfolding the racial allegory of nineteenth-century monuments. The adversary is no longer the colonizer, but, rather, the speculator for public space. We will briefly mention the means of demonstration and protest based on the image of the armed *cabocla* spear that “haunts” the historic center. The composition of this allegory comes from the performance of the *cabocla* of July 2<sup>nd</sup>, created by the theater director, performer, set designer and cultural activist Ivana Chastinet, who died on August 8, 2017, a victim of breast cancer. In her artistical performances as the *cabocla* warrior in defense of the historical center of Salvador, Ivana displays her body following a mastectomy performed seven years before her death.

The *cabocla* allegory in the “digital and artistic performance era” became, in another intervention, a haunting of the center, under threat from real estate interests. The *cabocla* goes through the facades of the old city, circulating through social networks—instigating the revolt and the preservation of the center of Salvador as a historical, architectural, literary and cinematographic monument.<sup>14</sup>

The substitution of the male *caboclo* by the original monument of the female *cabocla* fighting the “colonizing dragon” acquires, in the performance of Ivana Chastinet, the meaning of other political struggles, namely, that of

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<sup>14</sup> Vignette realized in digital filming as summoning for political act of defense of the historical center through the social networks. Data-sheet: animation/mapping: Caetano Britto; KÆ. footage: Matheus Tanajura, Fabio Di Rocha; soundtrack: artista: Alahtac, song: “Nossa cultura é a macumba, não é a opera” (*Our culture is macumba, not opera*) soundcloud.com/alahtac; sponsored: Viviane Hermida, Ivana Chastinet, Alex Simoes, Diego Haase, Claudenice Almeida, Talitinha Andrade, Luiz Arthur Rocha, Pedro De Rosa Moraes, Jeovana Sena, [online] [www.facebook.com/articulacaodocentroantigo/](http://www.facebook.com/articulacaodocentroantigo/)

women and the fight against breast cancer, while at the same time restoring the avenging role to indigenous women; a genuine enactment, as documented in the photograph of the 1<sup>st</sup> Meeting of Indigenous Nations of the Xingu, held in the heart of the Amazon, in the city of Altamira, state of Pará, on February 20, 1989, in protest against the construction of the *Cararaô* hydroelectric plant. The *Caiapó* Tuíra Indian threatened a senior management official with a machete, stating that her people were not interested in the “progress” promised by the state-owned company *Eletronorte*. Despite the protests, the tragedy of the indigenous peoples of the Xingu in relation to this project continued, as the construction of the plant went ahead, now under the name of Belo Monte.<sup>15</sup>

In this case it is not an artistic performance, a destructive-creative mimesis, but a gesture of political intervention, whose mixture of despair and threat does not offer any hope.

## Conclusion

In the examples cited above, it is possible to identify a characteristic that evokes the Benjaminian reflections “erected” on European soil, written at the time of conflict and wars. The idea of destruction and wreckage was the present and the future reflected in the historian’s gaze, helpless before the rubble, as we read in the description of the angel of history. In this context, speaking of “constructive destruction,” in no man’s land, could sound politically bizarre. However, this is a critical gesture, aiming to destroy the image falsely constructed under mystifying values, masking barbaric behavior beneath a beautiful facade. To bring to the fore the hopeless situation of the indigenous peoples in Brazil, by showing the allegorical construction of the 19<sup>th</sup> century struggle against the colonizers, is to reveal the figuration of a struggle that has not been extinguished. It is a memory capable of resurfacing in the unfolding of the displaced image of the pedestal, which circulates in the center of the city of Salvador, projected on the closed facades, reachable in all networks throughout the world. It is a political call to fight those who insist on erasing the past.

As previously stated, the interconnected concepts of destruction/construction, barbarism and catastrophe could lead us on to the discussion of memory and (anti)monuments, less related to the construction of monu-

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<sup>15</sup> Concerning associations to defend indigenous people and the situation after the construction of Belo Monte, see: “The Human Rights Situation of Indigenous Peoples in Brazil”, [online] <http://www.conectas.org/arquivos/editor/files/2016> [accessed: 10.12.2017].

ments than to artistic and political interventionist cases, capable of re-evaluating their remembrance. In this sense, the true content of those actions could reveal its artistic value in a material and historical perspective. The discussed example should be seen as the expression of this premise, as well as a construction that created a new relationship to the cultural and revolutionary allegory of the *cabocla*.

As Ivana Chastinet was cremated, she will not have a tomb to be visited and bedecked, but she will be remembered in a different “monumentality.” As a fleeting image of an angry *cabocla*, encircling the center of Salvador and the one depicted in printed postcards, showing her on top of *Lacerda’s* elevator, intentionally composing a strange and impossible column.<sup>16</sup> As Viviane Hermida<sup>17</sup> one of those involved in the movement “Articulação” explains: “We created the image of the *cabocla* ‘occupying’<sup>18</sup> the postcard (the touristic attraction *Elevador Lacerda*) as a synthesis of the idea that the city and the old center belong to the people and should not be considered as merely tourism projects, as happened in the 1970s and is happening again today.”<sup>19</sup>

This postcard of *Lacerda’s* elevator displays a graphic montage that mimics the 19<sup>th</sup> century Second of July monument, with the *cabocla* on top of the pedestal wielding her spear and summoning the people to protest against the threat to the historic center of Salvador, calling for a public demonstration on the same meaningful date: July 2<sup>nd</sup>. Above all, the collective political cry: “The old center belongs to the people.”

The examples used in this article, in the light of Walter Benjamin’s thought, were aimed at gathering his critique on the history of the winners, in contrast with the permanence of the struggle waged by the memory of the vanquished. The allegorical figure of the *cabocla* constituted an example in which stories unfolded, interrelated in a non-linear way, through interruptions and gaps. That is, at different times, this allegorical figure of the first

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<sup>16</sup> “Art deco Elevador Lacerda connects the Cidade Alta with Comércio via four elevators traveling 72m in 30 seconds. The Jesuits installed the first manual rope-and-pulley elevator around 1610 to transport goods and passengers from the port to the settlement. In 1868 an iron structure with clanking steam elevators was inaugurated, replaced by an electric system in 1928.” See: “Elevador Lacerda”, [online] [www.lonelyplanet.com/brazil/salvador/attractions/elevador-lacerda/a/poi-ig/1179232/363210](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/brazil/salvador/attractions/elevador-lacerda/a/poi-ig/1179232/363210) [accessed: 13.12.2017].

<sup>17</sup> We are most grateful to Viviane Hermida and Diego Haase for supplying us with information and photographic material.

<sup>18</sup> Concerning the political meaning of “occupying” by social movements since 2013, see: *Street Politics in the Age of Austerity From the Indignados to Occupy*, eds. Amsterdam University Press, M. Ancelovici, P. Dufour, H. Nez, Amsterdam 2016.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Viviane Hermida.



generation of Brazilians, arising from the mixture of white and indigenous people, in its recent reconstitution, corresponds to a “monument”—not constructed in marble and great columns as in the past—but as deconstructed images of the two original monuments. They are digital and graphic deconstructed images, anti-monuments, adding a new layer to the allegory of the *cabocla*, resignifying it once more in the present. These images are unfolded from the performance created by the artist Chastinet, assuming the allegory as an emblem of the political resistance against the actual destruction of the architectural and cultural memory in the center of the city of Salvador. It is clear by now that the protest is not only aimed at the preservation of a collective and past memory, visible in all historic colonial buildings, old houses and churches, but also targets the political and economic powers that bent on banishing inhabitants from the area—in a gesture of “cleansing”—as these are seen as an abjection, flying in the face of their political plans of aesthetization and profit-making through the construction of new and commercial buildings; the same gesture that affects the inhabitants of “cracolândia” in the center of São Paulo.

Finally, as a constellation of the many allegories and monuments referred to in this article through Benjamin’s ideas, we might recall *Berlin Childhood around 1900*, and the perception of the child, who cannot fathom the significance of the towering Column of the Victory in Berlin, as its eyes cannot reach the top, gazing, therefore, on the “closer figures on its pedestal in which the ‘vassals’ of the sovereigns are portrayed.”<sup>20</sup> Similarly, we may infer that the performer and digital art producers can display their perception on the behalf of the people—the “nameless corvette”—upon whom the “victors” aim to march again as a re-enactment of the triumphal parade, erasing the collective memory pasted on the facades of those buildings, and expelling its inhabitants in one single violent gesture.

*Translated by Marta Nunes da Costa*<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> See p. 133.

<sup>21</sup> Marta Nunes da Costa is Ph.D. in Political Science/Political Theory at the New School for Social Research, New York. She is Adjunct Professor of Philosophy at the Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul, Brazil. She has published many articles on critical theory, feminist theory, ethics and political philosophy.

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Fig. 1. The Japanese Immigration Centenary Monument by Tomie Ohtake.

Source: Instituto Tomie Ohtake, [online] <http://www.institutotomieohtake.org.br/tomie-othake/interna/aeroporto-internacional-de-guarulhos> [accessed: 12.12.2017].



Fig. 2–4. Statue at the top of the column in celebration of 2<sup>nd</sup> July, located in Campo Grande, Salvador, Bahia. The Indian, Paraguaçu, is on the right at the base of the column.

Source: “Monumento ao Dois de Julho”, [online] <http://www.salvador-turismo.com/campo-grande/monumento.htm> [accessed: 10.12.2017].



Fig. 5. Ivana Chastinet in her *cabocla* performance in defence of the historic center, together with the black warrior Zumbi, played by Sr. Raimundo, a member of the *Bahia Homeless Movement*, who belongs also to social movement *Articulação de Movimentos e Comunidades do Centro Antigo de Salvador*, 2017.

Source: *Articulação de Movimentos e Comunidades do Centro Antigo de Salvador* Collection.



Fig. 6. On July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2015, the image alludes to Ivana Chastinet performing a fight with a bulldozer, a gesture of resistance against demolitions ordered by the City Hall in May 2015 to “clear the area” for speculators. The image is the logo design of the *Articulação de Movimentos e Comunidades do Centro Antigo de Salvador*.

Source: *Articulação de Movimentos e Comunidades do Centro Antigo de Salvador* Collection.



Fig. 7-10. The *cabobla* allegory.

Source: *Articulação de Movimentos e Comunidades do Centro Antigo de Salvador* Collection.



Fig. 11. *Caiapó Tuíra* Indian.

Source: "Povos do Xingu se encontram o pará", [online] <http://memorialdademocracia.com.br/card/povos-do-xingu-se-encontram-no-para> [accessed: 10.12.2017].



Fig. 12. Postcard of Lacerda's elevator.

Source: *Articulação de Movimentos e Comunidades do Centro Antigo de Salvador* Collection.



**Dorota Golańska\***

## **The Invisible and the “Matter” of Memory: A New Materialist Approach to Countermonumental Aesthetics**

### **Abstract**

Taking a new materialist perspective, the article looks at the artistic installation entitled *2146 Stones Against Racism* (created in 1993 by Jochen Gerz in Saarbrücken, Germany) as an example of countermonumental project dedicated to the commemoration of the Shoah. The argumentation sheds light on how, by operating in material-semiotic ways and employing aesthetics of the invisible, the memorial triggers reflection on the complex processes of memory work in post-traumatic societies.

### **Keywords**

countermonument, Germany, Holocaust, new materialism, trauma

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### **Aesthetics of memory: an introduction**

Adopting different formats and subscribing to diverse discourses, practices of remembrance proliferate nowadays. Noticeably, in recent times the processes of memorialization are predominantly related to the commemoration of collective traumas: deaths, genocides, catastrophes, violence, or other atrocities. In this way, they are no longer about the celebration of historical deeds and triumphs. Rather, such events are often referred to in terms of a “difficult past,”<sup>1</sup> “undesirable heritage,”<sup>2</sup> “dissonant heritage,”<sup>3</sup> or “heritage

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<sup>1</sup> W. Logan, K. Reeves, “Introduction: Remembering Places of Pain and Shame”, [in:] *Places of Pain and Shame: Dealing with „Difficult Past”*, eds. W. Logan, K. Reeves, London 2009, pp. 1–14.

that hurts.”<sup>4</sup> These labels are meant to signal—in Sharon Macdonald’s words—“a heritage that the majority of the population would prefer not to have.”<sup>5</sup> Such sites constitute an important branch of the contemporary tourist industry. Although referring to sorrowful or shameful deeds, it is often both politically and culturally important to include discourses on these troubling events in public narratives and to integrate them with other historical stories, so that they constitute a part of the entire heritage of an ethnic group, regardless of their problematic nature. This phenomenon is connected to the necessity of inventing new modes of conveying knowledge about these experiences, thereby encouraging more individualized responses, alternative readings and interpretations. Such logic remains in concord with current aesthetics of memorialization, especially as far as countermonumental architectural forms and artistic structures are concerned.

Recently, a significant transformation in the ways in which memory sites are preconceived and arranged has become noticeable. Nowadays, such places tend to adopt a format that, as James E. Young suggests, invites multiple, contradictory meaning-making practices as well as inventive experiential uses.<sup>6</sup> This novel trend allows for the development and performance of different participatory practices by visitors, encouraging them to interact with the material/semiotic aspects of the site, to explore its physicality and socio-cultural context, and to experience it in singular ways. Such arrangements trigger diversified reactions and uses, offering space for individual readings and taking into account different contexts from which the visitors emerge and by which they are shaped. To put it another way, the transformation of contemporary sites of remembrance into spaces of negotiation or contestation of the institutionalized framings of historical events seems to offer visitors the possibility of a more particular response to the past as well as creating opportunities for personal “rewriting” of the taken-for-granted accounts of history. Importantly, the format that difficult heritage sites currently adopt is not intended to convey pre-determined and already widely-

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<sup>2</sup> S. Macdonald, “Undesirable Heritage: Fascist Material Culture and Historical Consciousness in Nuremberg”, *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 2006, 12 (1), pp. 9–28.

<sup>3</sup> J. E. Tunbridge, G. J. Ashworth, *Dissonant Heritage. The Management of the Past as a Resource in Conflict*, Chichester 1996.

<sup>4</sup> D. L. Uzzell, R. Ballantyne, “Heritage that Hurts: Interpretation in a Postmodern World”, [in:] *Contemporary Issues in Heritage and Environmental Interpretation*, eds. D. L. Uzzell, R. Ballantyne, London 1998, pp. 152–171.

<sup>5</sup> S. Macdonald, op. cit., p. 9.

<sup>6</sup> J. E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*, New Haven 1993.

-circulating meanings; instead, it enables and encourages a creative engagement, even though such interactions might often generate unpredictable consequences.

In order to do justice to the richness of such experiential commitments, in this article I propose to critically examine one example of countermonumental art created in the German context of the 1990s and honoring the memory of the community of German Jewry murdered by the Nazi regime. Adopting new materialist lenses, my aim is to approach the artistic installation entitled *2146 Stones Against Racism*, created by Jochen Gerz and his students in 1993, as a "material-semiotic"<sup>7</sup> or "material-discursive"<sup>8</sup> process. As such, not only does this work of art stimulate reflection on the traumatic past of the vanished ethnic group but also generates consideration of the tangled nature of memory—both collective and individual. Apart from that, a new materialist perspective allows us to capture the complicated character of the mnemonic processes, indicating the non-linearity of past, present, and future and shedding light on the complex procedures of remembering "difficult" past or integrating the "dissonant" heritage into the fabric of socio-cultural tissue.

### **New materialism and the entanglement of the semiotic and the material**

"New materialism"<sup>9</sup> has emerged as a "transversal"<sup>10</sup> philosophical tendency at the turn of 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century. It focuses on matter as active material, always "entangled"<sup>11</sup> with meaning with which it dynamically co-exists and which it co-forms, while being at the same time co-formed by it. New materialists define matter in terms of constant movement and productivity, or perpetual becoming. In her virtuoso attempt to figure out "how matter comes to matter," Karen Barad argues that matter and meaning are equally active and explains that "[d]iscursive practices and material phenomenon do

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<sup>7</sup> D. Haraway, "Situated Knowledges. The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective", *Feminist Studies*, 1988, 14 (3), p. 593.

<sup>8</sup> K. Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, Durham 2007, p. 102.

<sup>9</sup> M. DeLanda, "The Geology of Morals: A Neo-Materialist Interpretations", [online] <http://www.t0.or.at/delanda/geology.htm> [accessed: 20.09.2013].

<sup>10</sup> R. Dolphijn, I. van der Tuin, "The Transversality of New Materialism", *Women: A Cultural Review*, 2010, 21 (2), pp. 153–171.

<sup>11</sup> K. Barad, op. cit., p. 185.

not stand in a relationship of externality to each other.”<sup>12</sup> Consequently, new materialism calls for a detailed examination of matter as lively and transformative and explores how material-semiotic complexity produces singular “events.” Unsatisfied with approaches developed within the so-called “linguistic turn,” new materialism points to the fact that matter is implicated in all (sometimes imperceptible) processes of meaning-making, hence the increased interest in its vibrant and continuous movements expressed recently by a significant number of scholars.<sup>13</sup> Importantly in the context of the argumentation that this article offers, the new materialist approach to art<sup>14</sup> focuses on the processes of the emergence of art as well as the handling of the material, the “material-semiotic” ontology of the work of art, and the experience of art (which is one of both matter and meaning, or materiality and context). It conceives of art in terms of aesthetic encounter triggering a profound, critical inquiry. In other words, new materialism fosters the idea of the agency of a work of art, emphasizing its material-semiotic processual unfolding.

Interestingly, new materialism also seems to remain in accordance with the recent findings on trauma and traumatic memory focusing more thoroughly on their bodily (material) and unspeakable (unrepresentable) nature.<sup>15</sup> It is often argued that memory (and especially traumatic memory) should be considered as embodied and corporeal, to a certain extent eluding processes of representational framing (that is, of meaning-making practices). This obviously translates into at least partial unspeakability or unrepresentability of traumatic experiences. Instead they should be considered as bodily-intellectual, affective-emotional, or material-semiotic. Such an understanding of trauma corresponds well with both new materialist assumptions and countermonumental aesthetics.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibidem, p. 152.

<sup>13</sup> See: B. Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, Durham 2002; *Material Feminisms*, eds. S. Alaimo, S. Hekman, Indianapolis 2008; *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, eds. D. Coole, S. Frost, Durham 2010.

<sup>14</sup> New materialist works on art include: B. Bolt, *Art Beyond Representation: The Performative Power of the Image*, New York–London 2004; idem, “Painting is Not a Representational Practice”, [in:] *Unframed: Practices and Politics of Women’s Contemporary Painting*, ed. R. Betteerton, New York–London 2004; S. O’Sullivan, “The Aesthetics of Affect. Thinking Art Beyond Representation”, *Angelaki. Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, 2001, 6.3, pp. 125–135; idem, *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari: Thinking Beyond Representation*, London 2006.

<sup>15</sup> See: R. Leys, *Trauma. A Genealogy*, Chicago 2000.

However, the fact that the new materialist approach emerged as a critical reaction to the poststructuralist analytical framework does not mean that it disregards discourse theory and its meaningful achievements. Building on the accomplishments of the "linguistic turn," yet adding emphasis on materiality and matter, this philosophical ferment postulates that any study of the aesthetics of memory requires taking into consideration the context and how it shapes, and is shaped by, the material dimensions of the memorial space or event. Certainly, even though it might seem that the memory of the Shoah operates cross-culturally, it in fact functions and is used (and sometimes politically abused) in different ways related to the current cultural and social moods or challenges typical for specific geopolitical circumstances. In Germany the incorporation of the Holocaust into a public narrative is locked within the dilemma of remembering and forgetting, as it is both impossible to erase these events from the past and difficult to integrate this dissonant heritage within the accepted and widely disseminated popular discourses. Troubled by the record of World War II and the difficult times of division afterwards, German society has for many years struggled with the issue of how (if at all) to honor the victims of the Nazi regime and how to commemorate their deaths. Rather unsurprisingly, the horrendous crimes of the Third Reich have always resisted smooth incorporation into dominant public narratives, as they have tended to leave the society completely speechless, with no adequate response to such horrifying events. It would probably be easier to let these memories disappear into oblivion, yet it is not entirely feasible. Thus, as heirs to the legacy of their (grand)parents, contemporary Germans are still divided on the question of how to include the trauma experienced by Holocaust victims into the official public discourses of remembrance and how to position the deeds of perpetrators and bystanders. As such, the memorialization of these painful events in Germany, as James E. Young argues, "remains a tortured, self-reflective, even paralyzing preoccupation,"<sup>16</sup> albeit a necessary one if contemporary German society is to do justice to its shameful past.

Certainly, such a process demands careful consideration as well as requiring the adoption of adequate aesthetic means to fully embody the tangled nature of these difficult memories. This, however, poses a number of unanswerable questions. How should a nation remember the victims of the cruel and unthinkable crimes it has perpetrated? How should it acknowledge its own dreadful deeds? How should the void created after the expul-

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<sup>16</sup> J. E. Young, "The Counter-Monument: Memory Against Itself in Germany Today", *Critical Inquiry*, 1992, 18 (2), p. 269.

sion and extermination of German Jewry be represented? Since the shock of what was done to the victims dwells in memory as a relentless reproach that disquiets the perpetrators' descendants, Holocaust remembrance in the contemporary German context embodies intractable questions rather than delivering straightforward answers. This finds its meaningful reflection in the ways in which the Shoah is represented in contemporary memorial art, especially as far as countermonumental aesthetic strategies are concerned.

It is worth noticing that the work of memorializing these horrifying deeds has to be necessarily undertaken by those who were not part of these events themselves, and who only know them from historical accounts and testimonies, as well as from widely circulating popular (and postmemorial) discourses and narratives. Even though similar situations are also dealt with elsewhere, especially as the Holocaust gets more remote in time, in Germany the nature of this memory is radically different, as artists often face the dilemma of evoking the atrocities perpetrated by and on behalf of the same nation to which they now belong and with which they often identify. The Holocaust, consequently, remains an event inscribed forever into the heritage of the German nation, haunting its current culture and demanding adequate recognition. Therefore, whereas other societies primarily evoke discourses on victimhood and resistance as commemorative tropes, in this particular case the mnemonic strategies need to be of different character, referring to the convoluted nature of Germans' participation in World War II and addressing the intricate character of processes of remembering in a more general sense.

Apart from the struggle with challenges that the practices of recognizing the shameful past pose, German artists also face the problem of monumental aesthetics which is so typical for memorial architecture and art. Here such massive forms are loaded with fascist connotations, given the regime's well-known admiration for colossal formats and immense structures. As James E. Young reminds, "German memory-artists are heirs to a double-edged postwar legacy: a deep distrust of monumental forms in light of their systematic exploitation by the Nazis and a profound desire to distinguish their generation from that of the killers through memory."<sup>17</sup> As such, the emergence of countermonumental aesthetics should come as no surprise. It seems that the best strategy to celebrate the fall of totalitarian regimes is to highlight the fall of their monuments<sup>18</sup> or the means of expression that their

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<sup>17</sup> Idem, *At Memory's Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture*, New Haven–London 2000, p. 96.

<sup>18</sup> Ibidem.

supporters admired. Perhaps destruction itself should be perceived as the most adequate manner to commemorate destructive deeds. Or are there any other means available to those who want to evoke the genocidal events perpetrated on behalf of the whole nation? Some contemporary German memory-artists seem to struggle with finding answers to these difficult problems, pointing out that the vanishing or self-abnegating memorial sites and installations may serve as the most suitable vehicles for conveying the memory of a traumatic loss.

The indeterminate and vexed nature of the German memory of the Holocaust has translated into specific strategies of remembrance. The above-signaled shift towards "countermonumental" aesthetics<sup>19</sup> and the invention of ambiguous memorial formats count as important characteristics of this relatively recent memorial genre. Such installations often seem to reflect on the character of memory itself rather than offering narrativized interpretations of the specific events. Countermonumental aesthetics employed in the service of commemorating the Shoah in Germany seem to evoke non-existence and nothingness, or a void left after disappearance of a whole ethnic group. Such memorial spaces tend to fuel reflection on a number of difficult questions: How to represent immateriality and absence? How to do justice to erasure and loss? Is it possible for a nation to openly mourn its own victims and to dedicate space to them in the national memorial landscape? How to incorporate the guilt of an unimaginable crime into the collective memory of a nation? And, ultimately, how to embody the dreadful past in a work of art, especially considering the fact that deriving aesthetic pleasure from art evoking mass murder seems to be an ethically controversial issue?

Since remembrance and self-indictment appear to be completely at odds, countermonuments tend to avoid the certainty inscribed in monumental forms. Given the disturbing nature of the events to which they refer, such aesthetics resist the redemptory closure so typical of most standard memorial formats worldwide, which are aimed at "making sense" of past traumas or inaugurating the processes of necessary healing. Rather than offering already interpreted accounts or inviting predictable responses, countermonuments tend to ask questions and open public debates, triggering critical reflection and intense affective-emotional involvement. As such, they remain in contrast to the conventional memorial institutions (including museums and monuments) that seem to be entirely incapable of fulfilling the

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<sup>19</sup> See: idem, "The Counter-Monument: Memory Against Itself in Germany Today", op. cit.; idem, *The Texture of Memory...*, op. cit.; idem, *At Memory's Edge...*, op. cit.

needs of the tortured, angst-ridden nature of the memory of the Holocaust in Germany. “[B]razen, painfully self-conscious memorial spaces conceived to challenge the very premises of their being”<sup>20</sup> serve as a means to both realize and express the difficult relations to the past and to stimulate consideration of the work of memory as well as how it shapes and is shaped by more contemporary contexts and circumstances. As I want to once more underline, a new materialist approach to both the analysis of these memorial sites/installations and the processes of remembering allows for a more thorough understanding of the complex material-semiotic nature of such memorial practices.

**The invisible monument: *2146 Stones Against Racism*  
(Jochen Gerz, 1993)**

Implementing the aesthetics of the invisible, the controversial memorial work created by Jochen Gerz and his students does not announce its presence by traditional visual forms, relying instead—in an unconventional fashion—on discreet, often unnoticeable verbal messages. Plaques reading “Place of the Invisible Memorial” (*Platz des unsichtbaren Mahnmals*) are installed throughout the (memorial) space, informing passersby that there is something more to this site than what immediately meets the visitor’s eye. One needs to make an effort and find out information in order to participate in the memorial experience that offers itself to the visitors without visually manifesting the memorial’s presence. Typically for similar countermonumental installations in Germany, this space also appears to reflect on the nature of mnemonic processes, triggering serious consideration of their complex metamorphous nature. It also seems to exemplify the constant tension between the representable and the unrepresentable dimensions of traumatic memory and its material-semiotic character.

The invisible monument’s emergence was also untypical and violated a number of legal regulations and traditional rules that usually guide the process of erecting a public monument or memorial. It was neither a response to a contest nor a proposal for an official undertaking. Instead, the work of art was created clandestinely by Gerz in collaboration with art students from the Hochschule für Bildende Kunst Saar (Saar College of Visual Art) in Saarbrücken, where the artist served at that time as a visiting professor. It was an act of an uncommissioned artistic activity, performed in secret

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<sup>20</sup> Idem, “The Counter-Monument: Memory Against Itself in Germany Today”, op. cit., p. 27.



and revealed to the public in an already finished (yet still invisible!) form. Given the circumstances of its creation, it could actually pass for an act of vandalism or a manifestation of resistance to the prevailing (that is, predominantly silenced or non-existent) discourses on historical shame.

Between April 1990 and May 1993 a group of students led by Jochen Gerz made an extended intervention in public space. The site for the project was carefully selected. The memorial, now called *2146 Stones Against Racism*, is situated in front of Schloss Saarbrücken, the building that in the past served as home for the Gestapo. It is located in the square where, on *Kristallnacht* in 1938, the Nazis brought and humiliated the local Jewish population. Later, in October 1940, the town's remaining Jews were deported from the same square to the South of France, and then subsequently to camps all over Europe to meet their horrendous fates. The artistic project was undertaken to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of these events, as well as to do justice to the material memory of the site. The location of the "invisible memorial" is therefore undeniably tied to the painful history of the Jewish minority in Saarbrücken while its materiality bears imperceptible traces of these sorrowful events. Undertaken in secret, the artistic activity was initially completely unnoticed by anyone but those involved in this 3-year surreptitious, and in fact illegal, action. Consequently, what commenced in the private context of a classroom, as a concept for critical artistic reflection, soon turned into a successful guerrilla-style memorial project aimed at drawing meaningful connections between past, present, and future, thereby assuring evocation of the difficult past in the public space of the city. Somewhat paradoxically, the project operates in an invisible mode. The whole process, if looked at in a retrospective manner, seems to provoke reflection on how memory clandestinely dwells within the tissue of the society. It also raises questions about how the effects of memory may remain unnoticed for a long period of time while leaving inerasable traces on the socio-cultural fabric. Given its manifold character, the artistic enterprise was meant to trigger debate on German memory of the Shoah, but it also offered inspiration for the consideration of the complex nature of mnemonic processes in a more general sense: their relentless transformations and vagueness, their reliance on materiality (organic and inorganic), and their tangled material-semiotic character.

As for the artistic intervention, it emerged as an extended development combining the materiality of the space and the processing of the material with the symbolic structures and factual knowledge. It demanded a research work that had to necessarily precede the conclusion of the project and re-

quired a substantial amount of time to get finalized. At night or at opportune moments, avoiding disclosure of the complex task, one group of Gerz's students removed a great number of cobblestones from the Schloss Saarbrücken square and replaced them with temporary substitutes containing metal nails so that they could be easily found later with a metal detector. It was necessary to keep trace of the whole process so that, in a final stage of its realization, the original stones could be reinstalled in their initial locations. Another group of students was tasked with researching the names and locations of all Jewish cemeteries existing in Germany before the World War II. They were interested in identifying all the sites that were abandoned, vandalized, or destroyed during the Nazi regime with the aim of recovering memories about them. This part of the project was conducted with the generous help of Jewish communities in Germany and, eventually, a long list of 2146 sites was drawn up. Following this, the names of the cemeteries were engraved on the original cobblestones removed from the square. The historical objects were also inscribed with the date Gerz and his team had rediscovered information about the cemeteries,<sup>21</sup> so that the project offered another connection between the past and the present, that is, between the vanished sites and the recovered knowledge of their existence. Later on, the original—yet already engraved—stones were gradually, in tranches of ten-to-twenty, resituated in their previous location in front of the Saarbrücken Palace.<sup>22</sup> All the 2146 stones were, however, placed with the inscribed side facing the ground and therefore the inscriptions left on them by the group of artists remained completely invisible, as if nothing was actually changed in the original composition of the site. Thus, the artistic project stays permanently hidden from view, and exploration of the memorial character of the site is only possible for those who possess primary knowledge about the effectuated intervention. Such a strategy is completely antithetical to more conventional memorial aesthetics and points to the convoluted, and in fact subcutaneous, nature of remembering atrocities. Even though, in the course of the project's realization, the measure was made public, and the memorial was eventually approved by the state parliament and retrospectively commissioned, there is still nothing to be seen in Saarbrücken's square. Since—as a result of the approval of the memorial—the site was renamed *Platz des unsichtbaren Mahnmals*, the site's official

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<sup>21</sup> See: A. Hapkemeyer, "On the Principle of Dialog in Jochen Gerz's Works for Public Spaces", [in:] *Jochen Gerz-Res Publica: Public Works 1968–99*, ed. A. Hapkemeyer, Ostfildern–New York 1999.

<sup>22</sup> The Palace currently serves as the seat of the state parliament.

designation is what signals to visitors that they are entering an unusual space. Still, they can only know the name of the site without seeing the scars the group of artists purposefully left on its deeply hidden materiality.

Although every single material trace of research performed for the fulfillment of this artistic project, the joint collaboration of artist and students, and the process of creating the memorial over a period of three years all remain concealed, the site attracts visitors by inviting them to engage in an individual memory exercise. This, however, demands certain preparation and some initial knowledge about the memorial character of the square, since, as Andrea Pinotti writes, the project is "an invisible work, a monument structurally kept out of sight in a structural sense of nonumentality."<sup>23</sup> It is hidden from view, buried underground. Yet it is still there and haunts the visitors with its non-evident and unimposing presence. Actually, the official designation of the site is the only technique used for making the invisible installation visible—the square's name announces the indiscernible presence of the memorial. Employing aesthetic strategies based on displaying nothingness, yet simultaneously leaving material traces on the stones-witnesses of the events of the Shoah, *2146 Stones Against Racism* constitutes an antithesis of more traditional memorials employing insolent monumental aesthetics. Similarly to museums or exhibitions, it draws on original objects (that is, the cobblestones) that "participated" in the commemorated dreadful events. It also inscribes them with symbolic meanings (by adding the names of the vanished cemeteries). Yet—in contrast to most memorial institutions—it keeps these material-semiotic traces discreet and hidden, so that in a sense they simultaneously are and are not there. Such an artistic format evokes disappearance itself. Moreover, and rather untypically for more conventional sites of remembrance, Gerz's work of art does not convey any straightforward message or narrative. Instead, it is a memorial site to be walked over, reflected upon, and negotiated individually by each passerby. As Mark Callaghan notices, "The conditions found in The Place of the Invisible Monument create this opportunity for personal imaginative authorship of one's own memory-work that, like Gerz's version, remains internal, concealed."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> A. Pinotti, *Mnemonsyne and Amnesia, Social Memory and the Paradoxes*, [in:] *Socioaesthetics: Ambiance—Imaginary*, eds. A. Michelsen, F. Tygstrup, Leiden–Boston 2015, p. 79.

<sup>24</sup> M. Callaghan, "Speak Out: Invisible Past, Invisible Future: A German's Alternative response to the Holocaust", [online] [http://www.arttimesjournal.com/speakout/Nov\\_Dec\\_10\\_Callaghan%20Nov\\_Dec\\_10\\_Callaghan.html](http://www.arttimesjournal.com/speakout/Nov_Dec_10_Callaghan%20Nov_Dec_10_Callaghan.html) [accessed: 13.03.2016].

Importantly, the site also triggers reflection on the operations of memory itself, especially as it concerns a difficult heritage. This invisible, in fact subterranean, memorial space seems to embody the compound nature of the processes of remembering the traumatic, shameful past. It alludes to the complex entanglement of the unrepresentable and the representable, or the narrative and the bodily, that is, a mixture of procedures that form together a multidimensional set of information stored in the representational-corporeal memory, translating into a complex recollection of the traumatic event. The memorial character of the site is in fact inscribed into its deep and hidden materiality, which, nevertheless, cannot be accessed through visual means. It remains subcutaneous, enfleshed, etched in the materiality of the place, yet—in fact—its physical traces or material wounds could not be easily narrated in visual terms. There is not straightforward, unconstrained access to them, even for those who actually know what is hidden underground. Such an aesthetic strategy is likely to question the very possibility of building memorials to the atrocious events as well as testifying to the impossibility of expressing traumatic experiences, to making sense of them, and passing knowledge of them to others via representational means. At the same time, however, these traces, through the creation of the memorial, have been reintegrated back into the fabric of the everyday life of the city, invisibly documenting its history and bearing testimony to the merciless destruction of a great part of the legacy of German Jewish culture. Seemingly erased from the tissue of the local community, they remain present in a subterranean manner, engraved forever in the material texture of the site. In other words, the inscribed cobblestones constitute a vanishing monument to vanished people, signaling an irreparable loss, a disappearance of a whole ethnic group. It seems that this great loss left an incurable wound in the composition of the city's population—one that is present and absent at once.

Employing a new materialist approach, it may be argued that the memorial exemplifies a compound entanglement of the material and the semiotic. The existence of the invisible memorial discreetly announces itself through the appellation of the place and activates visitors' "becoming." The meaningful name, encountered visually, prompts an always-singular process of memory work, shaped by the individual contexts of the passersby. In this way, the scarred materiality of the square's cobblestones is transformed into representational meanings, conveying a sense of the irrevocable ephemerality of constant material-semiotic unfolding, or of metamorphous transformation that never leaves the affecting/affected bodies completely unaltered. Certainly, the carefully selected information on cemeteries was "artificially"

added to their historical materiality, but in fact they—as witnesses—“remember” the commemorated traumatic events anyway. It seems that the artistic intervention into their materiality was meant to make visitors aware of the constant becoming of materiality that keeps record of the passing events. These traces, however, remain invisible to observers (as much as those effectuated by Gerz’s team). By adding the representational, yet invisible, layer to the site, the artist seems to refer to the imperceptible marks left by any encounter on the surfaces of the involved bodies (both organic and inorganic), testifying to their complex histories and trajectories. The realization of these processes encourages reflection on how to think about these tangled memories in times of postmemory, where contemporary relations to such traumatic events exist solely in the ways their histories and details have been passed to subsequent generations.<sup>25</sup> This procedure makes them necessarily mediated and infused with widely circulating codes and meanings, which never do justice to their complex character. It seems to suggest that trauma cannot be captured within any purely narrative structure but that it is destined to remain partly hidden, engraved deeply in the texture of the affected bodily materiality, as a trace that shapes the body, yet never fully actualizes on a purely representational level.

## Conclusion

Concealed underground and embodying a trajectory of disappearance as well as the vagueness of memory, this buried monument seems to “commemorate absence” and its own “passing in oblivion.”<sup>26</sup> Through counter-monumental means, the commemorated loss gets discreetly smuggled into the here and now. Memorial’s representational dimension is reduced to a concise form of modest narration, which activates a material-semiotic process of memorial work. Realized through “the artistic choice of physical disappearance of the visual image from the viewers’ field of perception,”<sup>27</sup> Gerz’s work exemplifies a self-thematizing memorial that debates the diffi-

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<sup>25</sup> See: M. Hirsch, “The Generation of Postmemory”, *Poetics Today*, 2008, 29 (1), pp. 103–128.

<sup>26</sup> J. Kear, “Spectres of the Past, Inhabitations of the Present: Jochen Gerz and the Problem of Commemoration”, [in:] *Memories and Representations of War: The Case of World War I and World War II*, eds. E. Lamberti, V. Fortunati, Amsterdam–New York 2009, p. 193.

<sup>27</sup> L. Aceti, “The War Shaped Identities: Destruction as Cultural Inheritance”, [in:] *Transition: Cultural Identities in the Age of Transnational and Transcultural Flux*, ed. H. Black, Ekaterinburg 2008, p. 31.

culties inherent in public commemoration. Such self-abnegating formats, in Henry Pickford's words, "do not provide a convenient closure of universal reconciliation, [but] do provide another kind of closure, that of historical causality and agency,"<sup>28</sup> pointing to the transience of the ever-incomplete task of remembrance, especially when a difficult, traumatic past is concerned. *2146 Stones Against Racism* embodies the dynamics of remembering embedded in the narrative-corporeal memory. Combining the intimate (the material) and the monumental (the semiotic), it is a memorial about memory itself. By finding means for speaking against the imposition of a single code of remembrance, Gerz puts the established meanings at risk, favoring a format that stimulates discussion about memory work itself as well as the troubled processes of incorporating Germany's difficult heritage into the consciousness of contemporary socio-cultural life.

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## **(Counter)Monuments and (Anti)Memory in the City. An Aesthetic and Socio-Theoretical Approach**

### Abstract

This article reflects upon the possibility of the visualisation of different forms of collective memory in the city. It focuses on the evolution of the ways of commemorating in public spaces. It juxtaposes traditional monuments erected in commemoration of an event or an “important” person for a community with (counter)monuments as a modern, critical reaction geared towards what is either ignored in historical narratives or what remains on the fringe of collective memory. While following a theoretical exploration of the concepts of memory and their fruition in monuments as well as (counter)monuments, the eventual multimodal analysis central to the paper looks in-depth at Ruth Beckermann’s work *The Missing Image* (Vienna, 2015). The latter is treated as an example of the possible and manifold interpretations of the function and multiplicity of meanings that (counter)-monuments bring to contemporary urban spaces.

### Keywords

(counter)monuments, monuments, city spaces, collective memory, narratives of the past

City space is approached within the social sciences as a mixture of material, economic and administrative components, but also ever more frequently as both the object and outcome of symbolic power. The latter relies on the signification of localised discourses and systems of imagination<sup>1</sup> and is crucial in the processes of identity politics and of re/defining collective identity<sup>2</sup> as

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<sup>1</sup> L. Kong, “Power and Prestige”, [in:] *The Sage Companion to the City*, eds. T. Hall, P. Hubbard, R. Short, London 2008, pp. 13–28; N. Krzyżanowska *Kobiety w (polskiej) sferze publicznej*, Toruń 2012, p. 193.

<sup>2</sup> A. Graff, *Rykoszetem. Rzecz o płci, seksualności i narodzie*, Warszawa 2008, p. 25.

well as, very prominently, of re/shaping the urban's social and spatial order. However, while looking at the contemporary city from a cultural studies or social-anthropological perspective, the city also appears as a *palimpsest* of collective memory<sup>3</sup> and identity. Such a view allows for emphasising how the urban space should be perceived via the focus on the "relationships between the 'social'/'cultural' and the 'material,'"<sup>4</sup> and by assessing inasmuch and how those relationships help reconstruct or deconstruct the key existent social "imaginaries"<sup>5</sup> of the past and the present of urban space.

Various forms and formats of public commemoration appear to be among the key tools of symbolic power, the related enactment of symbolism, and axio-normativity in the city. In fact, commemoration as a form of collective ritual is "an activity defined by the gestures and words of those who come together at sites of memory to recall particular aspects of their past."<sup>6</sup> This process is rarely an unplanned or spontaneous collective activity and is based in a script of cultural signification that is "rigidly prepared by political leaders determined to fortify their position of power."<sup>7</sup> Hence, an analysis of modes of commemoration in urban spaces as well as their de-construction from the point of view of key visual strategies—and their role in transformation of collective identity and memory formation—are vital for not only socio- or anthropological analysis but also more extensively for the aesthetic analysis of visual arts as a political construct.

In accordance with the above, this paper reflects upon the possibility of the visualisation of different forms of collective memory struggles in city spaces. It does so by focusing on (counter)monuments as new tools of commemoration in the urban environment, and by showcasing the key challenges faced by the counter-monumental modes of commemoration that question the existent urban *genius loci* sustained by various forms of historical and contemporary symbolic power. As the article argues, (counter)monuments open a new array of possibilities of commemorating. They do so not only by focussing on what is inscribed in the official—and indeed often hegemonic—narratives of the past, but also by bringing to the fore all the marginal and marginalised discourses of memory, and of a discursive construction of collective identity.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. M. Halbwachs, *Spółeczne ramy pamięci*, tłum. M. Król, Warszawa 2008.

<sup>4</sup> D. Hicks, "The Material-Cultural Turn: Event and Effect", [in:] *The Oxford Handbook of Material Culture Studies*, eds. D. Kicks, M. C. Beaudry, Oxford 2010, p. 26.

<sup>5</sup> C. Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, Durham NC 2003.

<sup>6</sup> J. Winter, "Sites of Memory and the Shadow of War", [in:] *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies*, eds. A. Erlil, A. Nunning, Berlin–New York 2010, p. 70.

<sup>7</sup> Ibidem.

Hence, this paper argues that (counter)monuments certainly constitute a huge breakthrough in the existent array of localised modi of urban commemoration of what are not only the local, but often also the global experiences of the past (as is the case with the trauma of the Holocaust). As the paper highlights it is the strongly context-dependent nature of (counter)monumental commemoration which makes it possible for (counter)monuments to effectively transform the existent *genius loci* of urban spaces, while not only reconstructing, but also deconstructing local narratives and narrations of the past. However, as it is highlighted, in addition to the challenges associated with transgressing the very well-established patterns of commemoration via monuments, it is also the said context-dependence, that makes it difficult to arrive at any solid typology of generic and universal features of (counter)monuments. The latter thus face the danger of becoming a very elusive object of analysis difficult to be explored without an in-depth local knowledge and partaking in the experience of the studied urban community.

The article starts with a theoretical exploration of memory and collective memory in general, and social as well as cultural memory in particular. It first attempts to find a reliable, social-scientific definition of remembering in contemporary society and in urban spaces and does so, while emphasising the power-driven logic that often governs collective knowledge and interpretation of the past. The paper then moves towards defining the key features of monuments and does so mainly to provide a point of departure for the eventual discussion of the key aspects and structural as well as interactive aspects of (counter)monuments.

The analytical part of the paper focuses on an example of commemoration which—along the trajectory highlighted below—departs from the deficiencies of the traditional monument-based modus and eventually moves into (counter)monumental formats seen as a remedy for monuments' general lack of interactivity and dialogicity. The analysis looks in-depth at Ruth Beckermann's famous work *The Missing Image* "added" in 2015 to the earlier *Monument against War and Fascism* designed in 1988 by Alfred Hrdlicka (both placed at the Helmut Zilk Platz in central Vienna, Austria). The analysis of Beckermann's work—as well as the subsequent examination of its interaction with both the pre-existent monument by Hrdlicka as well as with the spatial/physical and discursive context of Vienna and its experiences of the Holocaust—yields an example of the possible and manifold interpretations of the multiplicity of meanings and functions that (counter)monuments forge in a late modern city space. It allows showing how contextualisation of

memory—as provided in our central example by Beckermann’s installation—is crucial for any forms of commemoration to become successful by transforming local and global narratives of the past, but also as empowering the subversive, often silenced, “uneasy” discourses of memory, commemoration and of collective identity formation.

### Memory—forgetting—(anti)memory

Memory is one of the key concepts of contemporary social science used across various contexts.<sup>8</sup> The huge proliferation of research on collective memory especially and in the context of research on policy discourses, symbolic power, collective or place identity adds to a contemporary “*memory boom* and *memory turn* which signals equally important transformations in the humanities as did earlier turns: linguistic, spatial or visual.”<sup>9</sup> Maurice Halbwachs’ work was a precursor to the wider sociological reflection on the relationship between individual and collective memory. Halbwachs advocated that the social framework of memory should be recognized as “instruments used by collective memory to reproduce an image of the past, which is in accord with the predominant thoughts of the society in each epoch.”<sup>10</sup>

A vast body of research conducted over the years contributed to the elaboration of the concept of collective memory. We can now speak of, inter alia, “collective,” “social,” “historic,” “public,” “group” or “cultural,” memory.<sup>11</sup> Among these conceptions, social and cultural memory are the most germane to this paper.

*Social memory* is recognised as an amalgam of “a socially constructed, transformed, relatively standardised and adopted power, relating to the past of a community.”<sup>12</sup> It bonds collective memory with individual memory, and thus, the content of social memory is not necessarily always “actively lived

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<sup>8</sup> *Pamięć zbiorowa i kulturowa. Współczesna perspektywa niemiecka*, red. M. Saryusz-Wolska, Kraków 2009, p. 7.

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>10</sup> M. Halbwachs, op. cit., p. 7.

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem; B. Szacka, “Pamięć zbiorowa i wojna”, *Przegląd Socjologiczny*, 2000, 49, pp. 11–28; M. Golka, *Pamięć społeczna i jej implant*, Warszawa 2009; A. B. Jacobs, *Great Streets*, Cambridge MA 1995; B. Szacka, *Czas przeszły – pamięć, mit*, Warszawa 2006; *Pamięć zbiorowa i kulturowa...*, op. cit.; P. Connerton, “Seven Types of Forgetting”, *Journal of Memory Studies*, 2008, 1/1, pp. 59–71; A. Erll, A. Nünning, *Media and Cultural Memory*, Berlin 2008; A. Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume: Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses*, München 1999.

<sup>12</sup> M. Golka, op. cit., pp. 14–15.

by the members of society [...]; experiences can be evoked, but they often remain latent and have a more potential rather than actual power.”<sup>13</sup> The most important functions of social memory concern transferring knowledge about history, cultural competences, patterns of behaviour, and values. These encapsulate real and mythical information about the origin and structure of a group, creating a group identity and specifying relations between groups—both dominating and dominated. Furthermore, social memory has a predictive value: it sustains impression of durable trajectories of a group history and their consequences as a way of legitimising power.<sup>14</sup>

The concept of *cultural memory*, on the other hand, is particularly useful in analyses of media or works of art, mainly due to the former and the latter’s “important quality, metaphoricity, which results from the character of analyses of various cultural texts, from literary classics to contemporary media reports.”<sup>15</sup> At the same time, cultural memory overlaps with Pierre Nora’s idea of “lieux de memoires [...] where the memory crystalizes”<sup>16</sup> and is characterised by discursivity. Hence, exploring memory’s intricacies “is sometimes close to the practices of discourse analysis [...] [and] the contemporary forms of cultural memory stem more and more often from the public sphere.”<sup>17</sup> For *homo videns*,<sup>18</sup> another category emphasising the importance of visuality for contemporary culture “the existence of European cultural memory is rooted in image.”<sup>19</sup> In this paradigm, visuality is treated differently than it would be in the paradigm of art history and is recognised as a reservoir of memory. Cultural memory appears thereby when communication of memory (based on eyewitness accounts) starts to fade and blends with post-memory.<sup>20</sup>

As such, “remembering, forgetting and recalling are in a constant game”<sup>21</sup> that happens not only at an individual level, but also at a collective one. It is

<sup>13</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>14</sup> Ibidem, p. 17.

<sup>15</sup> *Pamięć zbiorowa i kulturowa...*, op. cit., pp. 18–19.

<sup>16</sup> P. Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoires”, *Representations*, 1989, 26, p. 7.

<sup>17</sup> *Pamięć zbiorowa i kulturowa...*, op. cit., p. 19.

<sup>18</sup> G. Sartori, *Homo videns. Telewizja i post-myslenie*, tłum. J. Uszyński, Warszawa 2007.

<sup>19</sup> A. Warburg, “Der Bilderatlas MNEMOSYNE”, [in:] *Gesammelte Schriften*, Hrsg. M. Warnke, M. und C. Brink, Berlin 2000, p. 3, [in:] *Pamięć zbiorowa i kulturowa...*, op. cit., p. 24.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. M. Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory. Writing and visual culture after the Holocaust*, New York 2012.

<sup>21</sup> B. Skarga, “Tożsamość i pamięć”, *Znak*, 1995, 5, pp. 4–18.

therefore easier to specify the concept of memory by analysing its carriers (people who remember certain occurrences, etc.) or its media (photos, media reports, street names, monuments, museum exhibitions, etc.), than indeed to define “the mystery of the presence of absence.”<sup>22</sup> But “the theories and techniques of memory have always accompanied the topic of forgetting, which—again like a shadow—emphasises the dark sides and dilemmas connected with it.”<sup>23</sup> Forgetting and remembering conceal a much greater difficulty, namely, that they are “always connected with a certain form of reflexivity. Someone, who wants to forget cannot avoid confronting themselves and their own procedures of creating memory.”<sup>24</sup>

Forgetting at the group level seems to be an even more complex and multilevel process<sup>25</sup> that almost always results in the formation of a “socially meaningful gap in the collective memory concerning people and facts important for the community.”<sup>26</sup> It is distinguished from the natural process of forgetting and has an influence on both the culture and the feeling of identity of a given community. It is augmented by a *meaningful absence* of certain narratives of the past, which I propose to call holistically (*anti*)memory. The emergence of gaps in collective memory can be a result of both passivity and activity, which are active and planned actions,<sup>27</sup> or an effect of memory filtering. It can be understood as a selective forgetting “by choosing certain memory fragments and omitting or even deleting some other, uncomfortable, ones.”<sup>28</sup> (*Anti*)memory is therefore about that which is “unsaid [and] easily becomes forgotten,”<sup>29</sup> indeed often as a matter or purposeful (political) activity and strategy.

<sup>22</sup> P. Ricoeur, *Pamięć, historia, zapomnienie*, tłum. J. Margański, Kraków 2006, p. 56.

<sup>23</sup> E. Esposito, “Zapomnienie społeczne z perspektywy teorii systemów”, [in:] K. Kończal, *(Kon)teksty pamięci*, Warszawa 2014, p. 360.

<sup>24</sup> Ibidem, p. 361.

<sup>25</sup> P. Connerton, op. cit.

<sup>26</sup> P. T. Kwiatkowski, “Niepamięć”, [in:] *Modi memorandi. Leksykon kultury pamięci*, red. M. Saryusz-Wolska. R. Traba, Warszawa 2014, pp. 272–273.

<sup>27</sup> P. Ricoeur, op. cit., p. 553.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. M. Kula, *Nośniki pamięci historycznej*, Warszawa 2002, pp. 55–56; M. Golka, op. cit., p. 144.

<sup>29</sup> M. Hirszowicz, E. Neyman, „Społeczne ramy niepamięci”, *Kultura i Społeczeństwo*, 2001, 45/3–4, p. 30.

### **Monuments and (counter)monuments: towards a visualisation of memory in the city space**

Architecture or, more broadly, urbanism, views monuments as buildings or structures characterised as well as legitimised by cultural, historical or artistic values. Historically, the idea of a monument was linked to constructions aimed at *commemorating* events and occurrences (victory, reign or a new law)<sup>30</sup> or people. In a city space, monuments become features of its landscape as spatial reference points or elements constructing the identity of a place (i.e. its *genius loci*).<sup>31</sup> Monuments in each community might have educational, political or artistic functions, as well as those related to commemorating, inter alia, a struggle for independence of a nation, its leaders, strategists, heroes or cultural creators—all assumed to be of importance to collective identity. Sometimes they commemorate the traumatic experiences of a given community or victims of disasters (e.g. *Pestsäule*, 1679 or the monument commemorating the victims of the 1963 Skopje earthquake). But monuments, because of the evolution of their function, can be reduced to a spatial event (*landmark*), the intended content of which becomes unreadable to the recipients. This process was addressed by Musil, who said that there is nothing more invisible for a city dweller than monuments.<sup>32</sup>

From the perspective of semiotic reflection, monuments can be interpreted as material indicators of what is particularly important in collective memory.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, both the practice of erecting monuments and of organising their various unveilings, stagings and other such events (with the participation of the audience or reported in the media) clearly have a political value. They might legitimise claims to a political project and attest to the special significance of patriotic or increasingly even nationalistic values and narratives often resting on the discourse of the alleged distinctiveness of a group or its 'imagined' cohesion.<sup>34</sup> Monuments thus "emphasise values that are important for a group, which establishes them for its identity and legitimisation of power, privileges, origin and social significance."<sup>35</sup> This proves that monuments are an important part of the urban ideological lay-

<sup>30</sup> *Encyclopaedia of the City*, ed. R. W. Caves, London 2005, p. 318.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. C. Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*, New York 1980.

<sup>32</sup> R. Musil, "Denkmale", [in:] idem, *Nachlass zu Lebzeiten*, Stuttgart 2013, pp. 57–61.

<sup>33</sup> G. Abousnnouga, D. Machin, *The language of War Monuments*, London 2013.

<sup>34</sup> B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London 1989.

<sup>35</sup> W. Bałus, "Pomnik", [in:] *Modi memorandi...*, op. cit., pp. 387–389.

out:<sup>36</sup> they are the medium of social memory, means used for communicating an official interpretation of history or promoting role models and collective values, and carriers of any possible changes or manifestations of struggles for the interpretation of one's own history.<sup>37</sup>

(Counter)monuments, on the other hand, are implementations often characterised by the purposeful departure from sculptural, ornamental or figurative imagery in favour of 'non-standard' artistic pursuits that can result in an unusual form, material or location. Defining the features of (counter) monuments as a genre is far from easy as they mainly have been discussed in a contrastive manner, especially vis-à-vis the classical sculptural implementation of monuments,<sup>38</sup> and have mainly been defined and assessed in terms of their local context of placement/location and reception.

A protest/disagreement of artists has often been the key impulse for the creation of (counter)monuments, often located at the verge of invisibility of their fruition in a city space. On the other hand, (counter)monuments are not about dominating and hegemonic narratives—and their perpetuation or recontextualisation as is evident in monumental commemoration—but about what is socially forgotten/neglected/ignored, and about what concerns some problematic aspects of the community's past.<sup>39</sup> Artistic protest or disagreement can also entail purposeful undermining of meanings—such as war, patriotism, death, etc.—which are often highly ideologised and thereby sustained in monumental implementations. (Counter)monuments hence have the value of de-legitimising power, while at the same time instrumentalising the author, their work, and their aim of creating subversive (counter)narratives.

In their form, (counter)monuments blend various strategies of dialogue with tradition. As is evident from the works of, inter alia, Krzysztof Wodiczko, transgressing form is the key aspect of what the artist has even called "*monumenttherapy*" whereby "people freeze motionless, turn to stone

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<sup>36</sup> F. Zieliński, "Szata ideologiczna miasta – pomniki", [in:] *Przemiany miasta. Wokół socjologii A. Wallisa*, red. B. Jałowiecki, A. Majer, M. S. Szczepański, Warszawa 2005, p. 225.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. A. Wallis, "Pamięć i pomniki", [in:] *Społeczeństwo i socjologia*, red. J. Kulpińska, Wrocław 1985, pp. 310–311; N. Krzyżanowska, "Indywidualne i zbiorowe strategie pamięci/ u-pamiętnienia w przestrzeni miejskiej", [in:] *Miejskie (trans)formacje*, red. N. Krzyżanowska, K. Nowak, Toruń 2014, pp. 197–199.

<sup>38</sup> P. Carrier, *Holocaust Monuments and National Memory in France and Germany Since 1989*, Oxford 2005, p. 6.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. N. Krzyżanowska, "Dyskursy (nie)pamięci w przestrzeni miasta", *Studia Socjologiczne*, 2006, 220 (1), pp. 127–154.



in a shock, in a trauma. Just like statues or monuments. Monuments and buildings sometimes become silent and motionless witnesses of events in the public sphere. Those people and those monuments both seem to need the same thing: reanimation, revival.”<sup>40</sup> Indeed, the former and the latter are clearly evident from some of the most widely-debated (counter)monumental implementations. Among them, there is, for example, the “Oxygenator” (2007) created by Joanna Rajkowska to commemorate the Warsaw Ghetto. The author described it not as a monument or an installation, but as a “social sculpture” that was intended to “bring together different communities, residents and visitors,” and to enable dialogue within central Warsaw’s Grzybowski square i.e. a space otherwise associated with war-time trauma and post-war forceful politics of memory. By installing thereupon, a pond and a fountain, the author aimed not only at commemorating the traumatic and tragic past, but also at providing a new opening and an invigorating element—symbolised through the “fresh air” of the breeze coming from the fountain and the pond—into the historically heavily burdened intercultural relations of Poland’s capital.<sup>41</sup>

Furthermore, the term (counter)monument is used to refer to erecting objects in a city space, which are often planned only as temporary exhibitions (cf. very prominently *Monument against Fascism* by E. and J. Gerz in Hamburg 1986–1993) yet often tend to “outlive” their temporariness and become long-standing or even permanent elements of the city landscape. However, it is not only temporary, but also even the unimplemented (counter)monuments—such as the “Minaret”, a piece planned for 2010 by Rajkowska in Poznań, Poland, during the annual local Malta Festival whose leitmotif was multiculturalism—which attract media attention and are widely discussed. These too contribute to what can be described as an associative public sphere, which “emerges whenever and wherever [...] people co-operate with each other” and wherein “freedom can appear.”<sup>42</sup>

If a (counter)monument is not represented in a routine way, the recipient who does not already have a prepared range of routine interpretations, has full freedom when searching for meanings. Therefore, the task of the recipient of a (counter)monument seems to be more difficult than in the case

<sup>40</sup> K. Bojarska, “Opowieści kariatyd”, [online] <http://archiwum-obieg.u-jazdowski.pl/wydarzenie/4477> [accessed: 26.06.2017].

<sup>41</sup> E. Gorzadek, *Joanna Rajkowska*, [online] <http://culture.pl/pl/tworca/joanna-rajkowska> [accessed: 14.06.2014].

<sup>42</sup> S. Benhabib, “Trzy modele przestrzeni publicznej”, *Krytyka Polityczna*, 2003, 3, p. 77; H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Chicago 1998. More about the concept of the public sphere cf. N. Krzyżanowska, *Kobiety w (polskiej) sferze publicznej*, op. cit.

of contact with a more classic form of commemoration. In fact, the recipient—or one should perhaps also say interlocutor—of (counter)monuments faces a situation where they are to some extent coerced to (de)re-construct the meanings of events or people. However, the recipients/interlocutors can equally find their own interpretation of an event (against the backdrop of both their individual and collective identity) or even ignore a new element of the city space in a gesture of subversion against the coercion of interpretation.<sup>43</sup>

**(Counter)monument as a representation of (anti)memory:  
an analysis of Ruth Beckermann's *The Missing Image***

Based on *The Monument against War and Fascism* (1988) ordered by the city of Vienna and designed by an Austrian sculptor Alfred Hrdlicka, I would like to point to the multiplicity of roles and meanings of (counter)monuments including those previously highlighted above.

The general intention of the work in question was to commemorate victims of fascism. The decision that such an installation was necessary, was part of Austria's so-called Commemorative Year 1988 (commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Austria's alleged "annexation" by Nazi Germany in 1938). The implementation was placed near the extremely popular Albertina Museum in the direct vicinity of the Viennese Opera as well as the Hofburg Royal Palace, i.e. in an area regarded as highly prestigious and frequently visited by tourists.

During World War Two, the site of the monument—now officially called Helmut-Zilk-Platz yet commonly referred to just as the 'Albertina Platz'—was filled by an enormous neoclassical tenement building called Philipphof. The latter was bombarded during air raids on the 12<sup>th</sup> of March 1945 (the bombing itself resulted in the death of 300 people who were hiding in the building's cellars). The monument, which was described by Hrdlicka himself as a "walk-in" installation, was unveiled on the 24<sup>th</sup> of November 1988 with the explicit aim to "preserve the memory of the darkest period of our [Austria's] history. It was dedicated to all the victims of war and Fascism."<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> U. Eco, *Semiologia życia codziennego*, tłum. J. Ugniewska, P. Salwa, Warszawa 1996, p. 160.

<sup>44</sup> This is a fragment of a plaque, which was initially placed on the square. The plaque contained a short description of the work and its main ideas, which the artist tried to present.

Initially, the monument consisted of several groups of sculptures<sup>45</sup> scattered around a square and made of various materials. The first stage of the implementation included two irregularly carved granite blocks, known as the “Gates of Violence,” brought to the site from the former Mauthausen Nazi concentration camp in Upper Austria. The higher fragment on the right side paid global tribute to all victims of war, while the lower part commemorated the victims of Nazi mass murders, including concentration camps. Between the blocks, there was a figure of a kneeling Jew washing the streets. The figure commemorated the events in 1938, marked by the public humiliation of Jews in Vienna who were, inter alia, forced to wash antifascist slogans from the streets with acid. Those events, which happened at the beginning of the escalation of violence against the Jews, were an opportunity for numerous gawking passers-by to mock, spit at, and humiliate the Jews washing the pavements and stairs, not only outside, but also inside public buildings including universities.

As one of many later changes, barbed wire was placed on the Jew figure to prevent people from sitting on it. Another element overlooking the square was a marble column from which a silhouette of Orpheus stepping into Hades seemed to emerge, thus symbolising those that opposed the totalitarian system. The installation was eventually “closed” by “the Stone of the Republic” located on the edge of the square and including a carved fragment of the declaration of independence forming the Austrian Second (post-Nazi) Republic on the 27<sup>th</sup> of April 1945. The stone, which is over seven meters tall and in the form of a split upright menhir, symbolised a political rebirth of both civil liberties and rights of individuals in Austria. Among the granite and marble blocks covered with reliefs and letters, there were initially smaller bronze sculptures, which are not currently part of the work (e.g., a bust of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a murdered German pastor and one of leaders of anti-Nazi resistance, or sculptures illustrating war violence, and compositions depicting and emphasising the cruelty of the war).

The great challenge of this monument was, however, the fact that its key target groups as well as the wider public generally disliked its implementation. The Austrian and international Jewish community, for example, protested a humiliating visualisation of the Jew washing the pavement, as well as against the fact that the figure was made in such a way so that the visitors did not instantly recognise a human figure and often sat on it, which

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<sup>45</sup> See: J. Weidenfels, “Hrdlicka, Sculptor, Citizen”, [online] <http://www.art-in-society.de/AS10/AH/Hrdlicka-1A.html> [accessed: 23.12.2017].

was viewed as a lack of respect. At the same time, the facial features of the figure were connoted with an exaggerated and highly stereotypical image of a “Jew,” which was often present in anti-Semitic satires. Due to protest of this implementation a decision was made that it was necessary to erect a new monument commemorating murdered Jews, whose number in the pre-war Vienna was over 200,000. Among other key figures of the Austrian Jewish community, Simon Wiesenthal was a very strong supporter of this idea who in an act of protest against the monument at Helmut-Zilk-Platz opted instead for a different form of commemoration that eventually came to fruition at the Viennese Judenplatz under the name “Nameless Library” (2000).

Another group that rejected Hrdlicka’s monument were feminist activists who opposed various depictions of sexual aggression placed on the structure, including images of female bodies subjected to fragmentation and rape. Similarly, the families of the victims and people who survived the bombing and collapse of the Philippshof at the end of the war were also dissatisfied with such a form of commemoration. They did not perceive themselves or their relatives as victims of Fascism, but of victims of the Allies and especially the Soviets who carried out bomb-raids in 1945. Finally, for the visitors of the city, the monument was unclear due to the multiple local meanings that were invoked or connoted and which could not have been captured without a more detailed knowledge about the city history.

From the perspective of time, it also seems that the idea of combining the memory of war experiences of various groups could not be successful and was essentially—and cumulatively—a simplification of history aimed at identifying the guilty as well as reconstructing the logic of the events. Namely, in the moment when Philippshof collapsed, Jews were no longer in Vienna, as by that time they had already been deported to ghettos in Central Europe and thereafter to Nazi concentration and death camps. It is much more likely that, given the prestige of the place, many persecutors associated with the totalitarian system, or people just passively watching the tragedy, died in the cellars of the Philippshof. The assumption that all of those people and loved ones of the victims could meet in the same place in mourning the tragedy of the deceased—and/or find relief after only forty years—was impossible as demonstrated by the difficult and controversial reception of the monument.

In the last decade, the monument has undergone multiple changes of which a key one took place on the 10<sup>th</sup> of March 2015, and made the monu-

ment—as well as the attached counter-monumental installation—hotly debated again, almost 30 years after the original unveiling of Hrdlicka's work.<sup>46</sup>

The above happened thanks to Ruth Beckermann, a famous Austrian artist and director, who placed two LED screens on the inner side of the *Gates of Violence* fragment of the Hrdlicka's monument, initially for eight months until November 2015. The screens were used to display a short, 11-second-long video made of documentary archival materials. The intention of the artist of the *The Missing Image* was to add a specific historical context, which according to Beckermann, was acutely absent from Hrdlicka's original monument.

The screens installed by Beckermann are not visible for the people approaching from the direction of the Albertina Museum and the Viennese Opera—i.e. from the most typical directions for pedestrians. Only after walking through the *Gates of Violence* piece is it possible to see the screens, and while eventually passing through the Gate, one can hear delicate sounds that resemble somewhat muted voices of chatter and laughter. In order not to “trip over” the figure of the Jew washing the streets, one needs to eventually turn around to become surrounded by the faces of people who are sneering and pointing fingers at the recipients, and who gather to have a better view of the event.

The people displayed on the screens are those that, originally, ridiculed the Jew washing the streets. In the current installation, they look at “us” i.e. both me (the spectator) and the Jew washing the streets, both of whom thus equally experience the silent mockery and sneers. The figure of the hunched-over man and the spectator hence share the discomfort and fear of being mocked by the crowd looking from the screens (see Fig. 1 and 2). The people shown on the video are larger than usual and hence their huge, amused faces contrast with the snapshots of the victims' faces, who are terrified and throw a furtive glance towards the spectator. With the glance they seem to be asking the spectator for help, support, or at least some reaction to being ridiculed and discriminated against.

The short clip displayed on the LED screens was created by Beckermann from archival materials of the Austrian Film Museum and shows that the bestiality of the perpetrators committing appalling war crimes were very often accompanied and legitimised in quasi-trivial actions of witnesses

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<sup>46</sup> Cf. J. Stolz, “L'image manquante de Vienne sous le Reich”, *Le Monde*, 2.04.2015; T. Schaur-Wünsch, “Ruth Beckermann: Hass, Neid und eine Hetz haben”, *Die Presse*, [online] <http://diepresse.com/home/leben/mensch/4686736/print.do> [accessed: 28.06.2017].

and/or by “passive” bystanders.<sup>47</sup> Although the former and the latter did not hurt anyone physically, they offered the greatest support to the Nazi system thanks to their lack of action and their consent to oppression.<sup>48</sup> They showed that symbolic power comes along the coercive force and that physical oppression comes along with the symbolic one.

Through her ‘addition’ to the original monument, Beckermann hence used the inherent ambiguity of (counter)monuments by making her installation part of an ongoing process of (de)construction of an identity of a place as well as by linking it with the quintessence of the concept of social and cultural memory. She emphasised the salience of (anti)memory as well as created a *manifestation* of the structure of human memory that is recorded in physical material.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, Beckermann has argued that using video rather than photos was purposeful: she claimed that the “video reminds us how recently it happened—as if we were suddenly transported back in time”. The artist’s aim was to re-construct the monument of Hrdlicka from 1988, enabling people to empathise with the victims and to redefine how we see the contemporary history of Vienna, its identity as a place and as an urban space. The artist created a space where we encounter the events from the past on three levels: the kneeling Jewish man, the sneering crowd and the contemporary visitor. The space is hence a meeting place *beyond time*: a space between the present and the past that marks its boundaries and combines the experiences of the past humiliation of other people with the experiences of the viewer. It creates and embodies a historically impossible community of shared experience of those living in the past and in the present.

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<sup>47</sup> The term “bystanders” denotes average people who, during the time of the Nazi terror, “did not take any sides. Neither were they direct perpetrators against Jews, nor did they offer any help” – cf. “About the Holocaust. Overview – How Vast Was the Crime”, [online] <http://www.yadvashem.org/holocaust/about.html> [accessed: 23.12.2017]. This situation also concerned the Roma. Moreover, it should be pointed out that such an approach facilitated, on the one hand, the hostility towards ethnic otherness, terror and sanctions used by the Nazis for insubordination, as well as an expectation of financial benefits resulting from extermination (ibidem). An extensive study of the phenomena was described in R. Hillberg, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe 1933–1945*, New York 1993.

<sup>48</sup> “Missing Image added to WWII memorial”, [online] <http://www.thelocal.at/20150311/missing-image-added-to-war-sculpture> [accessed: 28.10.2015].

<sup>49</sup> P. Dybel, “Przemijalność piękna i melancholia Freuda”, *Teksty Drugie*, 1999, 3, p. 25.

## Conclusions

Contemporary art can be seen as one of the most important tools of evoking an associative public sphere by means of forging various forms and strategies of commemoration, including very prominently, via (counter)monuments. It is through the latter that the influence of critical art is made visible in the public spaces of cities and is being additionally reinforced by the dialogical as well as the spatial character of (counter)monuments embedded in urban contexts. These not only evoke but also allow to discursively negotiate meanings and experience of the past, while often using its pre-existent narrations and interpretations, which are merged with emotions and emotional reactions often caused by the idea/shape as well as the message of (counter)monumental installations. (Counter)monuments hence become elements of urban reality that, while not being intrusive and dominating, retain the viewer's high degree of freedom, and only gently cause them to "trip over"<sup>50</sup> the installations to fully bring to fruition their meaning and potential. But (counter)monuments are not only about the artistic freedom of the artist, but also about the freedom of interpretation by the recipient, or indeed by the recipients understood as a collectivity.

As has been shown above, (counter)monuments are a peculiar metaphorical catalyst: they connote new content, combine it with an old and pre-existent one, and through their articulations, de/re-construct metaphorical meanings as well as effectively change those parts of collective identity, which not only reside in memory but also in (anti)memory. It is through their inherent multiplicity that (counter)monuments become especially relevant "for commemorating events that are impossible to represent, such as the Holocaust"<sup>51</sup> which traditionally were a great challenge for commemoration in urban contexts. There, many competing discourses on the *Shoah* have often been intersecting with political powers, or event nativist and nationalist tendencies, that used to be displayed and prevailing in the traditional forms of commemoration. Hence, in case of the Holocaust, the idea of a (counter)monument as a *genre*, whose form is often difficult/un-easy in reception, seems to be particularly adequate, also as it links collective narratives with individual experiences. Through (counter)monuments, the

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<sup>50</sup> "Tripping over" has previously been explored as a strategy of commemoration in N. Krzyżanowska, "The Discourse of Counter-monuments: Semiotics of Material Commemoration in Contemporary Urban Space", *Social Semiotics*, 2016, 25, 5, pp. 465–485, [online] <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/10350330.2015.1096132> [accessed: 26.06.2017], pp. 475–482.

<sup>51</sup> W. Bałus, op. cit., p. 388; M. Miles, *Art, Space and the City*, London 1997, p. 48.

recipient is invited to 'join in' and find the meaning of such notions as *community*, *humanity* or *the meaning of life* "anew" and "for themselves." The recipient is hence able to play a game with the identity of the urban space, its history and collective memory,<sup>52</sup> and to thus create their own version of past-oriented truth at the intersection of all of the above.

Finally, (counter)monuments' inherent multiplicity allows them to not only invoke literal or embodied meanings—as it the case with Beckermann's faces, which directly embody both the oppressors and the oppressed—but also, contrary to monuments, to visualise concepts that otherwise seem impossible to portray (such as e.g. *absence* or *loss*).<sup>53</sup> Hence counter-monuments may represent the suffering literally, but also portray the results of or reactions to the suffering as displayed by bystanders, passers-by and in a more contemporary manner, by the (counter)monuments' interlocutors. However, what is vital is that (counter)monuments do not provide the transgression between those different narratives themselves, but require their recipients to undertake a discursive journey—often in the form of a 'walk'—through such a process of transgression. Here, the simple act of walking—or as Hrdlicka insisted 'walking-in'—is understood not only as a walk through a space or an installation but as an "act of traversing space [...], giving rise to the most important relations of a human being with space and earth."<sup>54</sup> In the case of the works commemorating the Holocaust, this "encourages an open coping with loss"<sup>55</sup> and a gradual engagement with and immersion into experience thereof. At the same time, this also transforms art in the city into an ideal medium of making and maintaining memory as "the past is not simply there in memory, but it must be articulated to become one."<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> E. Rosenberg, "Walking the City: Memory and Place", *The Journal of Architecture*, 2012, 17/1, p. 131.

<sup>53</sup> See, inter alia, "Vacant Chairs" installation in Oslo or "Homage to Raoul Wallenberg" in Stockholm or "Nameless Library" in Viennese Judenplatz. These implementations do not represent suffering literally and they do not include representations of particular people, but they are indicators or visual markers of loss.

<sup>54</sup> F. Careri, *Walking as an Aesthetic Practice*, trans. S. Piccolo, Barcelona 2002, p. 20.

<sup>55</sup> E. Rosenberg, op. cit., p. 134.

<sup>56</sup> A. Huyssen, *Twilight Memories. Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia*, New York–London 1995, p. 3.





Fig. 1. Ruth Beckermann, *The Missing Image*, Vienna 2015 – faces of the mocking.  
Author's photograph.



Fig. 2. Ruth Beckermann, *The Missing Image*, Vienna 2015 –  
The face of a man washing the pavement.  
Author's photograph.

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Marta Maliszewska\*

## ***The Road* Monument by Oskar Hansen— Critical Narration and Commemoration Discourse<sup>1</sup>**

### Abstract

In this paper I will analyze a project of a monument titled *The Road* by Oskar Hansen addressing Walter Benjamin's and Maurice Merleau-Ponty's theses. I have presented it as an attempt to establish a discourse about Auschwitz-Birkenau beyond monumental history within the account of Friedrich Nietzsche. This example illustrates how monuments exemplifying the Open Form have been attempts to use the critical micro-narration in the field of sculpture. I refer to it through my presentation of how such a strategy makes preservation of individual postmemory possible and resists the use of history as a tool of propaganda.

### Keywords

Oskar Hansen, perception experience, micro-narration, *The Road* monument, sculpture in the expanded field

[...] it would thus be necessary to *dialecticize the visible*. That is, to make other images, other montages; to look at them differently; to introduce into them division and movement combined, emotion and thought combined. In short, to rub one's eyes, to rub the representation with the affect, the ideal with the repressed, the sublimated with the symptomal.

Georges Didi-Huberman, *To Render Sensible*<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> G. Didi-Huberman, "To Render Sensible", trans. J. Gladding, [in:] *What Is a People?*, ed. A. Allen, New York 2016, p. 70.

## *The Road*

In 1957 the International Auschwitz Committee announced a competition for a monument for the victims of fascism, which was to be erected at the site of the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp. The jury, headed by sculptor Henry Moore, awarded first place to a Polish group consisting of Oskar and Zofia Hansen, Jerzy Jarnuszkiewicz, Julian Pałka, Edmund Kupiecki, and Lechosław Rosiński for the design of *The Road*. The theoretical premises of the design were created by the team's leader, Oskar Hansen, who is associated the most with the work. The project was an 80-meter wide and 1000-meter long asphalt road that would run across the camp symbolically crossing it out. The road would begin near the main gate (through which there would be no entrance) and end by the ruins of the crematoria. The camp buildings would not be renovated, so that as time passes nature would take over the slowly decaying buildings.<sup>3</sup>

The theoretical foundations of *The Road* were comprised of the Open Form concept of Zofia and Oskar Hansen. As an "open work," the monument was designed to invoke individual reflections in the viewer up against historical testimonies of the Holocaust. Its creators assumed that the road would be covered with stones, votive candles, and flowers left by visitors in the process of time. The Open Form architecture should establish a matter of "passe-partout" for life, and not a "monument to the ego" of its creator (as Hansen called modernist buildings). The building becomes a blank canvas, which the inhabitants can fill with meaning. It allows for the "inclusion of INDIVIDUALITY IN THE COLLECTIVE"<sup>4</sup>—"FINDING THE INDIVIDUAL'S PLACE IN THE COLLECTIVE, MAKING IT ESSENTIAL FOR FORMATION OF ITS SURROUNDINGS."<sup>5</sup> Hansen wanted to make "SEEMINGLY OPPOSITE ELEMENTS PERMEATE EACH OTHER"<sup>6</sup> "BETWEEN OBJECTIVE, SOCIO-COLLECTIVE ELEMENTS AND SUBJECTIVE, INDIVIDUAL ELEMENTS."<sup>7</sup> By retaining the creative potential of the viewers, the Open Form made it possible to express individual perspectives, differentiating them from the Closed Form and its strategies of subjecting experiences and needs of individuals to the official discourse.

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<sup>3</sup> The project has never been realised due to the pushback from some members of the International Auschwitz Committee.

<sup>4</sup> After: O. Hansen, "Forma otwarta w architekturze. Sztuka wielkiej liczby", [in:] *Wobec formy otwartej Oskara Hansena. Idea—utopia—reinterpretacja*, red. M. Lachowski, M. Linkowska, Z. Sobczuk, Lublin 2009, p. 15 [trans. J. M.].

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 16 [trans. J. M.].

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem* [trans. J. M.].

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem* [trans. J. M.].

*The Road* is difficult to classify as purely an architectural or sculptural object. It combines the two fields, and exemplifies what Rosalind Krauss calls the sculpture in the expanded field. According to her, the classic definition of sculpture "A is B characterized by C" is no longer possible. Krauss places it on the Greimas diagram:

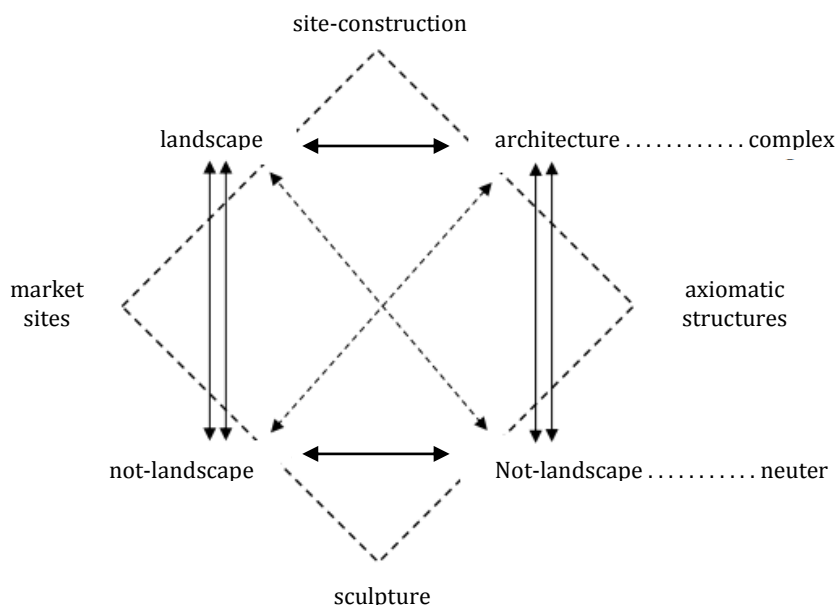


Fig. 1. Rosalind Krauss's diagram representing the sculpture in the expanded field  
Source: R. Krauss, "Sculpture in Expanded Field", [online] <http://www.onedays-culpture.org.nz/assets/images/reading/Krauss.pdf> [accessed: 20.06.17].

It is hard to say which of the four corners (sculpture, signified place, place of construction, axiomatic structure) of the diagram is closest to *The Road*. Nonetheless, it can be clearly located within the "expanded field" of Krauss, similarly to many later works by minimalistic and land art artists, on which she constructs her theory. One of the already mentioned artists, Robert Morris, created his own definition of sculpture, which also corresponds to Hansen's project:

Sculpture. For want of a better term, that grouping of work which does not present obvious information content or singularity of focus. It is not dominated by the obviousness of looming scale, overly rich materials, intimate size, didactic ordering. It neither impresses, dominates, nor seduces. Elements of various focuses are often in it, but

in more integrated, relative, and more powerfully organized ways. Successful work in this direction differs from both previous sculpture (and from objects) in that its focus is not singularly inward and exclusive of the context of its spatial settings. It is less introverted in respect to its surroundings.<sup>8</sup>

Use of the term “sculpture” in respect to *The Road* may be counterintuitive, especially since Hansen himself is associated mostly with architecture. Nevertheless, in light of the cited definitions it seems correct and allows one to look at the project in a broader context of changes in art initiated by *minimal art* and continued by *environmental art*.

### **With any luck they might forget all about it<sup>9</sup>**

The *Modi memorandi. Leksykon kultury pamięci* [*Modi memorandi. Lexicon of Cultural Memory*] dictionary defines “monument” as: “A monument, in a narrower sense, is a work of art consciously designed to be displayed in the public space, to last and commemorate persons or events. It has characteristics of an illocutionary act, which appeals to the potential viewer with “do not forget.”<sup>10</sup> Therefore, monuments are one of the visual tools used in the construction of historical narrations. Friedrich Nietzsche differentiates three types of historical narration—monumental, antiquarian,<sup>11</sup> and critical—I would like to examine the first and the last of them. The aim of the monumental model is to create a cohesive cause and effect sequence, so that „the great moments in the struggle of the human individual constitute a chain, that this a chain that unites mankind across the millennia like a range of human mountain peaks, that the summit of such an ancient moment shall be for me still living, bright and great.”<sup>12</sup> The monumental history does not need to reflect truth, it is designed to blend and unify particular events, so they would fit into the accepted framework of narration. “[I]t will

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<sup>8</sup> R. Morris, “Notes on Sculpture, Part 3: Notes and Non Sequiturs” [in:] idem, *Continuous Project Altered Daily: The Writings of Robert Morris*, Cambridge 1993, p. 26.

<sup>9</sup> The title refers to a Adam Adach’s video. The video shows members of a Swiss family sitting with their backs to each other. They talk about their grandparents who during World War II had to hide for two years in a dugout shelter in the Polish countryside because of their ethnicity.

<sup>10</sup> W. Bałus, “Pomnik” [in:] *Modi memorandi. Leksykon kultury pamięci*, red. M. Saryusz-Wolska, R. Traba, Warszawa 2014, p. 387 [trans. J. M.].

<sup>11</sup> According to Nietzsche, the antiquarian model is characterized by a reverent attitude towards the past. It is demonstrated by overt attachment to the past, and in result, reluctance to changes.

<sup>12</sup> F. Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, Cambridge 1997, p. 68.



always have to diminish the differences of motives and instigations, so as to exhibit the *effectus* monumentally, that is to say as something exemplary and worthy of imitation, at the expense of the *causaue*,"<sup>13</sup> writes Nietzsche. Traditional monuments, which "manifest values important to the group that erects them, to its identity and legitimacy"<sup>14</sup> are also used to construct this kind of narration. They memorialize in the solid form what authority wants to preserve.<sup>15</sup> Fluidity and multiplicity of perspectives, events, and experiences become mummified in an officially accepted form, and in time, the only remaining vision of the past.

The opposition to the described model is the critical narration, which relies on an analysis and assessment of past events. It is a constant process of "putting history on trial." The verdict, as Nietzsche writes, is always guilty, because history is a sequence of injustices and suffering. This sentencing allows to recognize the current situation and attempt to change the source of violence. While monumental history emphasizes the martyrial aspect of the Holocaust and mythologizes events, in effect making them more unreal, the critical narration demands to confront them with the "banality of evil"<sup>16</sup> and discards the martyrologic vision.

In that we are "touched by the same breath of air which was among that which came before,"<sup>17</sup> and that the air is steeped with injustice is for Walter Benjamin the source of the messianic mission of the historian, whose task it is to rescue the history of ancestors from the clutches of the monumental narration. Therefore, commemorating is both an attempt to give justice to the dead, and demands from us to remember that the history of camps is part of our history. In *On the Concept of History* Benjamin writes:

There is a painting by Klee called *Angelus Novus*. An angel is depicted there who looks as though he was about to distance himself from something, which he is staring at. His eyes are opened wide, his mouth stands open and his wings are outstretched. The Angel of History must look just so. His face is turned towards the past. Where we see the

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<sup>13</sup> Ibidem, p. 70.

<sup>14</sup> W. Bałus, op. cit., p. 387.

<sup>15</sup> See: P. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 3, trans. K. Blamey, D. Pellauer, Chicago 1988.

<sup>16</sup> In this context by the phrase "banality of evil" I mean its non-spectacular and everyday character, which contrasts to the metaphysical evil associated with monumental history. See: H. Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem. A Report on the Banality of Evil*, London 2006.

<sup>17</sup> W. Benjamin, "On the Concept of History", trans. D Redmond, [online] <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/benjamin/1940/history.htm> [accessed: 20.06.2017].

appearance of a chain of events, *he* sees one single catastrophe, which unceasingly piles rubble on top of rubble and hurls it before his feet. He would like to pause for a moment so fair, to awaken the dead and to piece together what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise, it has caught itself up in his wings and is so strong that the Angel can no longer close them. The storm drives him irresistibly into the future, to which his back is turned, while the rubble-heap before him grows sky-high. That which we call progress, is *this* storm.<sup>18</sup>

Benjamin proposes “to brush history against the grain.”<sup>19</sup> This approach is based on liberating events from the cause-effect continuum, placed there by the monumental history, and to replace it with the dialectical image. This image occurs within the collision of that which “was” with that which “is” now. The critical model “leaves it to others to submit their will to the harlot named ‘Once upon a time’ in the brothel of historicism. It remains master of its powers: strong enough to shatter the continuum of history.”<sup>20</sup>

When history becomes a series of images it is impossible to mummify it. Benjamin understands historical truth as something that flashes in unexpected moments, just to disappear again. Therefore, constructing a coherent, unified narration of the past becomes impossible. It is replaced with the strategy of micronarratives, also known as “micrology,” which is an assemblage of subjective and particular flashes of truth. This way the all-encompassing and objectivizing history is replaced with an assemblage of dialectical images, which complete each other, problematize, and most importantly, do not claim to lock the past in rigid narrative bounds.

Despite the seeming simplicity, and maybe even lightness of the described strategy, the threat, which Benjamin tries to escape using it, is very serious. In the mentioned essay he writes: “The danger threatens the stock of tradition as much as its recipients. For both it is one and the same: handing itself over as the tool of the ruling classes.”<sup>21</sup> This diagnosis relates to another pair of opposites existing in the philosopher’s theory—the opposition of the myth and the allegory. The nature of the myth is repetition, “it is a domain of beautiful illusions, totality, limitation and an aura [...] with which the allegory brakes.”<sup>22</sup> Allegory is, therefore, a kind of an antidote to the myth. It tears the guise like the dialectical image tears the monumental vision of the history.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>19</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>21</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>22</sup> A. Lipszyc, *Sprawiedliwość na końcu języka. Czytanie Waltera Benjamin*, Kraków 2012, p. 529 [trans. J. M.].

The equivalent of micrology in the visual representations is a “counter-monument,” also known as an “anti-monument.” The term was coined by James E. Young who in the definition emphasizes that the anti-monument challenges the accepted strategies of commemorating and the “logic of monument” itself (described by Rosalind Krauss).

Traditional monuments often do not commemorate events to which they are dedicated, but ‘bury them under a thick layer of national myths.’ In monuments Young sees a fight with the material form of memory, which in a way replaces the living memory or the perpetual work of the memory. A monument, as Young sees it, closes, simplifies, generalizes.<sup>23</sup>

The anti-monument is a strategy which preserves the “living memory” and does not close it in the boundaries of the official narrative. Monuments of this kind, exemplified by the *Monument against Fascism* by Jochen Gerz and Esther Shalev-Gerz in Hamburg or the aforementioned Eisenman’s *Memorial of the Murdered Jews of Europe* in Berlin, instead of attempting to visually represent the Holocaust in the spatial form, appeals to the experience of viewers. It is, as Jean-Luc Nancy writes, a representation which “does not want to be “of the camps” but rather brings into play their (un)representability as such.”<sup>24</sup> Those artists are called architects-deconstructionists, promoters of the Jacques Derrida’s thought in the field of architecture. The aim of their work is to “create space, which aesthetically pulls the viewers from the routine perspective and reflection about the past. It serves to break the habitual familiarity with the world, which in this case refers to being accustomed to the traditional—which, as Adorno argues, are used to forget—modes of commemorating and invoking the perceptual and intellectual curiosity.”<sup>25</sup> Those monuments discard the monumental tradition, which Hansen talked about in Otterlo:

Monuments [...] are passive toward changes in time. They become antiques in the moment they are born. [...] The Closed Form—[is] a decision made in my name—I stand beside the process. There is no way to find your identity here—your own self. One cannot find one’s own self there. All these are somebody else’s memories, feelings [...].<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> A. Janus, “Zapełnianie pustki. Muzeum i paradoks upamiętniania”, [in:] *Inne przestrzenie, inne miejsca. Mapy i terytoria*, red. D. Czaja, Wołowiec 2013, p. 263 [trans. J. M.].

<sup>24</sup> J.-L. Nancy, “Forbidden Representation”, [in:] idem, *The Ground of the Image*, trans. J. Fort, New York 2005, p. 48.

<sup>25</sup> M. Borowska, *Estetyka i poszukiwanie znaczeń w przestrzeniach architektonicznych*, Warszawa 2013, p. 148 [trans. J. M.].

<sup>26</sup> After: K. Murawska-Muthesius, “Open Form, Public Sculpture and the Counter-Memorial: Encounters Between Henry Moore and Oskar Hansen”, [in:] *Oskar Hansen*

*The Road* opposes the logic of closed form and monumental narration. It is an attempt to find an alternative representation of the Holocaust, which would not be a part of the official historical discourse. Although the literature on the subject, as well as the examples which I have mentioned in this essay were created later than Hansen's design, the cited definitions would suggest that *The Road* is an anti-monument, rather than a monument. It is placed in the context of the Berlin monuments by Magdalena Borowska, who writes that "*The Road* was supposed to constitute [...] the anti-monumental *iunctum* between the past and the future."<sup>27</sup> It demonstrates the uniqueness of the discussed project and that it can be interpreted as one of the first anti-monuments.

Creators of *The Road* did not assume what feelings and emotions the viewers would experience. Their goal was not to dramatize the space of the camp and the reactions connected with it. The monument was supposed to be a completely "open" work, devoid of attempts to manipulate the viewers' experience or provoke particular thoughts. One of the most crucial elements was the titular asphalt road. Visitors would not be allowed to stray from it and "tour" the entire premise. It symbolically marks that the experience of a "pilgrim" is not synonymous with the experience of a prisoner. The monument emphasized that it would also not allow to feel what it meant to be a victim of the Nazi death machine. It indicated that the only thing left for the future generations is the memory. Nonetheless, famous examples of anti-monuments often assume other strategies. The *Memorial of the Murdered Jews of Europe* or Jewish Museum in Berlin created by Daniel Libeskind are examples of creations which are supposed to invoke fear, the feeling of unfamiliarity and of being lost. In effect, the artists oppose the assumptions of the Open Form by confining the bodily experience within a designed discourse—a petrification of the multiplicity of interpretations in one reading. Those projects can even be classified as very aesthetically sophisticated examples of the closed form. This is how Ewa Domańska reads them. She claims that the Libeskind's museum is a "monumental anti-history," showing that in reality it rewrites the history from the perspective of the victims, but nonetheless, retains all characteristics of the monumental narration—"created in the interest of a particular group and reinforcing a vision of history desired by it."<sup>28</sup> Those examples show how easily the ideas of the anti-

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*Opening Modernism. On Open Form Architecture, Art and Didactics*, eds. A. Kędziorek, Ł. Ronduda, Warszawa 2012, p. 205.

<sup>27</sup> M. Borowska, op. cit., p. 151 [trans. J. M.].

<sup>28</sup> E. Domańska, "Niechaj umarli grzebią żywych", *Teksty Drugie: teoria literatury, krytyka, interpretacja*, 2004, 85/86, p. 95 [trans. J. M.].

monument can be intercepted and integrated into the official discourse leaving an empty shell of intricate form filled with history. Simultaneously, the aesthetic power of such projects “makes the architectural representation of the past [...] more dangerous than representation of the past in historiography, where aesthetization of trauma happens at more intellectual level.”<sup>29</sup> This way “evil becomes a more appealing, aesthetic experience within the horror aesthetic; it becomes [...] more unreal,”<sup>30</sup> and the projects of the pseudo “anti-monuments” become counterproductive in respect to their own assumptions.

### **Innocent eye does not exist**<sup>31</sup>

Traditionally sculpture is a form subjected to the hegemony of sight. Touching it, smelling it, listening to the sounds it makes, or tasting it are forbidden. The entire aesthetic experience is concentrated in one sense.

The hegemonic eye seeks domination over all fields of cultural production, and it seems to weaken our capacity for empathy, compassion, and participation with the world. The narcissistic eye views architecture [and art] solely as a means of self-expression, and an intellectual-artistic game detached from essential mental and societal connections, whereas the nihilistic eye deliberately advances sensory and mental detachment and alienation. Instead of reinforcing one's body-centered and integrated experience of the world [...] it disengages and isolates the body, and instead of attempting to reconstruct cultural order, it makes a reading of collective signification impossible. The world becomes a hedonistic but meaningless visual journey.<sup>32</sup>

This hegemony is strongly connected with the discourse of power and sovereignty. Gaze has “a very strong tendency [...] to grasp and fixate, to reify and totalize; a tendency to dominate, secure and control.”<sup>33</sup> The distrust for visible images, treated as false appearance, have evolved from antiquity to “an ocularcentric metaphysic of presence.”<sup>34</sup> The contemporary world is a place where people can and want to see everything, especially if they are to come to believe anything. This “frenzy of the visible” is also true for the

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<sup>29</sup> Ibidem, p. 96 [trans. J. M.].

<sup>30</sup> Ibidem [trans. J. M.].

<sup>31</sup> The title refers to a series of photos by Wojciech Wilczyk, which illustrate how buildings of synagogues built before World War II are currently “used” in Poland.

<sup>32</sup> J. Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin. Architecture and the Senses*, Chichester 2005, p. 22.

<sup>33</sup> Ibidem, p. 17.

<sup>34</sup> Ibidem.

Holocaust. In *Images in Spite of All*, Didi-Huberman describes a history of four photos made in 1944 by members of the Sonderkommando. The photos, taken in secret and with great risk, are blurry and uncropped. Didi-Huberman describes how they are currently retouched to fit to almost tabloid standards of precision. In this process the testimony they give is lost and subjected to the regime of sight. These “fixed” versions of “images in spite of all” are exhibited in Auschwitz. This understanding of gaze relates to the monumental historical narration. “Taken together” is a tool which petrifies fluidity and the multiplicity of perspectives. The museum created in the death camp, with its ambition to show as much as possible, in any way possible and if it cannot be done to reconstruct certain aspects of the Nazi death machine is also subjected to its power.

The growing dominance of the gaze results in a gradual decline of stimuli other than visual. This intensifies the separation between the subject and the world in which we were originally immersed. The “objectifying” gaze separates us from it and, at the same time subordinates all experiences to the official discourse (scientific, social, aesthetic...). Juhani Pallasmaa writes: „The eye is an organ of distance and separation, whereas touch is the sense of nearness, intimacy and affection. The eye surveys, controls and investigates whereas touch approaches and caresses.”<sup>35</sup>

Nonetheless, David Michael Levin distinguishes two types of gaze: “the assertoric gaze,” and “the aletheic gaze.” “[T]he assertoric gaze is narrow, dogmatic, intolerant, rigid, fixed, inflexible, exclusionary and unmoved, whereas the aletheic gaze, associated with the hermeneutic theory of truth, tends to see from a multiplicity of standpoints, and perspectives, and is multiple, pluralistic, democratic, contextual, inclusionary, horizontal and caring.”<sup>36</sup> Therefore, contrary to what Pallasmaa argues, gaze does not always distance and separate. Sight understood as a bodily organ, which “touches” the surrounding world, and not as a “scanner” registering information, can also be “aletheic,” but first it needs to be liberated from the compulsion of hyper-visibility.

An attempt to diverge from the understanding of experiences in oculo-centric categories is his phenomenological analysis based on work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. According to him, the motoric experience is the most basic way of reaching the world we inhabit. The assertoric gaze is reapplied on this basic perception and blurs it. “My body has its world, or understands its world, without having to make use of my ‘symbolic’ or ‘objectifying func-

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<sup>35</sup> Ibidem, p. 46.

<sup>36</sup> Ibidem, p. 36.

tion.”<sup>37</sup> The world understood this way is an “open” and subjective being full of mysteries. It does not belong to “the order of objective thought in which there are solutions.”<sup>38</sup>

This multiplicity of perspectives made *Phenomenology of Perception* a crucial text for artists from the minimalism circle. They wanted to provoke „disorienting art experience.”<sup>39</sup> Through confusing experiences, they attempted to divert viewers from accepted designs by showing the possibility of solutions beyond the official discourse. Therefore, the task of an artist was to ask open questions with no right (or wrong) answers. *Minimal art* was also the first art movement, in which, as in the work of Merleau-Ponty, the emphasis laid on spatial bodily experience. Reading texts of Robert Morris leaves an impression that *The Road* realizes their theoretical postulates. The monument would engage every sense to a degree that did not appear in art until the *environmental art*. Nonetheless, both the minimalism theoretical essays and first works of the movement were created after the Hansen’s design. His project was a kind of visionary anticipation of what was to come several years later.

Another important characteristic of Morris’ theory is the differentiation on a “subjective me” (“I”) and an “objective me” (“me”). According to him the “subjective me” is the domain of the past, memory, static images, and the “objective me” is responsible for the present and the imageless perception of space. “Spatial experience, requiring physical movement and duration, invariably puts a stretch between the modes.”<sup>40</sup> In Benjamin’s critical model of narration the division on two temporalities can also be found there—the past and the present—which have to collide in order to create the dialectical image, because “the historical truth shows only when our isolated present collides, enters the constellation with the past, with certain equally isolated, out of context, monadically separated epoch which reaches the threshold of higher readability in our present.”<sup>41</sup> The “subjective me” would then be the equivalent of the image of the past, which collides with “the present”—the “objective me.” This collision results in the creation of the dialectic-

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<sup>37</sup> M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. C. Smith, London–New York 2005, p. 162.

<sup>38</sup> Ibidem, p. 389.

<sup>39</sup> R. Morris, “Some Notes on Phenomenology of Making: The Search for the Motivated”, [online] <http://lingualeo.com/pt/jungle/robert-morris-some-notes-on-the-phenomenology-of-making-154086#/page/5> [accessed: 20.06.2017].

<sup>40</sup> Idem, “The Present Tense of Space”, [in:] idem, *Continuous Project Altered Daily...*, op. cit., p. 182.

<sup>41</sup> A. Lipszyc, op. cit., p. 515 [trans. J. M.].

tical image or Morris' perceptual experience. As in Benjamin's theory, the monumental historical narration is torn. The theory of the American artist also allows for bodily experience, which stands in opposite to the assertoric perception. The spatial experience understood this way is a strategy of constructing a critical narration and it can become the foundation for creating micronarrations.

*The Road*, as many later anti-monuments, was supposed to be an invitation to go on a journey on a designated route. At the same time, in opposition to traditional sculpture, it would not have a center or one, "correct" perspective of reception. One of the ways of participating in the monument was motion. In an "answer to the call," it would engage the entire body and let the visitor experience the space of the camp with all their senses. It would be a "gut" perception—"a somatic, automatic, subconscious experience of the viewers corresponding to their knowledge, consciousness, and memory."<sup>42</sup> For every person the performative forms of postmemory would assume an individual, the subjective form, because "[i]t is not enough for two conscious subjects to have the same organs and nervous system for the same emotions to produce in both the same signs."<sup>43</sup> There would exist a kind of collision between "then"—imposed, intimate images of memory—and "now"—bodily and subjective experiencing of the surroundings—which would allow every visitor to create private micro narratives about Auschwitz corresponding to their individual experience.

### **Our song-book<sup>44</sup>**

The described strategy is like Didi-Huberman's concept of "the Render Sensible." When we are confronted with "what our senses, like our intelligences, do not always know how to perceive as 'making sense.'"<sup>45</sup> the only possible expression is to retreat to bodily experiences as "multiple, pluralistic." It is not about the metaphysical inexpressibility. They are endeavors to commemorate, which are not mimetic, but still remain representations as "a presence that is presented."<sup>46</sup> The goal is to preserve a living memory about the traumatic events.

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<sup>42</sup> M. Borowska, op. cit., p. 150 [trans. J. M.].

<sup>43</sup> M. Merleau-Ponty, op. cit., p. 218.

<sup>44</sup> The title refers to a film by Artur Żmijewski, who in 2003 in Tel Aviv found Polish Jews living there and asked them to sing songs they remember from their youth.

<sup>45</sup> G. Didi-Huberman, "To Render Sensible", op. cit., p. 85.

<sup>46</sup>J.-L. Nancy, op. cit., p. 36.



The creators of *The Road* discarded the monumental narration and wanted to create a space to produce postmemory in its place—an active form of memory based on the construction of individual micro narratives rooted in subjective experiences and recollections. Instead, a museum was built on the premises of the camp. Its founding act (1947) states that it is “a memento for the nations, societies, politicians, indicating the purpose, possibilities, and morale of Germany.”<sup>47</sup> The history of the Holocaust was and still remains a tool of political propaganda. The space of the camp is now also included in “the phenomena of tourism, the most voracious form of appropriation and naturalization of the world.”<sup>48</sup> This is exactly what Hansen and his colleagues wanted to avoid. The infrastructure of the museum imposed on the space of the camp makes the commemoration outside of the official narration a challenge. Despite the entrance gates, audio guides and gift shops, the dead deserve justice and the challenge must be taken, remembering that walking in Auschwitz is “walking on the world’s biggest cemetery.”<sup>49</sup> In answering the appeal to “never forget” it is important to “be able to look as an archaeologist does,”<sup>50</sup> to see “in spite of all,” because “thanks to that gaze, which asks questions about what is seen, things begin to look back at us from their buried spaces and buried times.”<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> After: P. Piotrowski, “Auschwitz versus Auschwitz”, [in:] idem, *Sztuka według polityki*, Kraków 2007, p. 134 [trans. J. M.].

<sup>48</sup> Ibidem, p. 135 [trans. J. M.].

<sup>49</sup> G. Didi-Huberman, *Kora*, tłum. T. Swoboda, Gdańsk 2013, p. 79 [trans. J. M.].

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**Małgorzata Stepnik\***

**Modernist Sculpture Parks  
and Their Ideological Contexts—  
On the Basis of the Oeuvres by Gustav Vigeland,  
Bernhard Hoetger and Einar Jónsson**

**Abstract**

The purpose of this article is to explore the ideological contexts of sculptural works by Northern modernists: Gustav Vigeland (1869–1943) from Norway, Bernhard Hoetger (1874–1949) from Germany, and the Icelandic Einar Jónsson (1874–1954). The original iconographies of the Vigelandsanlegget in Oslo, Hoetger's Platanenhein in Darmstadt, as well as Jónsson's *oeuvres* collected in Reykjavik, will be interpreted in relation to wider discourses—i.e. Nietzschean influence, a particular taste for the esoteric (theosophy) and, last but not least, a noticeable aversion to classical form.

**Keywords**

early Nordic modernism, sculpture parks

Anguish! Anguish! I am o'erwhelmed  
by heavenly visions and greatness of worlds  
by the motley whirl of the living.  
Myriad—voices the All rushes on me,  
confuses with thick-crowding visions—  
that I, who should in the midst of the zenith  
sit like immovable eye, solitary,  
am whirl'd on myself, like a mote among motes.

Henrik Wergeland, *To an Illustrious Poet*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> As cited in: I. Ch. Gröndahl, *Henrik Wergeland. The Norwegian Poet*, trans. I. Gröndahl, London 1919, p. 26.

The suggestive image of “the motley whirl of the living” that appears in the motto—taken from an ode written by Henrik Wergeland, a notable Norwegian poet—evokes numerous associations. It may be regarded as a reference to the Wheel of Life, a symbol of the endless cycle of beings—each of them, “like a mote among motes,” in a majestic dance growing toward the sunlight. Spatial metaphors and symbols representing the concept of infinity, wholeness and life-giving power, such as Thor’s hammer, Odin’s cross, kolovrat, dharmachakra, mandala or yin-yang, various signs which take form of a turning circle or a swirling vortex, are all characteristic of early modern imagery, especially in Northern parts of Europe. Therefore, there is a deep intellectual affinity linking, for example, Edvard Munch’s *Metabolismus* with the spirit of vitalism expressed in Gustav Vigeland’s *Wheel of Life* (*Livshjulet*; Fig. 1) or Bernhard Hoetger’s *Tree of Life* (*Lebensbaum*), dedicated to Odin, with Einar Jónsson’s *Birth of Psyche* (*Fæðing Psyche*), a bas-relief with a composition based on an equilateral cross.

Unquestionably, the notion of completeness, often referred to by early modernists, will later find its echo in the Jungian theory of archetypes, in particular with the Self, represented by the mandala. Closer to our times, this will be expressed in a beautiful poem by Allen Ginsberg—*Sunflower Sutra*. Clearly, however, it was Nietzschean thought that exerted a profound influence among the intellectuals and artists of the first decades of the twentieth century.

In his famous study *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik* (*The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music*), published in 1872, Friedrich Nietzsche introduces a distinction between the Apollonian and the Dionysian—in other words, between the glory of passivity and the glory of activity, contemplation and intoxication. Thus, on the one hand, we have a dream-like world immersed in harmony and brightness, the Socratic *sophrosyne*,<sup>2</sup> “the fully wise calm of the god of images,”<sup>3</sup> while on the other, we have the domain of musical ecstasy and transgression, the “piercing scream” of generations,<sup>4</sup> “the exuberant fecundity of the world will.”<sup>5</sup> Those elements or powers, apparently antagonistic but in fact complementary, create a perfect

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<sup>2</sup> That is: “temperance”, the beauty of measure. See e.g.: P. van Tongeren, “Measure and Bildung”, [in:] *Nietzsche, Culture and Education*, ed. T. E. Hart, Farnham–Burlington 2009, pp. 97–112.

<sup>3</sup> F. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music*, trans. I. Johnston, Arlington 2009, p. 12.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 20.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 58.

unity. It is worth mentioning that in the same study, the German philosopher uses another rhetorical figure of unity—"the circle of science" in which a pure logic that "finally bites its own tail" meets a new form of knowledge referred to as "tragic insight."<sup>6</sup> Such rhetoric, accentuating inner dualities and ambiguities, must have seemed extraordinarily appealing to those artists who had witnessed the beginnings of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with all its tensions and conflicts.

The main purpose of my article is to explore the ideological contexts of sculptural works by northern modernists: Gustav Vigeland (1869–1943) from Norway, Bernhard Hoetger (1874–1949) from Germany, and the Icelandic Einar Jónsson (1874–1954). I will focus particularly on sculpture parks created by the aforementioned artists—for example, the famous Vigeland Park in Oslo, Hoetger's Platanenpark in *Mathildenhöhe* (one of the relics of Darmstadt artists' colony established by Prince Ernst Ludwig) and Jónsson's Museum in Reykjavík, with its beautiful sculpture garden and building designed in cooperation with Einar Erlendsson. It is extremely important to stress that the role of sculpture parks far exceeds what we would call an outdoor museum, since they both reflect and shape the mentality of the epoch.

The abundant and corresponding iconographies used by Vigeland, Jónsson and Hoetger need to be interpreted in relation to wider discourses: the above-mentioned Nietzschean influence, a revival of interest in Norse mythology as well as an intellectual turn toward the Orient, along with a noticeable aversion to Greco-Roman antiquity ("classical" form as a whole)<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ibidem, p. 54.

<sup>7</sup> In a paradoxical way, the early modernist aversion to "classical" form does not comport with Nietzsche's deep and enduring fascination with "the Greeks." This fascination is probably best expressed in passage 15 of *The Birth of Tragedy*: "Almost every era and cultural stage has at some point sought in a profoundly ill-tempered frame of mind to free itself of the Greeks, because *in comparison with the Greeks*, all their own achievements, apparently fully original and admired in all sincerity, suddenly appeared to *lose their colour and life* and shrivelled to unsuccessful copies, in fact, to caricatures." Ibidem, p. 52.

That aversion, however, harmonizes with the *perspectivist* orientation—the orientation shared by Nietzsche and his artistic followers. Douglas Kellner, in his article dedicated to *Nietzsche's Critique of Mass Culture*, points to another interesting paradox: "While Nietzsche is a major critic of modernity, he also exemplifies its spirit and ethos. Although he argues against democracy, liberalism, and various progressive social movements, Nietzsche's attack is at least partially carried out in a modern Enlightenment style, negating existing ideas in the name of a better future. Despite his keen appreciation for past cultures like classical antiquity and defence of some premodern

and, last but not least, a particular taste for—using the Welschian term—“transcultural” eclecticism. I deliberately used the term “transcultural” in order to emphasize the fact that Scandinavian modernists provoked a significant shift within the artistic geography of Europe. At the turn of the century, Paris and London were still the main centres of art, but Oslo and Berlin<sup>8</sup> had started to gradually build their own reputations.

In Berlin, the Scandinavian bohemia, centred around August Strindberg, used to spend their evenings in The Black Piglet (Zum Schwarzen Ferkel). Among its frequenters was the charismatic Polish writer Stanisław Przybyszewski (1868–1927). In The Black Piglet, Przybyszewski made acquaintances with Vigeland, Edvard Munch, Ola Hansson, Hans Jaeger, Christian Krogh along with many others and also met his future wife there—Dagny Juel. Undoubtedly, it was Przybyszewski who contributed much to the popularity of Norwegian artists in central Europe. In his substantial article of 1895—first published in 1897—*On the paths of the Soul* (*Auf der Wegen der Seele*), the Polish writer calls Vigeland a “Magus,” “a great philosopher and exuberant visionary” and, in an exaggerated tone, he states: “Magus is the only one who stands above all, who venerates as his forefather not Adam, the father of the herd, but Samyâsa, the father of the Only One.”<sup>9</sup>

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values, Nietzsche is very *future and present-oriented*, attacking tradition while calling for a *new society and culture*. An impetus toward innovation, involving negation of the old and creation of the new, is therefore at the very heart of Nietzsche's complex and often enigmatic theoretical work, which, in the spirit of modernity, affirms development and transcendence of the old as crucial values for contemporary individuals and society.” D. Kellner, “Nietzsche's Critique of Mass Culture”, [online] <https://pages.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/Illumina%20Folder/kell22.htm> [accessed: 5.12.2017].

<sup>8</sup> “There were many Scandinavian artists living in Berlin in the 1890s. A general German displeasure with all things French following the French-German War in 1870–1871 also contributed to the popularity of Scandinavian artists in the city.” T. O. B. Nielsen, “Gustav Vigeland and Stanislaw Przybyszewski”, trans. J. Engberg, [in:] *On the Paths of the Soul. Gustav Vigeland and Polish Sculpture around 1900 / Na drogach duszy. Gustav Vigeland a rzeźba polska około 1900 / På sjelens veier. Gustav Vigeland og polsk skulptur rundt 1900*, an exhibition catalogue, red. B. Leszczyńska-Cyganik, Kraków 2010, p. 234.

<sup>9</sup> S. Przybyszewski, “On the Paths of the Soul”, trans. E. Chrzanowska-Kluczevska, [in:] *On the Paths of the Soul. Gustav Vigeland and Polish Sculpture around 1900*, an exhibition catalogue, ed. B. Leszczyńska-Cyganik, Kraków 2010, pp. 271–272.

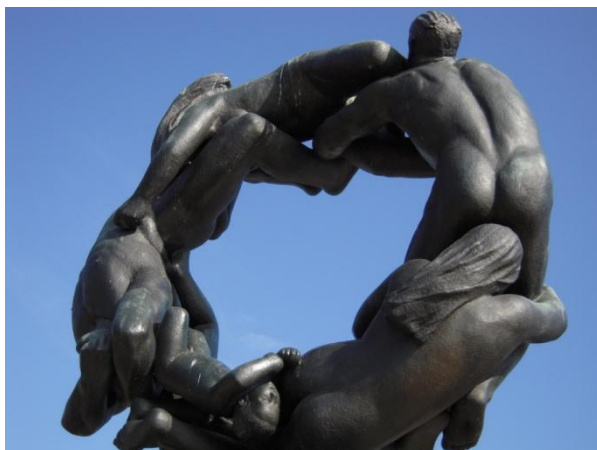


Fig. 1. Gustav Vigeland, *Wheel of Life*, The Vigeland Park in Oslo.  
Photo by M. Stępnik.



Fig. 2. Gustav Vigeland, *The Monolith* (detail), The Vigeland Park in Oslo.  
Photo by M. Stępnik.

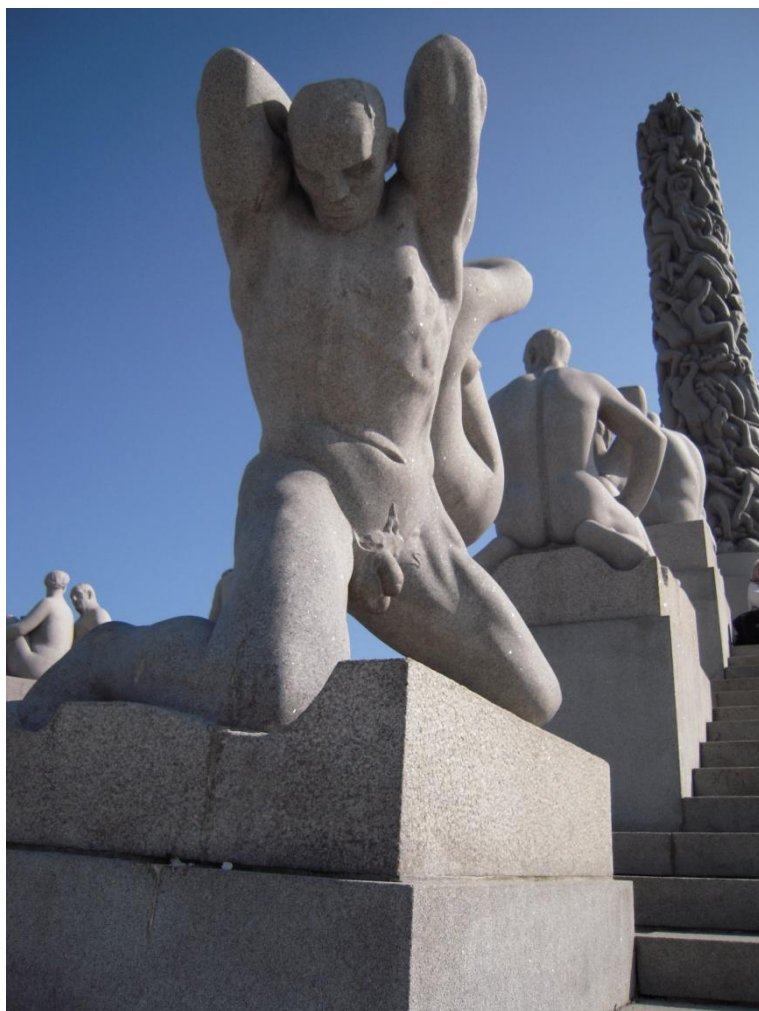


Fig. 3. Gustav Vigeland, The Vigeland Park in Oslo.  
Photo by M. Stępnik.





Fig. 4. Gustav Vigeland, The Vigeland Park in Oslo.  
Photo by M. Stępnik.

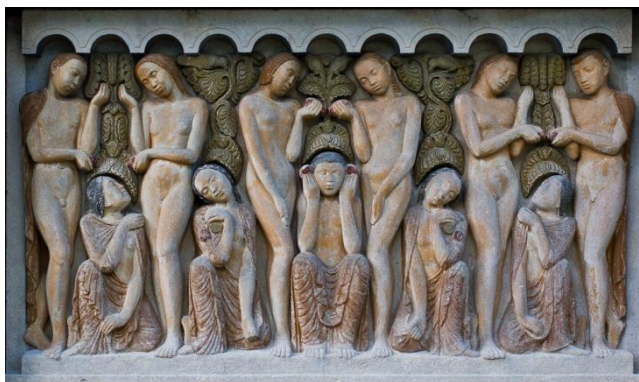


Fig. 5. Bernhard Hoetger, *The Resurrection*, The Plane Tree Grove in Darmstadt. Wikimedia Commons.



Fig. 6. Einar Jónsson Museum in Reykjavik, view from the garden. Photo by M. Stępnik.



Fig. 7. Einar Jónsson, *The Birth of Psyche*.  
Courtesy Einar Jónsson Museum in Reykjavik.



Fig. 8. Einar Jónsson, *The Rest*.  
Courtesy Einar Jónsson Museum in Reykjavik.

### Vigeland—"a western dialect with soft consonants"

Among Vigeland's numerous supporters<sup>10</sup> was Gunnar Heiberg, whom he met during his stay in Paris. In his famous article *The City with the Fountain*—proclaiming the necessity of erecting a monumental sculpture in Oslo (then Kristiania)—Heiberg, in a metaphorical way, describes the artist's sculptural language as "a western dialect, with soft consonants."<sup>11</sup>

As a matter of fact, that "softness" may be interpreted as coming from an aversion towards Greco-Roman antiquity and "classical" forms in art as a whole. Indeed, even in his earliest works, such as *Hagar and Ishmael* (1889) or *Accursed* first exhibited in Copenhagen (1891–1892), Vigeland's rhetoric adopts an individual character, far from academic patterns. One might say that even the titles of the aforementioned works reveal sympathy for outcasts and outsiders. "Empty tragic group with wild hair and fluttering draperies" is how the artist described the sculpture collection of Glyptoteket, in a letter written to Sophus Larpent.<sup>12</sup> In addition, while visiting the British Museum he remarked: "No, for me, of all the Greeks there is only Phidias. And the only one after him who dared to break all the bonds of human movements was Michelangelo."<sup>13</sup> It is worth mentioning, that *Abel Monument* unveiled in 1908 has often been compared to Buonarroti's work: *Allegory of Victory*. However, in my opinion it may also be associated with Gianlorenzo Bernini's *David*. All in all, such an anti-classical attitude is followed by a deep respect for gothic art<sup>14</sup>—that beautifully "barbaric" form which he would learn when engaged in the restoration of Trondheim Cathedral.

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<sup>10</sup> Vigeland was also supported by, among others, a Norwegian art historian Jens Thiis, a writer Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, as well as some notable Swedes: art critics Tor Hedberg and Klas Fåhræus, and a banker Ernst Thiel.

<sup>11</sup> "I recognized the voice" says Heiberg in the same place. "It belongs to a great artist, the only titanic one of all those who have lived and who now live among us." After: R. Stang, *Gustav Vigeland. The Sculptor and His Works*, trans. A. Grosjean, Oslo 1965, p. 120. And later, in the same article, he states: "And I thought: That would be something for all the citizens of Oslo who have ambitions for their city, and want to make it a big city, if ever the day should come when Norway's capital is known the world over as 'the City with the Fountain.'" Ibidem, p. 122.

<sup>12</sup> After: T. O. B. Nielsen, op. cit., p. 234.

<sup>13</sup> After: R. Stang, op. cit., p. 52.

<sup>14</sup> As Vigeland states in one of his letters: "It is quite certain that I have learned something from Gothic art which classical art could not have taught me." Ibidem, p. 54.

The real breakthrough came after Vigeland's visit to Auguste Rodin's studio in Paris.<sup>15</sup> Two bas-reliefs entitled *Hell* (the first version completed in 1894) and *Resurrection* (1900)<sup>16</sup> bear a notable resemblance to the famous *La Porte de l'Enfer*. To me, however, Vigeland's *Resurrection* could be compared to Blakean imagery, especially to the visions of *The Last Judgment*—compositions which evoke a sensation of revolving movement. (Obviously, one might have the same *impression when looking at* the *Monolith* or the *Wheel of Life* in Frogner Park). This resemblance, though, is probably coincidental—I have no data to ascertain whether Vigeland knew the heritage of William Blake—yet it is still a striking coincidence. In the writings of the great Englishman, Urizen, the satanic figure that represents cold Reason, is opposed to Urthona as the Zoa (“living one”) of creativity and Imagination—the power that saves the world. The original cosmological system developed by Blake, corresponds to the concept of a human being as a complete unity—*homo maximus* merged with the Universe. Moreover, it is thought provoking that Swedenborgian philosophy—so often praised by Blake—was also widely received by intellectual circles at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Hope and despair, the joys of youth and sorrows of old age, the Apollonian brightness and the Dionysian madness... The Vigeland Park may be regarded as a sculptural “microcosmos” reflecting the entire human universe. The whole complex covers an area of 80 acres (ca 32 ha) and its main axis is 850 metres long (ca 929 yd). It contains 194 sculptures in bronze, granite and wrought-iron. The long history of this *magnum opus* traces back to the year 1906 when a plaster model of a fountain was exhibited. Ragna Stang, a Norwegian historian and a daughter of Jens Thiis, in her brilliant study dedicated to Vigeland precisely describes “the moment in 1921 when, as a mature man of 52, he put his signature to the most remarkable contract ever entered into by an artist and an official body.” The uniqueness of the project lies in the fact that “Vigeland was to give the city of Oslo the rights to all he had created and all he would subsequently create. In return, the city would give him a studio large enough to permit him to bring into being all the works he carried within him.”<sup>17</sup> (He moved to the new studio in 1923).

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<sup>15</sup> Ragna Stang claims that: “Vigeland never liked to hear anyone mention Rodin's influence on him, yet there is no ignoring it. It is true that he never actually became a student of Rodin's, but he did go to his studio several times.” Ibidem, p. 25.

<sup>16</sup> Stang on Vigeland's *Resurrection*: “There is no unifying composition here, only people floating upwards, dreamlike, with eyes closed. Like silent shadows the figures glide past.” Ibidem, pp. 32–33.

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem, p. 10.

In 1942, the carving of *The Monolith* (one of the principal works, created by three artisans) was completed. Finally, in 1947, several years after the artist's death, Vigelandsanlegget was opened to the public.

*The Human Pillar* (Fig. 2)—as this is an alternative name for *The Monolith*—rises on the top of monumental stairs, in the middle of a vast plateau, bordered with a balustrade with beautifully designed wrought-iron gates. On the steps of the rounded stairs there are 36 granite sculptures arranged in radial order—thus, forming 12 rows—completed in years 1916–1936. Their iconography depicting life stages corresponds with the crowning 17-metre high “obelisk” or “menhir.” The pillar is entwined by naked human bodies, male and female, rising up and smoothly circulating towards the top (Fig. 3).

Its meaning may be interpreted in many ways: as a sculptural ode to immortal growth and fertility or an apotheosis of the life-giving sun. In fact, the Monolith takes the form of a sundial, and just next to it there is another sundial decorated with signs of the Zodiac. Ragna Stang points to Nietzsche's influence, namely, the suggestive image of “generation trampled on generation” that appears in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.<sup>18</sup> It is hard not to agree with the author, given that the pillar may be treated as an explicit symbol of male dominance. In parallel, the immediate echoes of Nietzschean philosophy may also be found in many of Munch's paintings, (here, the Oslo University Murals of 1909–1914 provide the best example).<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Ibidem, pp. 48–49.

<sup>19</sup> For example, Colin Trodd, in his article dedicated to Nietzsche's influence on modern art, investigates in what ways Nietzsche's vitalism and “cosmic Dionysianism” is reflected in the above-mentioned murals, commissioned by the University of Oslo: “*The Human Mountain* represents the zenith of Munch's Dionysian worldview [...]. It depicts a fragment of an endless mountain composed of knotted human forms. Some figures cling to the mountainside, others become incorporated into the rock-face, but all seek the splintered rays of light emitted by the sun. What Munch creates is a crystallization of the life-force, a mountain world where the struggle of energetic life is expressed through the pulsing interplay of geometric and serpentine lines. A pictorial hymn, then, to Zarathustra's self-vision: ‘Out of silent mountains and thunderstorms of pain my soul rushes into the valleys’ [...]. Munch's fusion of the fluxional and adamantine, which recalls Nietzsche's cosmic Dionysianism, was continued in the central panel, *The Sun*, 1909–1911 [...]. This composition, the apogee of Nietzschean vitalism [...] presents the sun as the living center that gives form to the world. In other words, the human body is not the measure of all things. In place of man, a sign of full knowing, we are given an image of ‘solar love’, a sign of full being [...]. Like Zarathustra, Munch's striving for wholeness takes him away from society to the primal oneness of the universe, a universe defined in vitalistic terms: striations of light, bands of energy, irradiated

I think that even the paved labyrinth that covers the area around *The Fountain* may be somehow associated with *Morgenröthe* (*The Dawn of Day*, 1881), where the philosopher alludes to a labyrinth as the form that best symbolizes the modern mentality. Here, in one of his aphorisms (no. 169), Nietzsche says, commenting on “the Greek genius foreign to us:”

Oriental or modern, Asiatic or European: compared with the ancient Greeks, everything is characterised by enormity of size and by the revelling in great masses as the expression of the sublime, whilst in Paestum, Pompeii, and Athens we are astonished, when contemplating Greek architecture, to see with what small masses the Greeks were able to express the sublime, and how they loved to express it thus. In the same way, how simple were the Greeks in the idea which they formed of themselves! How far we surpass them in the knowledge of man! Again, how full of *labyrinths* would our souls and our conceptions of our souls appear in comparison with theirs! If we had to venture upon an architecture after the style of our own souls (we are too cowardly for that!) a *labyrinth* would have to be our model. That music which is peculiar to us, and which really expresses us, lets this be clearly seen! (for in music men let themselves go, because they think there is no one who can see them hiding behind their music).<sup>20</sup>

But, getting back to the possible symbolic readings of Vigeland’s *Monolith*, one might be so bold as to assume that it conveys biblical meaning. By this, I mean that the number of the naked figures—which is 121—might have been inspired by Psalm 121 called “a song of ascents” or “a song of degrees.”

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lines of force.” C. Trodd, “Revitalizing Romanticism; or, Reflections on the Nietzschean Aesthetic and the Modern Imagination”, [in:] *A Companion to Modern Art*, ed. P. Meecham, Hoboken (NJ) 2017, p. 26. It is also worth mentioning that Munch’s fascination with Nietzsche is explicitly expressed in his painting of 1906—the posthumous portrait of the great philosopher. See: Edvard Munch, *Portrait of Friedrich Nietzsche*, 1906, oil on canvas, 201/160 cm, The Thiel Gallery (Thielska Galleriet), Stockholm.

<sup>20</sup> F. Nietzsche, *The Dawn of Day*, trans. J. McFarland Kennedy, New York 1911. The similar metaphor appears in the aphorism no. 230: “At the present time men’s sentiments on moral things run in such *labyrinthic* paths that, while we demonstrate morality to one man by virtue of its utility, we refute it to another on account of this utility.” Ibidem, p. 198. The topos of the labyrinth is also present, among others, in Nietzsche’s poetry, namely: his *Klage der Ariadne* (*Lament of Ariadne*), inserted in his *Dionysos-Dithyramben*, written in 1888 and first published in 1891). See also e.g. K. Reinhardt, “Nietzsche’s Lament of Ariadne”, *Interpretation*, 1977, 6(3), pp. 204–224. It is worth mentioning, that the figure of Ariadne, sleeping on Naxos, abandoned by Theseus—and very much resembling the classical marble sculpture of Ariadne, housed in Musei Vaticani—appears several times in paintings by Giorgio de Chirico, *il grande metafisico*, and a great admirer of Nietzsche. See e.g. G. de Chirico, *Le gioie e gli enigmi di un’ora strana* (*The Joys and Enigmas of a Strange Hour*), 1913, oil on canvas, 83.7 × 129.5 cm, private collection.



("I lift my eyes to the hills—where does my help come from?"<sup>21</sup>) In this context, it is significant that Vigeland once revealed that "The column may be said to be related to Ruben's *Resurrection* and *Descent in Hell* and *Judgement Day* in the Alte Pinakothek, Munich."<sup>22</sup> On another occasion, he said that the concept came to his mind when he saw a rolled photograph of his *Resurrection* relief. Once, when asked about the meaning of the Monolith, he enigmatically replied: "It is my religion."<sup>23</sup>

Vigeland—who grew up in a very traditional family—once wrote: "My childhood is always with me."<sup>24</sup> One needs to be aware that the children sculpted by the artist, together with the most famous bronze statue of *Sinnetaggen* ("angry little boy"), so willingly photographed by amused tourists, convey a variety of possible meanings. For instance, it would be fascinating to investigate the awkward relationship between Gustav and his younger, no less gifted brother Emanuel,<sup>25</sup> although this topic deserves a thorough exploration in a separate study. Most of all, however, the above-cited statement may be regarded as a symptom or a perfect "illustration" of the mechanism of regression as described by Otto Rank in his study *The Trauma of Birth* (*Das Trauma der Geburt*, 1924). In this essential book, the Austrian psychoanalyst argues that all kinds of fears and phobias originate from the same source—the anxiety of birth. As he considers in *Der Doppelgänger* (*The Double*), first published in 1925,<sup>26</sup> the neurotic anxiety of death is just another side of the same coin.<sup>27</sup> So, in a sense, the idea of the cyclicity of existence, or rather: existences, may serve here as a spiritual remedy.

Regression, as an ego defence mechanism leading to the reversion to earlier stages of development, even to the one *in utero*, evokes obvious associations with the element of water (amniotic fluids). In this context, it is striking

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<sup>21</sup> "My Help Comes from the Lord", [online] <https://www.bible.com/pl/bible/59/PSA.121.esv> [accessed: 21.06.2017].

<sup>22</sup> R. Stang, op. cit., p. 146.

<sup>23</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>24</sup> Ibidem, p. 37.

<sup>25</sup> Emanuel Vigeland Museum official website, [online] <http://www.emanuelvigeland.museum.no/museum.htm> [accessed: 21.06.2017].

<sup>26</sup> See English editions: O. Rank, *The Trauma of Birth*, trans. E. J. Lieberman, New York 1993; idem, *The Double. A Psychoanalytic Study*, trans. H. Tucker Jr., Chapel Hill 2009.

<sup>27</sup> As Rank reckons in his *Doppelgänger*: "One motif which reveals a certain connection between the fear of death and the narcissistic attitude is the wish to remain forever young. On the one hand, this wish represents libidinous fixation of the individual onto a definite developmental stage of the ego; and on the other, it expresses the fear of becoming old, a fear which is really the fear of death. Thus Wilde's Dorian says, 'When I find that I am growing old, I shall kill myself.'" Ibidem, p. 77.

that water is the leitmotif in Bernhard Hoetger's Plane Tree Grove, where, for example, one can find an excerpt from Goethe's *Song of the Spirits over the Waters*. It is also significant that it was *The Fountain* that was made one of the most crucial pieces in the whole complex both by the Norwegian and the German sculptor.

In the middle of Vigeland's fountain there is a sculptural group of "six nude male figures lifting a bowl high above their heads,"<sup>28</sup> as he wrote in a letter to Heiberg. The rectangular basin is symmetrically flanked by twenty bronze tree-groups standing on granite parapets. The trees form "natural" frames embracing and "dialoguing" with human figures representing the different stages of life: tiny dormant babies, girls and boys chatting and joyfully playing in the branches (Fig. 4), young people waiting for their fate—like the so-called *Swallow* beautifully plunging into the unknown, mature couples struggling with one another, elderly people with bodies bent to the ground and, at the end, deadly remains. As Ragna Stang observes, the artist "purposely treated Death's skeleton body and the tree's branches in the same way [...] The skeleton's feet are placed so as to suggest the return of energy, via the trunk of life's tree, to the earth we have come from."<sup>29</sup> The same concept has been used in the design of the bas-relief frieze adorning the walls of the pool. Here, human remains are accompanied by animal skeletons, which makes us think of ourselves as belonging to the universe of Nature. (As we will see later, the Platanenpark in Darmstadt might even be interpreted as a temple of Nature). I use a capital letter here in order to indicate the pantheistic aspect of early modern imagery.

It also seems to be evident that the bronze trees incorporate the ancient symbol of Yggdrasil—the Tree of Life. And, last but not least, in one of Vigeland's poems a personified tree denotes spiritual forces. In the last stanza, we read:

Still the buds sprout on the tree of my life,  
buds taking the sap,  
sucking the marrow from the twigs and branches  
which I know would endure—were  
their nourishment not seized by the others.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> R. Stang, op. cit., p. 120.

<sup>29</sup> Ibidem, p. 134.

<sup>30</sup> Ibidem, p. 181.

## Hoetger—"lights and shadows"

We must build a city, a whole city! Anything less would be pointless!  
government should give us [...] a field, and there we shall *create a world*.

Joseph Maria Olbrich<sup>31</sup>

In an extensive catalogue published in 2013, dedicated to The Plane Tree Grove, Hoetger's *magnum opus* has been described as "a non-European *hortus conclusus*"<sup>32</sup> reflecting modern utopias, as "an idiosyncratic open-air cultic site with relief altars, pitcher-bearers, jackal vases and a tombstone as a monument to new life."<sup>33</sup> (Perhaps the latter is an allusion to a sculpture entitled *Dying Mother with Child* whose theme was inspired by the untimely death of a brilliant German painter, and Hoetger's personal friend, Paula Modersohn-Becker). In his essay, Philipp Gutbrod, the Director of the Institut Mathildenhöhe Darmstadt, recalls the early history of the grove that, "measuring approximately 125 metres by 40, was laid out in the mid-nineteenth century on the Mathildenhöhe (an elevation outside the city named after Mathilde Caroline of Bavaria, a princess who had married Grand Duke Louis III), and planted with rows of trees of equal length."<sup>34</sup> The origins of Hoetger's project trace back to the year 1911, when the sculptor was appointed to the Artist's Colony (Künstlerkolonie) by its founder, Grand Duke Ernst Ludwig (Ernest Louis), a grandson of Queen Victoria and a brother of the future Tsarina of Russia Alexandra Fedorovna. It is worth mentioning that, in the previous year, the artist created a marble torso entitled *Jugend* (*Youth*), commissioned and, in due course, enthusiastically received by the sapient duke.

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<sup>31</sup> After: H. Bahr, *Bildung. Essays*, Leipzig 1900, p. 45. Olbrich's words have also been quoted by Sabine Welsch: S. Welsch, "Chronicles of the Mathildenhöhe", [online] [http://raumlabor.net/wpcontent/uploads/2014/03/mathildenho%CC%88he\\_english.pdf](http://raumlabor.net/wpcontent/uploads/2014/03/mathildenho%CC%88he_english.pdf) [accessed: 21.06.2017].

<sup>32</sup> P. Gutbrod, "Bhavagad Gita and Anti-Pietà. Bernhard Hoetger's Hieratic Total Artwork on the Mathildenhöhe Darmstadt", [in:] *Bernhard Hoetger. The Plane Tree Grove. A Total Artwork on the Mathildenhöhe Darmstadt / Bernhard Hoetger. Der Platanenhain. Ein Gesamtkunstwerk auf der Mathildenhöhe Darmstadt*, eds. R. Beil, P. Gutbrod, Munich 2013, p. 24.

<sup>33</sup> R. Beil, "Hoetger's Hymn to Life. An Early Utopia of World Art", [in:] *Bernhard Hoetger. The Plane Tree Grove. A Total Artwork on the Mathildenhöhe Darmstadt / Bernhard Hoetger. Der Platanenhain. Ein Gesamtkunstwerk auf der Mathildenhöhe Darmstadt*, eds. R. Beil, P. Gutbrod, Munich 2013, p. 7.

<sup>34</sup> P. Gutbrod, op. cit., p. 24.

Before I proceed any further, it is necessary to note that the beautifully utopian project of Darmstadt's Künstlerkolonie—developed under the directorship of the prominent Joseph Maria Olbrich, the co-founder of the Vienna Secession—was strictly intertwined with the Lebensreform ("life reform") movement that originated in Germany in the mid-1890s, and among whose numerous proponents were Gusto Gräser, the charismatic initiator of Monte Verità commune, and Rudolf Steiner, to whom I will return later. The compelling traces of vitalism and pantheism that characterise Heotger's personal aesthetics have indeed much in common with the naturalistic approach shared by Lebensreform ideologists, designing a new, health-conscious,<sup>35</sup> pacifistic society. It is a sad paradox that in the 1930s some of them, connected with the *völkisch* current, began to sympathize with the Nazi ideology.<sup>36</sup>

Returning to the main topic, the Platanenhain covers a rectangular area and is oriented along the south-north axis. The entrance, marked by two massive pylons (pillars), is placed at the southern side of the grove. On the western pylon there is a sculpture group consisting of a panther—as a symbol of the night—carrying a sleepy child on its back. A corresponding sculpture depicting a puma—a Chinese symbol of the day—carrying an awakening infant, is situated on the top of the eastern pillar. Thus, again, we come across the concept of dualities transforming into a perfect Unity. Here, the Buddhist inspiration is explicit, but not alone. For, the pylon walls are covered with inscriptions chiselled in a stylized typeface that the artist designed himself in an Egyptian manner. The Occident is associated with night (fall, sleep etc.) and the water element. That is why on the western part of the entrance Hoetger carved a quote from *The Fountain Prayer*, dedicated to Thoth, a lunar deity, a patron of wisdom and knowledge; the prayer comes from Sallier I papyrus and is dated to the 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty. The metaphorical symmetry was maintained by a relevant inscription on the eastern pillar. Thus, the gleaming Orient is represented by an excerpt from *The Great Hymn*

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<sup>35</sup> See e.g. J. Virdi-Dhesi, "Constructing the Naked (Social) Body", [online:] <http://jaivirdi.com/2011/05/17/monday-series-constructing-the-naked-social-body-iii/> [accessed: 21.06.2017].

<sup>36</sup> In this context, the Nordic Ring, founded in May 1926 by Konopacki-Konopath, paid an especially significant role. According to Paul Weindling: "Other leading lights of the Ring were the architect Schultze-Naumburg, who led opposition to Bauhaus architecture as disfiguring the nation's racial physiognomy, and the animal breeding expert Darré. They met to rekindle the spirit of sagas, to interpret runes and to revive old customs." P. Weindling, *Health, Race and German Politics Between National Unification and Nazism. 1870–1945*, Cambridge 1993, p. 474.

to the *Aten* (the Sun) ascribed to Pharaoh Akhenaten, (18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, mid-14<sup>th</sup> century BC). "When you rise on the eastern horizon, you fill every land with your beauty [...]. You are beautiful, you are great, you shine above every land. Your rays embrace as many lands as you have created"<sup>37</sup>—in those words the apostate Pharaoh prayed to the life-giving sun disk.

The fiery Sun and soothing Water. East and West. A unity of Contradictions... But, moreover, Hoetger's sophisticated project both reflects and anticipates the broad process of changes within the geography of art, the great turn towards non-Western aesthetics. The shift that strongly manifested during the counterculture revolution of the 1960s and, closer to our times, gave rise to transculturally-based aesthetics, can be traced back at least to the impressionistic admiration for *ukiyo-e* prints of the Edo Period. Furthermore, it is obvious that at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the European dream of the unknown was profoundly exemplified through Paul Gauguin's idyllic and mysterious Tahitian paintings. Unquestionably, in this context, Hoetger's *Resurrection* relief representing a rhythmic "ornament" of six standing and five crouching figures (Fig. 5), and set in the south-eastern part of the grove, may be interpreted as an echo of Gauguin's imagery, in particular, the robust silhouettes and beautifully shaped faces of his models. The *Resurrection* from Darmstadt, so far removed from the above-mentioned *Resurrection* by Vigeland, and from Christian iconography in general, corresponds in its meaning rather with the famous: *D'où venons-nous? Que sommes-nous? Où allons-nous?* (*Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?*).<sup>38</sup>

It is as well worth mentioning the significance of the *Sonderbund* exhibition that took place in Cologne in 1912.<sup>39</sup> The "special alliance"—as this is the literal meaning of the title—gathered works by, among others, Gauguin, Van Gogh, Cézanne, Denis, Picasso, Mondrian and members of the two expressionist art collectives: Die Brücke and Der Blaue Reiter. Barbara Schaefer, a curator of the exhibition who organized a commemoration of the centennial of *Sonderbund* held by the Wallraf-Richartz Museum in Cologne, points out that: "What the organizers achieved in 1912 was the first survey of modernism, and at the same time, its manifestation in Germany."<sup>40</sup> Thus,

<sup>37</sup> This is a fragment of *The Great Hymn to Aten* translated from Egyptian by Robert Hari. After: R Hari, *New Kingdom Amarna Period*, Leiden 1985, p. 1.

<sup>38</sup> Similar is the interpretation by Ralf Beil. See: R. Beil, op. cit., pp. 7–8.

<sup>39</sup> See: P. Gutbrod, op. cit., p. 22.

<sup>40</sup> Schaefer's words quoted by Jochen Kürten. J. Kürten, "1912 Show That Shook Art World Returns to Cologne", [online:] <http://www.dw.com/en/1912-show-that-shook-art-world-returns-to-cologne/a-16252111> [accessed: 21.06.2017].

indeed, Hoetger who contributed with his *Licht- und Schattenseiten* ("light and shadow sides") series of majolika figurines, had an opportunity to analyse this "survey" and observe all those creative appropriations from non-European cultures.

As a matter of fact, Hoetger's park reflects the fascinating "transcultural" and "transreligious" mixture of citations, therefore, in a sense, anticipating the postmodern eclecticism. However, unlike Vigeland and, as we will see later, the Icelandic Jónsson, he did not reject Greco-Roman antiquity as a source of inspiration. Here, the figures of pitcher-bearers adorning the Fountain serve as the best example. According to Gutbrod: "Here, we already see, that Hoetger did not want to create a synthesis of several religions, including Christianity, but rather was concentrating entirely on his theme of cyclical nature, which in the West most readily took the form of a pantheist world-view."<sup>41</sup>

The spatial layout of the park is arranged in such a way that makes one think of a forest basilica or cathedral. Perhaps, it may be as well compared to an Egyptian temple, to be more precise, a hypostyle hall supporting a green, leafy roof. After all, the Egyptian influence seems to be preponderant in the whole project, which constitutes another difference to those by Vigeland and Jónsson. This is most likely because, at that time, the contemporary Germans were highly impressed by Ludwig Borchardt's findings in Tell el-Amarna, which included the now famous limestone bust of Nefertiti. It is also quite significant that originally the sculptures in the Platanenhain were painted, mostly in blue. In this specific case, the use of blue may be read, on the one hand, as a distinct reference to Egyptian architectural sculpture, and on another, as an allusion to the calming waters of Nirvana.

As I have mentioned previously (referring to Otto Rank), the water symbolism in Hoetger's works is very extensive. Actually, a separate study might be dedicated to an analysis of this aspect. Hence, let me only add that the stanza of Goethe's *Gesang der Geister über den Wassern* (*Song of the Spirits over the Waters*) was carved by the artist on a wall of the fountain, right above the stone cistern. There, one can read: "The soul of man is like water from heaven. It comes to heaven, it rises and down again to earth it must come in eternal alternation."<sup>42</sup>

The concept of "eternal alternation" (*ewig wechselnd*), or: eternal recurrence, as expressed by Goethe and later followed up by Nietzsche, is consistent with Steiner's anthroposophy, especially with the holistic vision of hu-

<sup>41</sup> P. Gutbrod, op. cit., p. 26.

<sup>42</sup> The passage from Goethe quoted in the aforementioned catalogue: *Bernhard Hoetger. The Plane Tree Grove...*, eds. P. Gutbrod, R. Beil, Munich 2013, p. 61.

man development—in other words, the holistic paradigm of education. It is truly striking to what extent Hoetger's pantheism (and animalism) fits in with the passage from Steiner's *The Kingdom of Childhood*, written on the basis of lectures delivered in Torquay in 1924, dedicated to Waldorf School: "The animal kingdom is the human being spread out, and the human being is the animal kingdom drawn together; all the animals are united synthetically in the human being, and if you analyse a human being, you get the whole animal kingdom."<sup>43</sup>

The official opening of the Plane Tree Grove in Darmstadt took place on 16 May 1914. Very soon afterwards, on the 28<sup>th</sup> of June, Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria and his wife Sophie were assassinated in Sarajevo, which, in a symbolic way, opened the new epoch—the epoch of terror and mass death unprecedented in history.

In the same year Hoetger moved to Worpswede, in Lower Saxony, where he met Ludwig Roselius, a merchant, art patron and—during the time of the Third Reich—a sympathizer of National Socialism. Unfortunately, the artist became infected by the same monstrous ideological disease. His *Lichtbringer* (*The Bringer of Light*) from 1936, a bronze, gold-coloured relief commissioned by Roselius, located at the entrance of Böttcherstraße in Bremen, at first glance may be interpreted as envisioning the figure of the Archangel fighting against the dragon. As a matter of fact, however, the work was intended to glorify the monstrous Führer.<sup>44</sup> The paradox lies in the fact that in 1937 the infamous sculpture was listed by the Nazis as an example of the *Entartete Kunst*. As we remember, such also was the case of Emil Nolde and his expressionist paintings.

In my opinion, the *Lichtbringer* hanging over the passage-way in Böttcherstraße, finds its perfect contradiction, so to speak, and ideological reverse, in a very special *passage* that one may find in the Catalan town of Portbou. Here, at the turn of 1990s the Israeli artist Dani Karavan erected his *Homage to Walter Benjamin*, a beautiful monument that takes the form of an iron gate open to the sea, commemorating the place of suicidal death of the great philosopher.

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<sup>43</sup> R. Steiner, *The Kingdom of Childhood. Introductory Talks on Waldorf Education*, trans. H. Fox, New York 1995, p. 44.

<sup>44</sup> See e.g. L. Gossman, *Brownshirt Princess. A Study of the 'Nazi Conscience'*, Cambridge 2009, p. 135.

### Jónsson—"that poisonous old 'Antiquity'"

Free from any moral ambiguities is the oeuvre by Einar Jónsson, who is said to have laid the foundation for Icelandic sculpture, and whose unusually designed house located in the heart of Reykjavik is surrounded by one of the most fascinating and stunning sculpture gardens in Europe, decorated with 26 bronze casts (Fig. 6).

In 1901, two years after graduating from the Royal Danish Academy of Art in Copenhagen, at the traditional Charlottenborg Spring Salon, the artist exhibited *The Outlaws* (*Útlagar*), a piece which marked a turning point in his career.<sup>45</sup> It is worth mentioning here that since the year 1920 the sculpture has been located in the main showroom at the Listasafn Einars Jónssonar (Einar Jónsson Art Museum).<sup>46</sup> In this fully mature work, Jónsson depicts a figure of a man carrying the dead body of a woman on his back and a child in his left arm, with a wolf scampering at his feet. This sorrowful scene was inspired by an old legend about a family who, having been (unjustly) convicted of a crime, in search of safety and freedom made a desperate escape to the highlands of Iceland. *The Outlaws* may be read, however, not only as the artist's obeisance to the Icelandic folktales—or, in a wider sense, the national tradition—but also as a metaphor for the very individual feeling of un-at-homeness, a kind of "oddness," solitude or isolation, which does not necessarily have to be "splendid."

Furthermore, the chosen subject-matter—and even the title of the work itself—seems to reveal the artist's sympathy and admiration for those who do not willingly obey the rules, who escape constraints, in other words: for the spiritual (and creative) outsiders. In this respect, his works bear analogy

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<sup>45</sup> Júlíana Gottskálksdóttir on (an indirect) Nietzschean influence, in the context of Jónsson's *Útlagar* and his temporary collaboration with the Danish group of the Free Sculptors: "By this time, [the exhibition of *The Outlaws*] Jónsson had abandoned naturalism for symbolism in his art, and he had shown his work with a radical group of Danish sculptors in Copenhagen who exhibited as the Free Sculptors (De frie Billedhuggere) [...]. Central to their ideology was the requirement of originality, which in turn relates to the concept of the autonomous creative individual, known to Danish artists through the writings of Danish writer Georg Brandes about German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche." J. Gottskálksdóttir, "Monuments to Settlers of the North: A Means to Strengthen National Identity", pp. 215–216, [online] <http://www.archipel.uqam.ca/10438/1/222023432.pdf> [accessed: 7.12.2017]. See original edition: eadem, "Monuments to Settlers of the North: A Means to Strengthen National Identity", [in:] *Iceland and Images of the North*, eds. S. Ísleifsson, D. Chartier, Quebec 2011, pp. 187–205.

<sup>46</sup> There are two other versions of *Útlagar*: one of them in Reykjavik, near the National Museum, and another in Akureyri, in the northern part of the country.



to the uncanny imagery of Stanisław Szukalski (1893–1987), a Polish modernist sculptor and author of the pseudoscientific-historical theory of Zermatism. That great outsider may be regarded as an archetypal artistic nomad, way ahead of his time. Szukalski—not much praised in the pre-war Polish artistic milieu as he was considered too extravagant—managed to realise many of his transgressive visions during his emigration years in America. Nowadays, his abundant artistic heritage—not easily classified, indeed—is taken care of by, among others, the famous film star Leonardo DiCaprio.<sup>47</sup> Meanwhile, in Poland, his legacy has been thoroughly explored by the art historian Lechosław Lameński.<sup>48</sup>

Jónsson's aesthetics are, on the one hand, deeply immersed in Northern tradition, with its mythology and folklore, while on the other hand they touch upon the archetypal grounds of human experience. As the artist once declared: "The inner life of my works is universal. The forms are purely Icelandic. As our soul is universal and our body is Icelandic, so should it be with our art."<sup>49</sup>

Since a more detailed description of his abundant *oeuvre* would far exceed the scope of this article, I will only touch upon tropes and motifs such as "modernity versus antiquity," and "the whirl of existence" or "the unity of contradictions" represented in the form of a swastika (*tetraskelion*) or a vortex (*ilinx*).

In this context, *The Birth of Psyche* (1915–1918; Fig. 7) may serve as an appropriate example. This beautiful bas-relief composition, based on the shape of a tetraskelion, depicts the moment when a young goddess, with her body only partly covered with soft drapes and "floating" hairlines, is slowly awakening, surrounded by figures representing the four elements (from the upper right corner in the clockwise direction: the winged male figure of the Air kissing her forehead, the ephebe-like Water giving her a bracing splash from some waterfalls, while the last two—the Earth and the Fire—together carve her form with a chisel and mallet). Here indeed, one can find a clear allusion—even literally expressed in the title—to the Greek myth of the winged Eros awakening his lover, the goddess of the soul. The semantic con-

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<sup>47</sup> "Stanislav Szukalski, a Polish-born sculptor who divided his life between Poland and the United States, may be one of those forgotten, forever lost geniuses of the 20<sup>th</sup> century [...]. The finesse and technical perfection alone of the impressive sculptures completed between the two world wars should earn Szukalski a place among the greatest sculptors of the century." E. Kirsch, D. Kirsch, "The Art of Stanislav Szukalski", [in:] *Struggle: The Art of Szukalski*, eds. S. Szukalski et al., San Francisco 2000, p. 13.

<sup>48</sup> See e.g. L. Lameński, *Stach z Warty Szukalski i Szczep Rogate Serce*, Lublin 2007.

<sup>49</sup> E. Kvaran, "Einar Jónsson. Poet in Stone", *Sculpture Review*, 1998, 46, p. 18.

tent of the piece is, however, more complex. The whole compositional layout—the four-armed swastika or “spiral nebula”<sup>50</sup> revolving from right to left—may as well be interpreted both as a reference to Buddhist or Hindu symbolism and to the Norse Mjölner, the hammer of Thor, used by theosophers as a symbol of creation. Somewhere within such interpretations is the fact that Jónsson “developed contact with theosophy around 1910 and the theories and ideas of theosophy became the foundation for the main body of his work from that point on.”<sup>51</sup> Undoubtedly, he must have been strongly inspired by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky’s *The Secret Doctrine*, fashionable in modernist circles, (first published in 1888).<sup>52</sup>

As mentioned previously, Jónsson’s fascination for the esoteric, quasi-philosophical illuminations of Madame Blavatsky, as well as of the British theosophist Annie Besant, inevitably led to his rejection of classical Greco-Roman heritage. A plaster cast entitled *Rest* (*Hvíld*, 1915–1935; Fig. 8) represents the most emblematic example in this respect. The work depicts the giant head of a young man, supported by a small figure, perhaps intended to represent the creative genius. Admittedly, the word “genius” refers us back to Roman mythology; this very effigy, however, is—according to the work’s title—resting upon a heavy hammer, most probably again: the Mjölner. The giant face is peculiarly divided, one half looking as if smoothly carved out of marble, the other half looking as if made from crude stones. Does the artist allude to the noble act of creating, bringing to light what was hidden under the apparent chaos of the phenomenal world? (The vertical forms jutting out from behind the head may resemble both basalt-like columns and life-giving sunbeams). Or maybe, there is another possible, and even, to some extent, contradictory meaning? In my view, this uncanny face might as well be interpreted as an illustration for Jónsson’s aversion towards the classic art forms, as overtly expressed in a letter written at the beginning of 1905, where we read: “that poisonous old ‘Antiquity,’” “this monster that turns everything to fossil.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>51</sup> The Birth of Psyche, [online] <http://www.lej.is/news/27/80/The-Birth-of-Psyche-1915-1918/> [accessed: 21.06.2017].

<sup>52</sup> Here is how Madame Blavatsky explains the symbolic meaning of swastika: “It is the emblem of the activity of Fohat [in theosophy: the universal, vital force], of the continual revolution of the ‘wheels,’ and of the Four Elements, the ‘Sacred Four,’ in their mystical, and not alone in their cosmical meaning.” H. P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. 2, New York 2016, p. 1031.

<sup>53</sup> Ó. Kvaran, *The Quest for Originality: Sculptor Einar Jónsson*, Reykjavík 2003, p. 4.

The difference between Jónsson's sculpture park and those of Vigeland and Hoetger lies in the fact that the Icelandic one—quite modest in size—was not intended as an autonomous project, but rather as a place, in a way, complementary to the Museum's interior. (Therefore, I took the liberty of discussing the most emblematic pieces collected inside the building). Nevertheless, as I argued above, the subject-matter of Jónsson's works, his eclectic imagery and esoteric inclinations are—regardless of his personal style—very typical for a Nordic modernist.

*The oeuvres by Vigeland, Hoetger and Jónsson*—as beautiful and as abundant—emerged from the same crucible of ideas, enriched with Swedenborgian and Blakean mysticism, Indian, Egyptian and, most of all, old Norse mythologies, as well as theosophical thought. All of them abandoned the early fascination with Buonarroti or Rodin in favour of the search for their own, unique artistic “languages.”

On the one hand, as we would say nowadays, the “transcultural” aspect of their works corresponded not only with the imagery characteristic for Nordic modernists but with the narrative of modernism as a whole. However, on the other hand, that “transcultural” tendency—the strong shift towards the remote cultures, as well as towards the remote, mythological past—found its counterpart in the quest to define and cultivate the national idioms in arts. Obviously, there is nothing wrong with this, but, we need to remember that many artists of that time, including Hoetger, easily fell into the trap of sympathizing with the most atrociously inhumane ideology that the world has ever witnessed.

Poetically speaking, in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the sacred Wheel of Life, the “motley whirl” of constant creation transformed into a vicious circle of fear and violence. The apotheosis of youth turned into the grief over the lost childhood, (see: the aforementioned Rank's study on *The Trauma of Birth*). Furthermore, the bewildering Nietzschean labyrinth was soon to be replaced by another spatial metaphor—the chessboard of history, as imagined by Benjamin in his last essay.

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