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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, *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, *Społeczne 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 know-ledge 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

<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

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<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.

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<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. Hirsowicz, 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-

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<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. Abousnoug, 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:] *Spółeczeństwo 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 cooperate 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

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<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, Citoyen”, [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 Philipphof 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 Philipp-hof 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 Philipphof. 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/2015/10/28/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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