

12

2015

IL CAPITALE CULTURALE

Studies on the Value of Cultural Heritage

JOURNAL OF THE SECTION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

Department of Education, Cultural Heritage and Tourism
University of Macerata

eum



Il Capitale culturale
Studies on the Value of Cultural Heritage
Vol. 12, 2015

ISSN 2039-2362 (online)

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Registrazione al Roc n. 735551 del 14/12/2010

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Archeologia delle aree montane
europee: metodi, problemi e casi di
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*Archaeology of Europe's mountain
areas: methods, problems and case
studies*

a cura di Umberto Moscatelli e Anna Maria Stagno

Altri contributi

Stone or Sound. Memory and Monuments in Contemporary Public Art

Gaia Salvatori*

Abstract

This essay tackles the issue whether contemporary monuments can still provide plausible supports for memory, even when they undermine the traditional forms of commemoration and are labeled as “anti-monuments” or “counter-monuments”. A starting point has been detected in the experiences of the 1960s, when the monumental tradition started to lose its essential self-referentiality, and artistic production with memorial aims challenged traditional boundaries and lost its traditional frame characterized by stability, universality and rhetoric. In this period, related theoretical efforts were made to grasp the ongoing change and to understand the relationship between “document” and “monument” and viceversa as connected with the interpretation of history and its manipulation. It was, however, the discussion, developing from the late 1980s and early 1990s about Public Art (as an evolution from “site specificity” to art for the public place, and public interest) that

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involved also the status of monuments as technical hybrids extending across disciplines and artifacts, sometimes contingent and perishable, but which nevertheless fulfil both a documentary and an artistic function. Thus, examples of recent relevant exhibitions and specific monuments have been selected that are supposed to be a memorial in relationship with contemporary Public Art, where collective and individual experiences basically intersect. They are all artworks that implement the criticism of traditional monuments and attempt to provide alternatives involving different audiences and moving between opposites as presence and absence, persistence and temporality materiality and immateriality. And yet, in post-monumental times monuments persist (in sound or stone) if they can embody historical contingency.

In questo saggio si affronta la nozione di monumento nel mondo contemporaneo a partire dalla domanda se essi possano ancora fungere da supporti plausibili per la memoria anche quando, etichettati come “anti-monumenti” o “contro-monumenti”, minano le forme tradizionali della commemorazione. Negli anni Sessanta la tradizione monumentale ha iniziato a perdere la sua essenziale autoreferenzialità a seguito di molta produzione artistica che, pur con finalità commemorative, è andata, anche negli anni Settanta, oltre i confini della stabilità, universalità e della retorica. Nello stesso periodo, è riconoscibile anche il sorgere di sforzi teorici volti a cogliere il cambiamento in atto, soprattutto in merito al rapporto tra “documento” e “monumento”. È stato, tuttavia, lo sviluppo fra anni '80 e '90 dell'arte pubblica (dall'opera *site specific* a un'arte per e nell'interesse pubblico), che ha coinvolto anche lo statuto dei monumenti intesi come ibridi trans-disciplinari e artefatti, talvolta contingenti e deperibili, aventi tuttavia funzione documentaria e artistica. Sono stati, quindi, selezionati esempi di rilevanti mostre recenti e di casi specifici di monumenti/memoriali, nell'ambito dell'arte pubblica contemporanea, dove le esperienze collettive e individuali finiscono per intersecarsi. Si tratta di opere che implementano la critica dei monumenti tradizionali e cercano di fornire alternative coinvolgendo diversi tipi di pubblico. In epoca post-monumentale tali esempi si muovono tra poli opposti, come presenza e assenza, persistenza e temporalità, materialità e immaterialità e dimostrano quanto, nonostante tutto, si possa parlare ancora di monumenti ogni qualvolta l'intervento artistico riesca a cogliere ed incarnare, in qualunque forma e materia, la contingenza storica.

1. *Introduction*

Keeping in touch with monuments is what people frequently do to come closer to memory. As we can see in the video of Harun Farocki at the Venice Biennale (2013, fig. 1), people touch the Vietnam Veteran Memorial (designed by Maya Lin in 1980) and even tread on the commemorative plaque of Buchenwald, seeking a shared and, at the same time, individual experience.

«People, rather than a featureless public or disembodied spirit, now are the focus of much contemporary memorial art»¹. That's what Hilde Hein wrote in

¹ Hein 2006, pp. 94-95.

2006, discussing cases like Maya Lin's artwork, characterized by an absence or by a blur of artificially distancing devices. Hein took over a discussion thread dating back to the late 1980s and early 1990s about the status of monuments that revealed the aesthetic and political upheavals of the time and which referred, basically, to the intersection between Public Art and political memory².

Following this hint, I propose to put recent monuments that are supposed to be a memorial in relationship with contemporary Public Art, where collective *and* individual experiences basically intersect.

In particular with the rise of the new Public Art in the 1980s and 1990s, monuments "tackled" the urgency of actuality and, at the same time, an ongoing need of preservation of memory. But

like other cultural and aesthetic forms in Europe and America, the monument – in both idea and practice – has undergone a radical transformation over the course of the twentieth century [...] a metamorphosis from the heroic, self-aggrandizing figurative icons of the late nineteenth century, which celebrated national ideals and triumphs, to the antiheroic, often ironic and self-effacing conceptual installations»³.

Whereas the traditional monument had the function of a one-directional screen between, at least, two subjects (the sovereign state or the official commitment and the citizen), in the experience of the last decades of Public Art this characteristic was subverted as well as the univocal relationship previously established with the audience⁴.

New definitions arose, such as "counter-monuments", "ephemeral monuments", "anti-monuments", "negative" and even "invisible", "absent" or "non-monuments"⁵, while "dialogic monuments" was a term proposed as «a concept that offered an opportunity to explore the function of monuments as a source of public participation in the discursive construction of historical self-understanding»⁶.

² See Young 1990 and Griswold 1990. An important collection of essays on this topic was published in Amsterdam (Reinink, Stumpel 1999).

³ Young 1999, p. 2.

⁴ Interesting recent examples of monuments as Public Art that focused on memory and that intended to "de-construct" the traditional idea of monument as the expression of a one-sided interpretation of history, are quoted in Mancini 2011, p. 45. The following cases are worth mentioning: the *Spinoza Monument* (Amsterdam, 1999), the *Bataille Monument (Documenta 11, Kassel, 2002)* of Thomas Hirschhorn and the Clegg & Guttman's *Monument for Historical Change* (2004), permanently placed in the Berlin Luxemburg Platz.

⁵ These definitions are to be found in Young's essays (1990, 1992 and 1999). See especially Young 1999, pp. 1-10. Subsequently, they frequently returned in recent literature about Public Art. A summary review of the evolution of the concept of "monument" with references to recent exhibitions (from *Monument to Now*, Athens, 2004 to *Unmonumental*, New York, 2007) is in Cavallucci 2010b.

⁶ Carrier 2000, p. 160. Carrier writes in the wake of James Young's insistence that public dialogue over the meaning of monuments takes priority over aesthetic form.

In this essay I will focus on some significant examples, tackling the issue whether contemporary monuments – as «technical hybrids extending across disciplines»⁷ and artifacts that fulfil both a documentary and artistic function – can still provide plausible supports for memory even when they undermine the traditional forms of commemoration.

2. *Memory between materiality and immateriality*

Monuments in contemporary art challenged traditional boundaries between sculpture, environmental art and architecture; and memory has apparently lost its traditional frame characterized by stability, universality and rhetoric. Nevertheless, the «logic of sculpture, it would seem, is inseparable from the logic of the monument», as Rosalind Krauss stated in her famous essay *Sculpture in the expanded field* (1979). The «logic of the monument», like that of sculpture, gradually faded away from the end of the nineteenth century and entered in the early 1960s into a «categorical no-man’s-land»⁸. Until that period monumental tradition remained essentially self-referential. By contrast, from the 1960s the artists attempted to create site-specific works of art, for determinate locations, and with a much more public “intention”. The “golden age” of abandoning the protected *ambience* of the art museum started: an era that would pave the way toward the conquest of outer space, the territories of everyday life, and environment. As part of this transformation, sculptures tended more and more to vanish from their own base, to “disturb” their traditional immobility thus losing their reason of being⁹, as the *Base magica* by the Italian artist Piero Manzoni effectively pointed out (fig. 2), that referred in 1961 to a disappeared statue from a pedestal¹⁰.

At the same time, the analysis of the notion of “monument”, also in historical-philosophical studies, started a novel course, now strictly related to the notion of “document”. The writings of Foucault and Le Goff, dating back to the period of the rise of the new forms of Public Art (1960s and 1970s), are cases in point.

⁷ Carrier 2000, p. 17.

⁸ Krauss 1979, pp. 36 and 40.

⁹ Burnham 1967b, pp. 47-48. Burnham states that yet in the 19th century «the greatest innovators in modern sculpture have had the most to do with the reorganization of bases. [...] The modern sensibility has progressively attempted to break down the psychic barrier, the traditional object-viewer relationship, that accounts for the transcendent qualities of sculpture. It has tried to substitute an environment where observer and object are given a like status» (p. 48). About this issue see also Burnham 1967a and Kultermann 1967.

¹⁰ Commissioned monuments that resulted in sculpted figures without a pedestal are already present, but only occasionally, in 19th-century art, such as Auguste Rodin’s *The Burghers of Calais*. For Piero Manzoni’s *Base Magica* and his other meaningful “monumental” artwork *Socle du monde* (1961), see Celant 2007, pp. 41-42.

For Foucault «de nos jours, l'histoire, c'est ce qui transforme les documents en monuments»¹¹ and Le Goff argued that:

Il documento non è innocuo. È il risultato prima di tutto di un montaggio, conscio o inconscio, della storia, dell'epoca, della società che lo hanno prodotto, ma anche delle epoche successive durante le quali ha continuato a vivere, magari dimenticato, durante le quali ha continuato ad essere manipolato, magari in silenzio. Il documento è una cosa che resta, che dura [...]. Il documento è monumento¹².

A monument commemorates events and persons. It recalls something. A monument (from the Latin *monere* = to remind, admonish) is a mark with a meaning that lends the mark a definitive finality: «it remembers something definite in space and time»¹³.

However, Public Art, in particular during the last decennia, is not anymore necessarily linked to highly symbolic or representative places or sites, but refers sometimes very strongly to the need for memory. In many cases, as social art, or community art it is capable to play an active role in the cultural and social dynamics of the place where it arises. In these cases a type of art can be detected that aims to preserve the specificity of history, memory and meanings given by the audience attending. From this point of view Public Art can be identified as an effective means of “upgrading” not only the territory, but also the relational life of its citizens, as exemplified in the still going on *Fourth Plinth Project* in London. With Anthony Gormley *One & Other* (2009) over the course of a hundred consecutive days, a total of 2,400 selected members of the public made the plinth their own, spending each one hour on it. Furthermore, and obviously not by chance, *Monument* has been the title of Rachel Whiteread's sculpture installed on the empty fourth plinth on June 2001: a clear resin cast of the plinth itself, inverted and set on top of it¹⁴.

Public Art is in fact intended for people that do not usually visit either museums or galleries. It does not simply come down to placing a work of art in a public place, but rather it consists of the implementation, through artistic interventions, of more complex processes regarding social and territorial integration. To be sure, since the mid-1990s, «the adjective “public” no longer identifies the site of intervention, but the type of intervention»¹⁵ and we can speak of “relational art”¹⁶, which, developing from some basic changes such

¹¹ Foucault 1969, p. 15.

¹² Le Goff 1978, p. 46. Quoting here translated from the original italian text.

¹³ Böhringer 2007, p. 398.

¹⁴ <<https://www.london.gov.uk/priorities/arts-culture/fourth-plinth>> 12.07.2015. See also Tedeschi 2011, p. 66. The artworks mentioned are expression of the installation practices extensively discussed, as to their history and temporality, in Ferriani, Pugliese 2009.

¹⁵ «Public Art encouraged the development of participatory citizens who were more active and engaged, a process which can generally occur only through an artist's activism and the provocation of art»: that is what Patricia C. Phillips wrote in 1995, quoted in Marchart 2007, p. 426.

¹⁶ See Bourriaud 1998.

as environmental sculpture and performative arts of the sixties, forced the artist himself off his pedestal. In this way «all acquire the “public” sense which was once assigned to the monument»¹⁷. Contemporary monuments – as in the 1960s (note the Oldenburg *Placid Civic Monument* in the New York’s Central Park, 1967, fig. 3, buried in the ground¹⁸) – can be

ephemeral, immaterial, transient. Even a photograph, which passes from the local news into history, or a video [...] can become monuments and bear symbolic messages which were once assigned to ‘high’ events and ‘eternal’ materials¹⁹.

“Anti-monuments” or “Counter-monuments” – selecting the most used definitions between those mentioned before – have been thus realized in many ways during the last decades (always using the term “monument” without loosing its connotation of “document”), pointing out issues of memory and commemorations.

“Anti-Monument” was a term coined by Robert Smithson to refer to accidental monuments such as buildings and industrial spaces or debris of decaying rust belt areas, while the concept of “Counter-Monuments” is generally associated with Holocaust memorials. The latter was defined by James Young as created by artists who have

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 memory²⁰.

Thus, “anti-monuments” originally refer to American experiences like the Smithson’s earthworks²¹, and Alan Sonfist’s and Michael Heizer’s, works, which all referred to space as well as to time concepts, including meditations on monuments.

Smithson wrote:

Instead of causing us to remember the past like the old monuments, the new monuments seem to cause us to forget the future. Instead of being made of natural materials, such as

¹⁷ Cavallucci 2010a, p. 16.

¹⁸ «At a time when self-conscious borrowing from early-twentieth-century avant-garde movements by advanced 1960s practices added new urgency to discussion of historical narrative. Oldenburg used the monument’s inherent connection to history to explore alternative models of temporality, opening up new possibility for relating to historical practices and reflecting critically on the present»: see Rose 2012, p. 115.

¹⁹ Cavallucci 2010a, p. 16.

²⁰ About these arguments a panel was organized in St Louis (Missouri, USA), April 10-12, 2014; see: <<http://arthist.net/archive/5936>>, 12.07.2015.

²¹ Smithson’s art works made in the 1960s (especially from 1964 to 1969) were labeled as belonging to Minimal art, but they can be also be listed among those «projects that would in fact create a new landscape made of sculpture rather than decorated by sculpture», as stated by Alloway in 1972, considering Lucy Lippard statements. See Sonfist 1983, p. 125.

marble, granite, plastic, chrome, and electric light. They are not built for the ages, but rather against the ages. They are involved in a systematic reduction of time down to fractions of seconds, rather than in representing the long spaces of centuries. Both past and future are placed into an objective present. This kind of time has little or no space; it is stationary and without movement, it is going nowhere, it is anti-Newtonian, as well as being instant, and is against the wheels of the time-clock. Flavin makes “instant-monuments”; parts for “Monument 7 for V. Tatlin” were purchased at the Radar Fluorescent Company. The “instant” makes Flavin’s work a part of time rather than space²².

In several Land Art projects, experiences can be detected, that connect monuments to the memory of nature and to the history of the places involved and which can be seen as some kind of “anti-monuments”. Michael Heizer enriched his land art works with monumental memory even referring to lost civilisations²³ and Allan Sonfist, with *Earth* and *Crystal Monuments*, exhibited several large sculptures (1966-1972), displaying the history of an area written visually in rock, and the changing cycle of crystal growth, respectively²⁴. These works have been defined as «public monuments of a new kind»²⁵, referring to the artist’s own statements:

Public monuments traditionally have celebrated events in human history – acts or humans of importance to the whole community. In the twentieth century, as we perceive our dependence on nature, the concept of community expands to include nonhuman elements, and civic monuments honor and celebrate life and acts of another part of the community: natural phenomena. Within the city, public monuments should recapture and revitalize the history of the environment natural to that location²⁶.

Natural but also civic and anthropological memory has subsequently been incorporated in monuments that come close to “anti-monuments”. To the latter belongs the collective intervention conceived by Maria Lai on September 8, 1981 in Ulassai in Sardinia. It was an urban and land artwork at the same time – proposed as a land or village monument – consisting in houses tied together with a blue ribbon by local women (including the mountain behind the village). It was a community action product that was developed through a symbolic gesture of collective recovery of historical memory, in order to pick up the thread of the community²⁷. In Maria Lai’s case, the monument is temporary, a kind of “social sculpture” rooted in the performing attitude of the neo-avanguard²⁸.

²² Smithson 1966.

²³ Amaya 1985, pp. 19-21.

²⁴ Hall 1983, p. 54.

²⁵ Carpenter 1983, p. 142.

²⁶ Alan Sonfist wrote *Natural Phenomena as Public Monuments* in 1978, as quoted in Carpenter 1983, p. 154.

²⁷ Pioselli 2007, pp. 33-35.

²⁸ Many other examples could be made: the “monuments” of the Swiss artist Thomas Hirschhorn, first of all, which are in the first instance “collaborative” and “participatory” projects

Subsequently, in the 1990s, in connection with intense debates on contemporary monument concepts,

an awareness [arose] of the fact that while monuments do highlight historical connections, they can never replace public and individual responsibility for critical recollection and responsible remembrance²⁹.

3. *Monument/Document in recent contemporary debate and artworks*

“Counter-monuments” was a term coined by James Young to give a name to alternative concepts of monuments: his ideas reflect major issues addressed in the contemporary debate on monuments, and thus the quality of public historical awareness³⁰. A number of different artworks were quoted by Young to exemplify this debate, like the “negative form monument” by Horst Hoheisel in Kassel, conceived in 1987 as a monument for *Aschrott’s Fountain*, condemned by the Nazis as “Jew’s Fountain” and demolished.

Hoheisel took up the idea of this pyramid shape again in his work, but sank it down like a funnel so that the construction was hardly visible on the square’s surface. «The visitor is the monument» was Hoheisel’s comment on his “negative” image of the destroyed building, whereby the artist not only takes a traditional concept of monuments to absurd lengths, but also points to citizens’ everyday historical responsibility and ability to reflect³¹.

Among others examples (quoted by Young) there is the *Gegen-Denkmal* by Jochen and Esther Gerz in Hamburg (fig. 4): a monument – as it was presented – «against Fascism, War, and Violence and for Peace and Human Rights». It was a pillar, twelve meters high and one meter wide. An inscription near its base read, in German, French, English, Russian, Hebrew, Arabic and Turkish: «We invite the citizens of Hamburg and visitors to the town, to add their names here to ours. In doing so, we commit ourselves to remain vigilant». As more and more names cover this 12 meter tall lead column, it will gradually be lowered into the ground. One day it will have disappeared completely, and the site of the Hamburg monument against fascism will be empty. In the end, only we ourselves can rise up against injustice. Unveiled in 1986, the memorial was lowered six times before sinking completely in 1993, with over 70,000 signatures inscribed

that require the participation of the local population in which they were built (see Ricci 2010, p. 73).

²⁹ Siegel 2005 (<<http://www.goethe.de/kue/arc/dos/dos/zdk/it204638.htm>>, 12.07.2015).

³⁰ Essays by James Young devoted to *Memory and Counter Memory* appeared in 1992 and in 1999. See Young 1992 and 1999 (<[http://mitpress.mit.edu/HDM](http://mitpress.mit.edu/HDM>)>12.07.2015).

³¹ Siegel 2005.

onto its surface. Today a framed panel explains the evolution of the memorial at its various stages. Visitors can see a portion of the sunken column from a glass door underneath the elevated terrace where it once stood³².

The empty spaces of these negative form monuments by Hoheisel and Gerz not only refer to historical breaks and losses, but also delegate the task of remembering and taking morally-founded action straight back to the visitor³³.

Looking at pioneering kinds of “Anti-monuments” or “Counter-monuments”, like the ones mentioned, and considering the related debate, one may conclude that the topic has been, and still is, an important subject of study and research, as attested – on a theoretical level – by the Programme of the “Collège International de Philosophie de Paris” devoted (from 2011 till 2016) to *Monument. Nonument. Politique de l’image mémorielle, esthétique de la mémoire matérielle*.

In this case, the basic question addressed turns around

la question de la monumentalité comme lieu de convergence de certains axes polaires fondamentaux de l’expérience humaine: temps / espace, mémoire / oubli, présence / représentation, individu / communauté, construction / destruction, vie / mort³⁴.

³² <<http://realtimocities.wikispaces.com/Monument+Against+Fascism,+War,+and+Violence+and+for+Peace+and+Human+Rights> and <http://audreyfm.wordpress.com/tag/monument-against-fascism/>>, 12.07.2015. See Miles 1997, pp. 48-49. Beside the ones quoted by Young, there are more examples of ‘counter-monuments’ that choose to bury the memory or propose a void space. Among the many, I mention the Reflecting Absence winner of the memorial concours in 2004 for the Twin Towers Monument in New York (see Pinotti 2010, pp. 37-38). David Summers argues that «the ruins of the World Trade Center in New York City immediately assumed the name ‘Ground Zero’, the term for the point of atomic denotation. This set the destruction in a very specific succession of modern cataclysm – Hiroshima and Nagasaki – to which Americans themselves have a vexed, contested relationship. Such events ‘take place’ and are unable to be forgotten as places. Even if there is disagreement about how they should be marked, a kind of decorum comes immediately into play. Memorials at these sites have irreducibly different meanings than those away from them». See Summers 2003, p. 24.

³³ Siegel 2005. Also the Hoheisel’s fountain in Kassel (1987) became a symbol of memories repressed, the desire to forget. It is a negative form and, as such, sunk deep into the ground: <<http://08.intervenciones.org/horstprojects.html>>, 12.07.2015.

³⁴ I believe this programme to be much clarifying about our topic. There one can read: «Il y a parfois des moments fondamentaux où le passé se cristallise dans une image, se fixe autour d’un objet sensible et là, en même temps, survit et se transforme selon la constante modification des modalités réceptives de l’objet dans l’histoire. Engagé dans cette dialectique de répétition (de ce qui a été) et reconstruction (de ce qui a toujours été parce que, à proprement parler, n’a jamais été) – ou, en d’autres termes, d’histoire et mythe –, le passé se fige dans *monuments*, au sens propre des mots allemands *Denkmal*, *Mahnmal* (à la lettre “tache”, *Mal*, “de la pensée”, *Denken*, ou “de l’avertissement”, *Mahnen*). En disant “monument”, on pense donc à la tache comme lieu de rencontre et de collision, dans le présent, du passé et du futur. Bref: on tombe ici sur un véritable chronotype de rencontre/collision, valide à la fois pour l’individu et la communauté. Le monument représente donc une trace physiognomiquement inscrite dans le visage des villes, la surface des paysages, le commun sentir comme tissu connectif anonyme de nos expériences. En rappelant le sens original du mot latin *monumentum* (qui vient du verbe *monere*, aussi “faire rappeler” que

Most of the examples of contemporary monuments that implement the criticism of traditional monuments and attempt to provide alternatives to them move between those opposites. They all have in common the awareness of memory which reveals an other essential polarity of contemporary Public Art devoted to memory: that between materiality and immateriality. This is present surely in monuments “to look for”, namely monuments that are almost hidden in the cityscape, like – just to quote a very significant one – the so-called “stumbling block” (*Stolpersteine*) by the Berlin artist Gunter Demnig (fig. 5): the small, cobblestone-sized brass memorial for the victims of National Socialism. Set into the pavement of the sidewalks in front of the buildings where Nazi victims once lived or worked, they call attention both to the individual victim and the scope of the Nazi war crimes. There have been over 40,000 *Stolpersteine* laid in several countries in Europe, making the project the world’s largest memorial. In this way a monument can be spread, thanks to an almost immaterial proposal, in different places at the same time³⁵.

Characterized by both materiality/immateriality has been the *Transparent Monument*, settled on the roof of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in 2006 by the Chinese artist Cai-Guo-Qiang, in dialogue with his own *Untransparent Monument* on the same place. Here a large sheet of glass, at the foot of which replicas of dead birds lie, stands in front of a multipart narrative relief sculpture in stone³⁶.

Pertaining to “immaterial” monuments, also monuments that has been designed to “listen to”, like *Touched echo* by Markus Kison (2007, figg. 6-7), merit to be mentioned. Kison’s is an art installation which takes people right back to a fateful day of the Second World War. It is located at the Brühlsche Terrasse, in Dresden: a 500-meter terrace also known as the Balcony of Europe, which overlooks the Elbe river and the old town on the opposite river bank. Not visible from the outside and identifiable only by four small plaques, it is a place of silent contemplation rather than a monumental memorial. By leaning onto the railing of the terrace with the elbows placed on the railing and the hands covering the ears, visitors are able to hear sounds, transported from the railing via bone conduction, and in particular to hear the noises of howling airplanes and detonating bombs³⁷.

This example can be significantly connected to what Gérard Wajcman wrote about the “invisible monument” (monument against racism) of the German artist

“faire penser”, “aviser”, “mettre en garde”, “exhorter”, “conseiller”, “inspirer” et enfin “prédire” et “annoncer”, cette trace transmet le passé au présent en vue de l’éclosion d’un horizon futur», <<http://www.ciph.org/direction>>, 12.07.2015.

³⁵ <<http://www.stolpersteine.com>>, 12.07.2015. See also Gallo 2012, pp. 280-281.

³⁶ <<http://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2006/cai-guo-qiang>>, 12.07.2015.

³⁷ The position which is necessary to hear the noises resemble people covering their ears to protect them from the deafening noises of the dropped bombs, <<http://www.atlasobscura.com/places/touched-echo>>, 12.07.2015.

Jochen Gerz in Saarbrücken (1993, fig. 8). He stated that for this monument the German word *Mahnmal* was chosen, instead of *Denkmal*. «*Denkmal* è un monumento che saluta il passato che è passato [...] *Mahnmal*, invece, il monumento [...] che deve proteggere il passato, scongiurarne il ritorno»³⁸. The 2146 engraved paving cobblestones, of which the monument consisted, were installed with the inscriptions pressed into the ground, in order not to let them be read.

Questo monumento non offre nulla da vedere [...]. Pone la sparizione e l'oblio *in presenza*. [...] Mostrare l'assenza non è fare storia, bensì realizzare un atto nel presente. [...] Il *Monumento invisibile* impone di non chiudere gli occhi [...]. Ma è un luogo in cui la memoria si pietrifica nella storia, è un oggetto che chiama i soggetti a un atto della memoria. Rende i soggetti dei portatori di memoria e fa di ciascuno un monumento. [...] Ciò corrisponde all'idea che il cambiamento non si produrrà mai attraverso un monumento, bensì attraverso la gente che lo guarda³⁹.

This is, actually, what Young meant as the “counter-monument”. A memorial form that, although provocative and difficult, can give space to memory, a space «between the viewer and his own memory, the place of the memorial in the viewer’s mind, heart, and conscience»⁴⁰. Something that provides, in a certain sense, new elements for reflection on Theodore Adorno’s famous argument that it had become impossible to write lyric poetry after Auschwitz.

Only subsequently, with the rise of Public Art in the 1990s, it has been noted that «whilst the monument as a device of hegemony establishes a national history, so it may also bury a national memory»⁴¹ and even can constitute a

memory-act [...] reminding visitors that memory can be a kind of transport through space in an ongoing present, as well as a transport through time itself. In this way, the memorial remains a process, not an answer, a place that provides time for memorial reflection, contemplation, and learning between departing and arriving⁴².

³⁸ Wajcman 2010, p. 47. 2146 *Steine – Mahnmal gegen Rassismus*, in the named *Square of the Invisible Monument* in Saarbrücken, consists in 2146 engraved paving stones. The inscriptions are the names of 2,146 Jewish cemeteries that were in use in the country before the Second World War. The stones were placed with the inscribed side facing the ground and therefore the inscription is invisible. Wajcman’s essay used the same statement (as to the relationship between *Mahnmal* and *Denkmal*) as the, previously quoted, Programme of the “Collège International de Philosophie de Paris” dedicated to *Monument. Nonument. Politique de l’image mémorielle, esthétique de la mémoire matérielle*.

³⁹ Wajcman 2010, pp. 46-47.

⁴⁰ Young 1999, p. 9.

⁴¹ See Miles 1997, p. 50.

⁴² Young 1999, p. 9. The author mentions as example the Bus Stop, an artwork by Renata Stih and Frieder Schnock (1995) in Berlin: a sort of “non-monument” or “mobile memorial” that «would send visitors out in all directions into Europe-wide matrix of memorial sites» and «remind everyone of the through integration of the terror machinery [itself] within everyday life in Germany from 1933 to 1945».

The polarity materiality/immateriality essentially combines – as one recognizes looking to or else touching or hearing monuments – with the related polarities between presence/absence and persistence/temporality.

4. *Controversial nature and ambiguity of commemoration*

Massive marble or bronze sculpture in contemporary art is sometimes reduced to “dust” – like stated in the exhibition catalogue *Postmonument* (Carrara-Italy, 2010)⁴³ – because

the monument, the expression of a one-sided interpretation of history, the tool of propaganda and the construction of local, national, transnational political identities, a sign set up to indicate conquests and occupations, has been the emblem of authority, of the sovereign state, of dictatorial régimes. In any case it is the fruit of strong power and it challenges eternity. [...] And as such every monument is also always a failure, and carries within it its own end. [...] A toppled monument is a strong image which still strikes and involves us. It is an evident sign that something has changed, and it represents better than any words the force and violence of a revolution. The current symbolic force attached to the monument demonstrates it is still a controversial element⁴⁴.

This became manifest in the exhibition *Homo Urbanus-Homo Sapiens?* (Liga-Amsterdam, 2008) where the public stood in front of huge monuments like air balloons that periodically inflated and deflated. But the controversial nature and ambiguity of commemoration can be detected even more effectively in Lara Favaretto's continuing project: *Monumentary Monument*. This is the title of a series of projects that have in common a linguistic paradox concerning ephemerality and persistence of monuments. In 2009 the Turin based artist build in Trento a *Wall* of sandbags around a monument dedicated to Dante and, in the same year, an other *Monumentary Monument* made part of the exhibition *Making Worlds* of the 53rd Venice Biennial. Here she realized an earthwork installation, *Swamp*, in memory of lost figures, like a writer, a traveller and a chess player⁴⁵. And subsequently in Kassel, for *Documenta XIII* she proposed a new *Monumentary Monument* which consisted in a «double, temporary sculptural gesture that rises up in the public sphere», at the same time in Kassel and in Kabul, creating, in the artist's words, «an uncomfortable

⁴³ “Dust” is the starting point of the exhibition *Postmonument*: «crumbling marble dust and dust of history. The exhibition in fact investigates the current phase of transformation of the attitude to the monument in global society» (Cavallucci 2010a, p. 15).

⁴⁴ Ivi, pp. 14-15. The controversial nature of monuments emerged also from the exhibition *Unmonumental* at the New Museum of Contemporary Art (New York) where the present day was described as an age of crumbling symbols and broken icons. See *Unmonumental* 2007.

⁴⁵ Birnbaum, Volz 2009, p. 48.

balance between its destruction and reconstruction»⁴⁶.

As to the civic aspect, celebration (a notion strictly connected with monuments) is also a way of unifying, collecting, promoting and, to the purpose sometimes contemporary art doesn't need to necessarily resort to immateriality or temporality. In some cases works became similar to traditional monuments and assumed a permanent character like the ceramic Lampedusa's Door *Porta d'Europa*, by Mimmo Paladino (fig. 9). The monument was inaugurated in June 2008 on the Italian island (pertaining to the region of Sicily): an important monument in memory of migrants from Africa deceased at sea, which evokes the positive effects of cross-cultural encounter.

Civic and anthropological memory had also precedently stimulated the historical memory with permanent "anti-monuments", like the memorial Public Artwork in Gibellina: a city destroyed by an earthquake in Sicily in 1968. Here, later the Italian artist Alberto Burri composed a gigantic white *Cretto* lying on the ground like a mantle dried up by the sun, where people can walk through, thus remembering the destroyed city. Burri covered in 1981 the streets of old Gibellina with concrete, preserving the layout of the blocks. Block after block of grey concrete rises from the ground, like the ghosts of buildings. They are high enough to peer over, so that the rest of the graves are always visible, along with the valley stretching out into the distance. The Burri's *Cretto* is a site-specific Land art project but also an example of monument/document with the pioneering attributes of the new Public Art, as it is realized *for* a public domain, rather than *in* the public space⁴⁷. And yet, Public Art does not need to be inevitably ephemeral, invisible, temporary, if those features do not meet the need to preserve the specificity, meaning and history of a place.

As regards memory related to civic, anthropological and even natural disasters, a recent earthquake in Emilia Romagna in 2012 inspired, in a different vein than in Sicily, a very light and subtle operation, but not less effective than the big work by Burri. In a long crack on a wall of an art gallery in Ferrara, the conceptual artist Stefano Sceda grafted small branches full of buds, just like little flowers born from the wound (fig. 10). The artist preserves the scar not to lose the memory, to bring the audience in front of its own open wounds. The cracks in the wall of the gallery become the breeding ground for the symbolic restart.

At this point one can subscribe to what Bourriaud said about the new typologies of art after the nineties:

⁴⁶ Marten 2012, p. 346.

⁴⁷ A basic attribute of the "the new genre Public Art" – developed long after Burri's *Cretto* – is the activation of an "awareness of place" extensively discussed in *Mapping the terrain*, edited by Suzanne Lacy (Lacy 1995), and further studies on the topic. In Burri's artwork a necessary factor is the participation of the people that could characterize the place involved of Gibellina as a "site" rather than a "space" – as pointed out by Suzanne Lacy.

l'œuvre d'art ne se donne donc plus à consommer le cadre d'une temporalité "monumental" et ouverte pour un public universel, mais elle se déroule dans le temps événementiel, pour une audience *appelée* par l'artiste. En un mot, l'œuvre suscite des rencontres et donne des rendez-vous, gérant sa temporalité propre⁴⁸.

In my view this also holds for the different kinds of monumentality we have briefly analyzed in contemporary art.

Touching a recent war memorial, hearing the bombs leaning on the railing of a terrace, or walking on the ghosts of the past, can push people to look with sharper eyes to what we do not have to forget. From this point of view, art works involving "memory" can be still properly defined as something that «sarà stato», «vestigia del tempo a venire invece che del tempo passato»⁴⁹. Thus, monuments in the post modern, or yet, post-monumental times⁵⁰, are not a «contradiction in terms» but devices that can document non-official history and even marginalized stories⁵¹; artifacts made of stone or sound, able to select memory till "immemoriality", if the historical present recalls it.

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⁴⁸ Bourriaud 1998, p. 30.

⁴⁹ Ricci 2010, p. 79, citing from Didi-Huberman 2000.

⁵⁰ Natalicchio 2010, p. 23.

⁵¹ Allen 2010, in Bouwhuis, Schavemaker 2010, p. 156 and Leerssen 2010, *ivi*, p. 132 (about the notion of the monument as a "contradiction in terms"). Allen's essay deals with the interesting issue of representability and visibility of *histoire* and *mémoire* (referring to, among others, Pierre Nora's and Carlo Ginzburg's writings) in connection with the era of the Internet, «where all histories can find a platform» and the screen can become «a home to any memory»: an important topic that could be the subject of a separate study.

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Appendice

Fig.1. Haroun Farocki, *Übertragung [Transmission]*, 2007, video still (55 International Art Exhibition, La Biennale, Venezia, 2013)



Fig. 2. Piero Manzoni, *Base magica*, 1961



Fig. 3. Claes Oldenburg, *Placid Civic Monument*, Central Park New York, 1967



Fig. 4. Jochen and Esther Gerz, *Gegen-Denkmal*, Hamburg, 1986-1993



Fig. 5. Gunter Demnig, *Stolpersteine*, Vienna, 2012



Fig. 6. Markus Kison, *Touched Echo*, Dresden, 2007



Fig. 7. Markus Kison, *Touched Echo*, Dresden, 2007



Fig. 8. Jochen Gerz, *2146 Steine – Mahnmal gegen Rassismus*, Saarbrücken, 1993

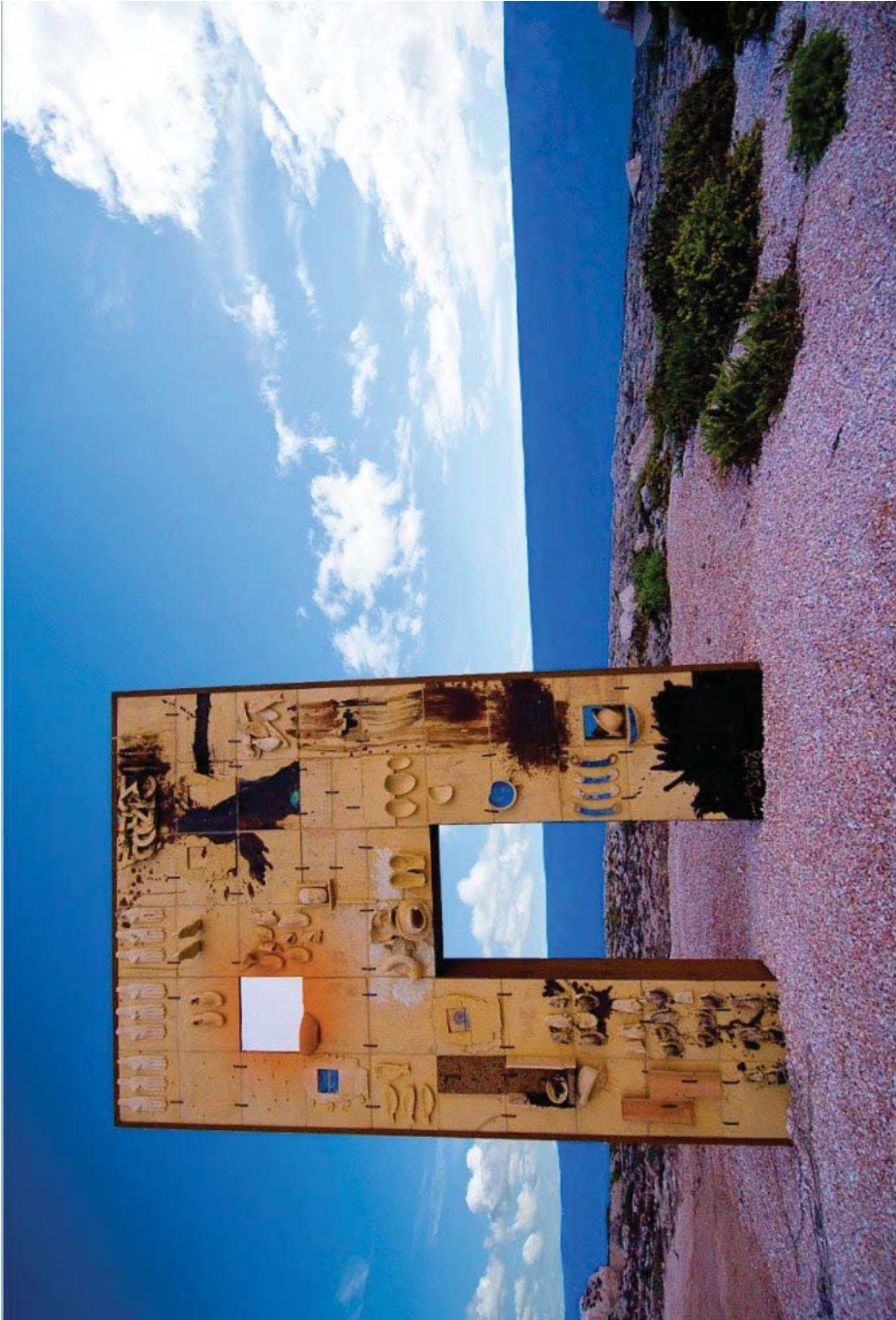


Fig. 9. Mimmo Paladino, *Porta d'Europa*, Lampedusa, 2008

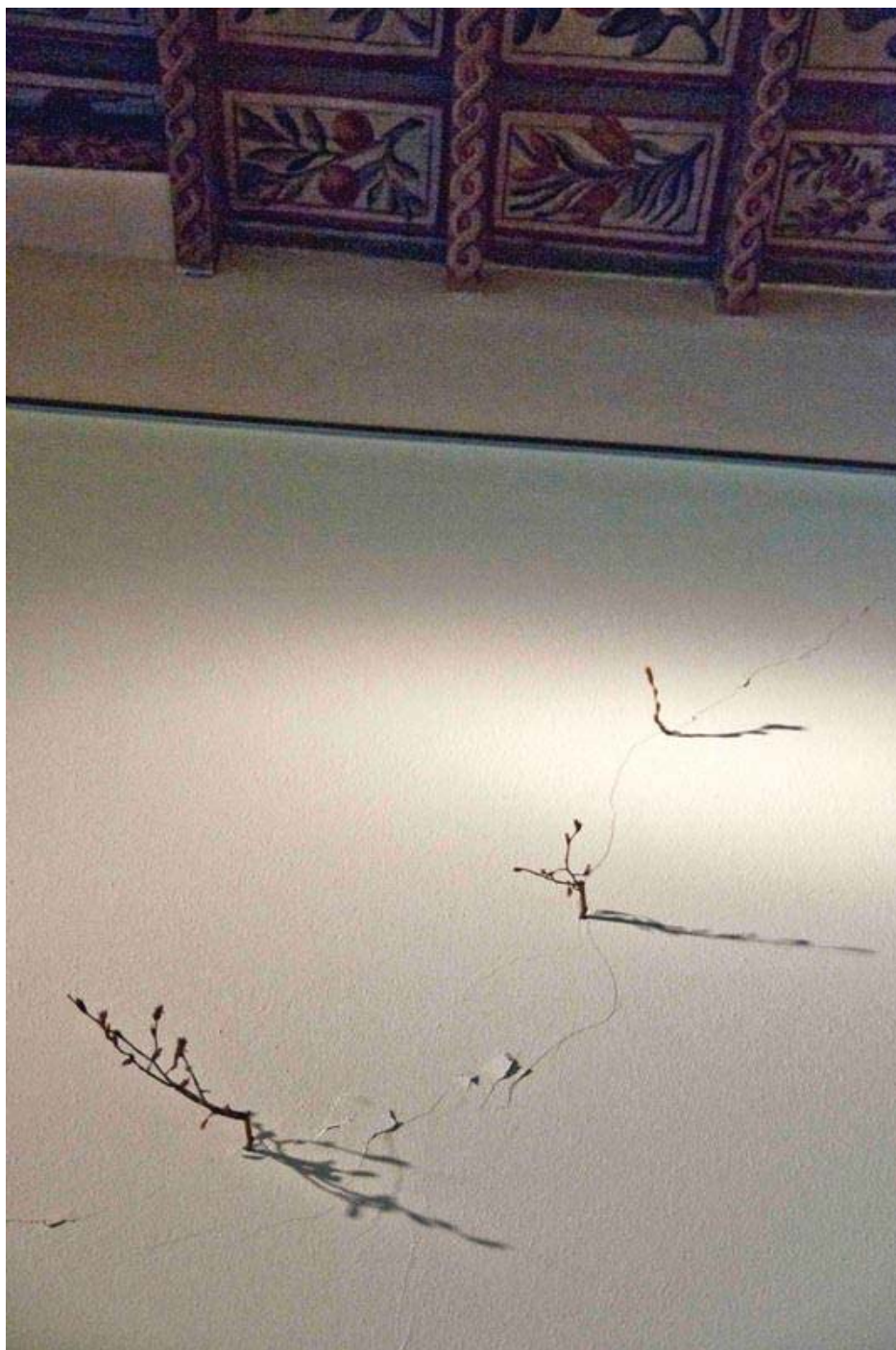


Fig. 10. Stefano-Scheda, *Gemmazione della crepa*, MLB Home Gallery Ferrara, 2012

JOURNAL OF THE SECTION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

Department of Education, Cultural Heritage and Tourism
University of Macerata

Direttore / Editor

Massimo Montella

Texts by

Ada Acovitsioti-Hameau, Viviana Antongirolami, Monica Baldassarri, Stefan Bergh, Anna Boato, Chiara Boscarol, Nicholas Branch, Paola Camuffo, Francesca Carboni, Francesco Carrer, Marta Castellucci, Annalisa Colecchia, Michael R. Coughlan, Alessandra D'Ulizia, Margarita Fernandina Mier, Serafino Lorenzo Ferreri, Vinzia Fiorino, Anna Gattiglia, Marta Gnone, Ted Gragson, Massimiliano Grava, Ana Konestra, David S. Leigh, Giovanni Leucci, Nicola Masini, Mara Migliavacca, Florence Mocci, Manuela Montagnari Kokelj, Carlo Montanari, Massimo Montella, Lionello Morandi, Umberto Moscatelli, Rosa Pagella, Eleonora Paris, Giovanni Battista Parodi, Juan Antonio Quirós Castillo, Enzo Rizzo, Francesco Roncalli, Alessandro Rossi, Maurizio Rossi, Dimitris Roubis, Enrica Salvatori, Gaia Salvatori, Fabiana Sciarelli, Francesca Sogliani, Ludovico Solima, Anna Maria Stagno, Michel Tarpin, Rita Vecchiattini, Sonia Virgili, Valentino Vitale, Kevin Walsh, Giuseppina Zamparelli.

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