The Praxis of Horst Hoheisel: the Countermonument in an Expanded Field

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THE PRAXIS OF HORST HOHEISEL: THE COUNTERMONUMENT IN AN EXPANDED FIELD

A Thesis Presented

By

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ABSTRACT

THE PRAXIS OF HORST HOHEISEL: THE COUNTERMONUMENT IN AN EXPANDED FIELD

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This paper examines the work of German artist Horst Hoheisel in Latin-America. I open the conversation by including Hoheisel’s provocative participation in the 2005 memory debates in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Here, I introduce the nature of Hoheisel’s reasoning and the dialectical self-reflectiveness that is at work in his artifacts. In each project, I look for the way in which Hoheisel lays down the “memorialistic substance” of a specific site together with the self-critical rationality that characterizes his creation. The second part of this essay attempts to construct the theoretical parameters for the expansion of the definition of the countermonument. This expanded definition attempts to unlock the countermonument and the memorial from the therapeutic mechanics of repetition -at the level of the subject- and release its possibilities vis-à-vis the potentiality of the event of language. Using the insights of Alain Badiou and Giorgio Agamben, I discuss the work of two contemporary artists (Jochen Gerz and Krzysztof Wodiczko) who experiment with the use of space and language as a way to invent a new type of countermonument, one that is based on the notion of an active memory rather than a cathartic one.
Key words:

Memory, Latin-America, aesthetics, praxis, countermonument, memorial, Horst Hoheisel, Jochen Gerz, Krzysztof Wodiczko
PREFACE

This essay is an attempt to draw a cartography of Horst Hoheisel’s works in Latin-America. As with any manuscript, this paper has changed directions in relation to the sources available, and the questions that aroused while it was being written. The pieces that I have included do not represent the sum of his work; I have left out earlier projects in Venezuela and more recent ones in Cambodia. This is not a totalizing critique of Hoheisel’s critical praxis, but just the first attempt to bring some of his pieces together under one space. I also see this monograph as a prospective study towards a broader appraisal of his international work and related artistic production that doesn’t necessarily follows under the label of “art of memory.” I decided to open the conversation by including Hoheisel’s provocative participation (Empty Box) in the development of memory debates in Buenos Aires. This presentation serves as a great opportunity to introduce the reader to nature of Hoheisel’s reasoning and the dialectical self-reflectiveness that is at work in his artifacts; later, at some points in the essay I refer to his statements in this section in order to clarify possible impasses that arise when explaining his main project. I have abstained from developing a larger commentary on Hoheisel and other countermonumentalists regarding their work in Germany because they have been thoroughly analyzed by James E. Young and others. Rather, this essay invested more time and attention in exploring the nature of the relations of memory as they unfold in the works of Horst Hoheisel in Latin-America. In the Brazil workshop “Sao Paulo, a city without memory?” I try to investigate the particularities of Hoheisel’s idea of overlapping memories (personal and collective) in relation to his unorthodox approach to produce subjective urban memories. That section is mainly preoccupied with the question
of method and the procedures that punctuate his ideal processes of reviving useful memories. The following sections “The Art of Memory: Installations at Memoria Antonia” and “Maria Antonia Building (The Language of Ruins)” both within the framework of his 2001 invitation to Sao Paulo, concentrate more on the aesthetic principles that guided his proposals and serve as a space where I elaborate on the idea of the linguistification of the object as an opportunity to recover traces of the past. In the discussion of the Argentinean collective project “La Química de la Memoria,” I try to bring Hoheisel closer to the figure of the archeologist and critical historian. The work of the Chilean survivor Roberto Zaldivar allowed me to compare Hoheisel’s projects using a historical-materialist interpretation. Following Walter Benjamin’s conception of history and the oppressed past, I argue that these two archeologists of a revelatory past perform an ethical call to break the hegemony of invisible historical determinants. The project in Ayacucho closes the section on Latin America. Since the project is still unfinished my discussion is limited to the aesthetic composition of the structure and its potential as a site that works in accord with different ethnic and linguistic traditions of mourning. The last section is an attempt to evaluate the category of the countermonumental as we step into the second decade of this century. We should remember that the paradigm of the countermonumental –as first outlined by James Young- was shaped and defined by specific historical circumstances (West Germany in the early and mid-80’s). More than twenty years had passed since. Today, the memory industry, as a much more sophisticated apparatus, has developed multiple ways to standardize and institutionalize practices such as the aesthetization of mourning in sculptural and architectural spaces. Also, in our globalized condition, the memorial has to operate in relation to different
types of commemorations and sadly respond to new tragedies. Thus, I propose to begin a conversation by redefining the parameters of the countermonument in view of these new circumstances. In some of Hoheisel’s projects I see a move towards an ampler reading of the act of “remembering,” not one that is locked in a psychoanalytic language of repetition, temporal delay, and return, but one that is opening up to an incorporation of the event of non-predetermined language and its potential to create a space of true dialogue. Naturally, Hoheisel is not alone in this exploration, and new proposals that successfully codify the space as a site of productive understanding need to be analyzed in the subsequent years. The last part of the monograph investigates the preconditions to outline an expanded definition of the countermonumental. Bringing other projects into discussion, I proceed to elaborate on the philosophical thought of Agamben in order to understand the countermonumental as a site where new initiatives of an active memory are being redefined. The first step towards the new active countermonument is an emphasis on language and the construction of spaces that could hold the conditions for something radically new to come forth. That something new is the potentiality that is at work within the logic of language itself. Through the creation of these new countermonuments, I argue, a new active memory could be channelized and coded into innovative ways that allow the building not so much of monuments and memorials that remember the past, but spaces that could serve as site of prevention of future tragedies.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCING HORST HOHEISEL

And with stratagems/Devices make war
(Proverbs 20:18)

Each behavior and each form of human living is never prescribed by a specific biological vocation, nor is it assigned by whatever necessity; instead, no matter how customary, repeated, and socially compulsory, it always retains the character of a possibility; that is, it always puts at stake living itself.
—Giorgio Agamben

The culture of memory and the industry of memory go hand in hand. From kitsch commodification to professional scholar production, from international commissions of truth and reconciliation to the cynical tourism of memory, the eluding term circulates as one more particle in the symbolic logic of our contemporary condition. And it does not only appear within sophisticated academic circles in which we must exercise our self-reflexive critical gesture, but in the discourse that permeates everyday experience. On the scale of the nation-state, struggles over public memory in relation to genocide, historical trauma, have enabled the proliferation of monuments, memorials, museums, and commemorative sites. Official apologies coming from modern governments acknowledging past atrocities together with incentives for a democratic representation invite artists to design spaces of remembrance and commemoration that have played a key part in the development of this industry of memory. On that note, this paper itself could be seen as one more end-product that illustrates of the workings of this machinery. That’s why I attempt to analyze the dialectical thinking that leads the creative production of Horst Hoheisel. As an artist and an activist of memory for more than 25 years, Hoheisel is well aware of the nature and functioning of the memory industry, its
contradictions, its internal logic and its great malleability.\(^1\) Thus, he has tried to overcome the space of the commodity through the use of many mediums: in some of his pieces Hoheisel opts for immateriality as a way to initiate debate and conversation about past tragedies, in other instances Hoheisel appeals to iconoclastic gestures that instead of prolonging the instrumentalization of memory, serve as radical negations of the traditional ways of commemoration and its weaknesses.\(^2\) In his eclectic approach to method and medium, Hoheisel successfully begins private and public processes of memory that assist a communitarian as well as a personal task. In his projects in Europe, for the most part Holocaust memorials, he tries to find new avenues in order to avoid a facile kind of *Wiedergutmachung*; that is, he constantly seeks new ways to commemorate without implying a sort of restoration or mending of the memory of those murdered. In Latin-America, his position as a foreign artist places him in an uncomfortable situation. This positioning has forced Hoheisel to devise alternate ways to start processes of memory without becoming entangled in the antagonistic role of an “expert of memory.” This paper is divided in two parts. The first pages are dedicated to study some pieces of Horst Hoheisel in Germany and in some countries of Latin-America and provide an interpretation of each of his “processes of memory.” In each project I look for the way in which Hoheisel lays down the “memorialistic substance” of a specific site together with the self-critical rationality that characterizes his creation. The second part attempts to unlock the countermonument and the memorial from the therapeutic mechanics of repetition -at the level of the subject- and release it to further expand its possibilities vis-

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\(^1\) See appendix A
\(^2\) It seems that Hoheisel works in accord with Hegel’s famous dictum “negation is creation.” Although some of his countermonuments and memorials allow for this kind of reading, we should be careful not to ascribe the work of Hoheisel to major schools of art in the twentieth century that used the logic of active nihilism as a guiding principle.
à-vis the use of language, spaces of non-determined action and iteration. It seeks to overcome the contemporary tendency of approaching memory using trauma as the central category of discourse. In this second part I discuss the work of two contemporary artists that experiment with the use of space and language as a way to invent a new type of countermonument.

Empty Box

Horst Hoheisel is a self-proclaimed catalyzer of memory. His projects tend to displace themselves from a certain poesis that is found only in the regime of the aesthetics, towards the problematic threshold that separate ethics and memory in the public space.

As an organizational strategy, I was suggested to accommodate Horst Hoheisel’s work in the format of an “arch” in order to treat his work as a totality where the reader could be easily walked through an orderly arrangement of interventions. But after carefully examining his production, I realized that this geometrical proposition would disfigure the richness of his work: I prefer the erratic line of an insecure trace. In his “Reflections about the Art of Memory and the Memory of Art” – a paper presented in Buenos Aires in 2005—Hoheisel forcefully interpellated today’s culture of memory. “Everything produced by artists to remember the crimes of the past is wrong, including my own work!” Horst self-reflectively critiques the paradoxical nature of our contemporaneity; the cynical impulse that permeates our multicultural hedonism, the relations of intersubjectivity and commemoration that reside within the logic of the marketplace, and

4 Horst Hoheisel. "Algunas Reflexiones Acerca del Arte de la Memoria y la Memoria del Arte." Políticas de la Memoria: Tensiones en la Palabra y la Imagen. Ed. Sandra Lorenzano and Ralph Buchenhorst. (Mexico, D.F.: Universidad del Claustro de Sor Juana, 2007), 121. Translation is mine. All translations are mine unless noted otherwise.
other tensions that are mediated by the artist. In the same letter, Horst reminds us of that critical sentence that haunted the process of the construction of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin during the 1990’s. ‘‘There is no business like Shoah business.’ That was a very unsettling phrase. It was like a caustic arrow that was shot from all angles, academic and vernacular alike, perhaps with some justification, and targeted the proliferation of institutions and entrepreneurs that functioned under the reasoning of maximum profit in order to sell the acceptability of the commodification process of a topical subject.”

He laments, “I too participated in this business with my commemorative works. And this contribution for this book belongs as well to this monumental business (that’s why I extended for so long this letter and I write it now with a certain malaise for the deadline, -what a word in this specific context!).”

What becomes clear here is that Hoheisel’s critical stance towards the business of memory is reflexive and paradoxical. As we will see through this study Hoheisel is constantly struggling to remain faithful to certain aesthetic and ethical parameters, while simultaneously activating processes of useful memory. Hoheisel’s words should not lead us the conclusion that what we find here is an attitude that characterizes the “guilty” but self-congratulating intellectual, artist, writer, etc. Not at all; Horst clarifies, “The more I work in this commemorative business, the more aware I become of the problem; memory disappears with commemoration! I try to find a new set of media in order to avoid the spectrum of the commemorative business. I build anti-monuments, negative monuments; I try to start up new processes of memory from below.” He adds, “As an artistic catalyzer, I restrict

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5 Hoheisel, 121.
6 Hoheisel, 122.
myself to create the adequate situations from which processes of monumentalization
could emerge. If perhaps I succeed in achieving this, some shards of a memory could be
recovered: blurry images amid the fog of disintegration and forgetfulness.”

Indeed, we can see that some of Hoheisel’s pieces effectively circumvent the pitfalls of
monumentalization and nostalgic memory. What is more, his projects radically initiate
fruitful conversations that on one first plane allow for the reactivation of old memories,
and secondarily expand the discursive space into the realm of politics.

Figure 1: Horst Hoheisel’s “Empty Box” for “La Química de la Memoria” Photo: Courtesy Horst Hoheisel

One of his most captivating proposals, where one can see this reasoning at work, can be
found in his collaboration for the 2005 project “La Química de la Memoria.” In this
installation, survivors and relatives of the victims of the Argentine Military Dictatorship
were encouraged to bring personal objects that would remind them of a specific time

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7 Hoheisel, 122.
8 I discuss this installation later in the section “La Química: counter-narratives in motion.”
during this period. These items were later placed on two large tables and with time they began to form relations (or reactions, in the sense of chemical reactions) of tension, antagonism and correspondence all within the mnemic framework. As part of his project of advancing the “processes of memory from below,” Hoheisel brought an empty white box. This box or cube had an inscription on the inside that read, “This is not my story. That’s why I bring an empty box.” Predictably, this empty box aroused a good deal of debate in the Argentinean post-dictatorship debates. For many, the empty box was a smart way of addressing the Argentinean tragedy. University of Buenos Aires professor Maria Antonia Sanchez reviewed the gesture: “An empty box: a poignant paradox. Our society as an echo chamber of disappearance (...) this void can be seen as a metonym for our society.” With this iconoclastic strategy Hoheisel was able to interrogate the Argentinean circles of memory and activism, while at the same time surpassing the condition of outsider and locating himself in the place of a self-conscious catalyzer of memory. The use of the empty box and its message can be read as a binary gesture that irradiates a creative violence. He is always attentive to remind us that his role is not signed under the authority of an expert of memory. With his voided gift, Hoheisel seems to be saying “here I offer you in a double negating gesture what my precarious condition allows me to.” Equally fascinating, is that his box is able to separate the "imposition" that is inherent to the act of giving, (or the persuasion of an acceptance) from his own gift to the project. The negating object of memory, or better, a non-memory object encapsulates the self-canceling dialectic that one can see as a constant in Hoheisel’s work. His pieces work within the realm of the paradoxical and as such are able to cancel the literalness of

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10 Sánchez, 4.
any representation (or sometimes themselves, literally) while negating the narratives of an official memory. In this case, the condition of a foreigner enters the equation of representation and memory, and problematizes his praxis even more.\(^{11}\)

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**The Countermonumental: Early Stages**

Before attempting a comprehensive examination of the memorialistic practice of Horst Hoheisel in Latin America, I revise some earlier projects that defined his conceptual and dialectical thinking. Here, I elaborate a short cartography of the processes that have expanded and delimitated the discursive practices of the countermonumental. Also, I try to localize Hoheisel’s production within the context of other West German memorialists working in the last decades of the 20\(^{th}\) century. In his now classic *Texture of Memory*, James Young framed the most recent modes of carrying out a commemorative practice in Germany. The thesis rests on the argument that since the theory and practice of the monumental as such has been so unabashedly exploited by the totalitarian governments of the twentieth century, the new generation of German artists painfully aware of their government’s policies and the tortuous complexity of the nation and its past, has found a new avenue that allows commemoration under a self-reflexive thinking. However, it is necessary to remember that the German artists and sculptors that resorted to the innovative reasoning of the countermonument were produced in part by the specific circumstances that marked the cultural landscape in late 70’s and 80’s: a period that facilitated an attitude towards commemoration and public space. But the politics of commemoration (as the object of commemoration itself and its choice) are subject of an

\(^{11}\) As I discuss later, his projects in non-western countries, take this problem to the extreme by incorporating into the logic of his creative reasoning his “point of enunciation.”
aggressive flux in the contemporary order and increasingly accelerated under the conditions of late finance-capitalism. If the projects that resisted the monumental and subverted the hegemonic dominance of an officially-sanctioned historical narrative during the 80’s used the media of sculpture, installation and other types of configurations, during the last decade or so this new “landscape of memory” has shifted and materialized using a different medium. As commentators have recently noted, the preferable mode of memorial artistic production in a postmodern globalized world increasingly leans towards Architecture. The proliferation since the early 90’s of the museum -as the medieval cathedral of our time- and as a more recent example, the role of landscape architecture in specific sites such as the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin as well as the 9/11 memorial Reflecting Absence in Manhattan speak of this transition from sculpture to architecture.12

For now let’s turn our attention to the conditions that provoked a change of paradigm in the aesthetics of funeral architecture. Under the banner of “countermonument,” Young gathered some artists who attempted to deconstruct the manifold gestures of traditional monuments and sought to explore hidden tonalities always at work in their proposals. He recorded “Artists like Jochen Gerz, Norbert Radermacher and Horst Hoheisel [among others] contemptuously reject the traditional forms and reasons for public memorial art, those spaces that either console viewers or redeem such tragic events or indulge in a facile kind of Wiedergutmachung or purport to

mend the memory of a murdered people.” Their praxis was characterized by a concern with the ethical and as such, with the task of releasing the medium from its associations with haunting pasts. The countermonument breaks certain tenets that have dominated the operability of the traditional monument and in their performance as tangible centers of memory they attempt to “provoke rather than console, to change rather than to stay fixed; they aim not to be everlasting but to disappear, not to be ignored by passersby but to demand interaction. [Countermonuments] do not to remain pristine but invite their own violation, do not to accept graciously the burden of memory but to throw it back at the town’s feet. Thus the countermonument illustrates the possibilities and limitations of all memorials everywhere.” Jochen and Esther Gerz’s *Monument against Fascism* was perhaps one of the first memorials that tried to operate within the parameters described above. Designed in 1986 for the city of Hamburg’s invitation to create a “Monument against Fascism War and Violence” their work is an ingenuous response that circumvents the intrinsic tensions and contradictions of the monument as a medium. Their *Gegen-Denkmal* (literally, counter- or against- monument) attempts to disclose a new dynamic that sets the object of art and the spectator in closer planes of performance by paying attention to the human scale, the possibility of multiple angles of observation and the periodic lowering into the ground as a symbolic victory over the phantasms of the past. The Gerzes’ monument gestured towards some of the characteristics that broadly defined what would be the “countermonumental,” and at the same time successfully incorporated their two greater concerns into a project that later inspired many to speculate with their

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13 James Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*, (New Haven: Yale, 1993), 28. These are by no means the only artists of memory that explore the negative as a site of creative speculation, Karol Broniatowski, Ralf Sroka, and the triad of architects Hirsch-Lorch-Wandel -all with works in Berlin- are a few among others.  
14 Young, 29.
own coordinates of the concept. Their first concern was how to commemorate such worthy sentiments (“a countermonument against fascism war and violence and for peace and human rights”) without ameliorating the memory altogether. Secondly, they feared the medium as such: how to build an anti-fascist monument without resorting to the authority, and the unilateral narratives that operate intrinsically in a typical monument? Their countermonument effectively worked under those conditions. Furthermore, it helped to configure a larger landscape of local debates, public conversations that revolved around contested politics, and questions of individual and collective memory. Most importantly the structure can be thought of as a propitious space that opens the possibility of language by exchanging the materiality of art with the transmissibility of communication.

Another German proposal that materialized during the 80’s was Norbert Radermacher’s interventions in the public space. Taking cues from the American post minimalism generation and specifically the social tonalities of conceptual art, (Jenny Holzer, Barbara Kruger, Krzysztof Wodiszcko), Rademacher’s projects want to appropriate certain sites, sometimes banal, and sometimes contested and problematic. Using photographic installations, the artist attempts to revisit parts of the urban cartography that seem innocent from any association with the Fascist past. When a distracted passerby activates a movement sensor that triggers these images onto specific urban surfaces, the contemporary present becomes a porous substance that is permeated

15 James Young, Memory’s edge After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture (New Haven: Yale, 2000), 130.
16 I will expand this point about the immateriality of spaces open for a non-predetermined event of language, in the last section of this article, “Countermonuments: towards an expanded definition.”
17 Radermacher is not alone in his use of the projector as a tool to revive problematic traces of the past in the city: Shimon Attie and Hoheisel himself have worked with this medium in their “sites of memory.” For Shimon Attie see Peter Muir, Shimon Attie: Writing on the Wall, (London: Ashgate, 2010) and James Young’s At Memory’s edge.
by an uncanny flash. Radermacher’s proposal departs from the sphere of the monument and the memorial as concrete pieces that work in the public space, and in turn, points towards a more “artistic” conceptualization of his practice. In Berlin, in the area surrounding the former site of the KZ Aussenlager, a former satellite concentration camp of Sachsenhausen, Radermacher installed the moving projection of a brief text narrating the history of the site’s now invisible past; the text slowly moves from one surface into the next, walls, trees, until it arrives and settles down on the sidewalk. “The lettering of this text is beamed first onto the crowns of the trees, where one can see the text but cannot quite read it. Slowly, it moves down to the wire fence until the words become clearer. The text is then projected onto the sidewalk where we can read it quite clearly. It remains for one minute before slowly fading out.”18 The text is a simple reminder of the layering in the urban palimpsest. “From 1944 - 1945 there was here a satellite department of the Concentration-camp Sachsenhausen.”19 Radermacher’s installation expands on the Gerzes’ countermonument aesthetic and releases it in a more flexible and less figurative way as an invasive and uncomfortable reminder of the city’s past. It brings together the ideas of the ephemeral, the problematization of every day urban spaces, and the ethos of a specific notion of remembrance. Projecting these slides, Radermacher seems to be calling on the strollers of this part of the city for the urgency of remembering. His installations remind us about the delicate nature of memory, ultimately dependent on our will to rehearse mnemonic fragments.

Coming from a non-artistic training, Horst Hoheisel has been able to navigate distinct spheres within the larger field of memory and in his later projects has explored

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18 Norbert Radermacher, quoted in Young’s Texture of Memory, 41.
the opening of the work-of-art itself into these intersections. Like many of the so-called countermonument artists, his practice began in the mid 80’s in West Germany and since then, it has morphed in ways that challenge the conception of a coherent artistic production. Carefully codifying his proposals under different media, always attentive of the preoccupations with the monumental, and the intricacies and symbolism of the vernacular, Hoheisel develops an aesthetic of memory and an ethical method whose substance is visible in his projects, both built and un-built. Perhaps, Horst becomes a master of the countermonumental due to his sensible approach of commemoration: as I have pointed before, his practice in many of his pieces operates at the level of a dialectical reason that is able, through a self-reflexive operation, to cancel out the well-known problems that inhabit the task of representation while simultaneously places itself (and himself) in an uncomfortable position. In his 2005 press release that accompanied a provocative proposal in Buenos Aires, this double self-effacing gesture reaches the threshold of questioning the telos itself. By adhering to this logic in many of his proposals outside of Germany, (Brazil, Argentina Venezuela, Peru, Cambodia) Horst has successfully advanced a dialogical process outside the countries that lead the resurgence of the cultural industry of memory. In the next sections, I describe some of his proposals in Germany that came into existence from the late 80’s until the 2000’s, and that I considered key in order to understand first the actualization of his philosophical preoccupations as outlined, and secondly, the dynamics of his Latin American projects in

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20 For more on Hoheisel see James Young’s *Texture of Memory*. Also, Siobhan Kattago’s *Ambiguous Memory: The Legacy of the Nazi past in Postwar Germany*, (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2001) and Karen Till’s *The New Berlin: Memory, Politics, Place*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005). These works examine Hoheisel’s production in Germany only. Also, Bill Niven’s “The Holocaust Memorial” in his *Facing the Nazi Past*, (London: Routledge, 2002), while not including Hoheisel specifically, offers a helpful panoramic review of the “master-debate” in Berlin regarding Holocaust memorials.
a wider and clearer context. These are the Aschrott Brunnen (Aschrott Fountain) Kassel, 1985; the Zermahlene Geschichte (Crushed History) Weimar, 1997-2003; and A Memorial to a Memorial Buchenwald, 1995.
CHAPTER 2

HORST HOHEISEL’S WORK IN GERMANY: A SELECTION

Negative-form Aschrott Fountain

Hoheisel’s first public piece, and one of the most impacting ones, was born out of a very concrete problem that he perceived in the collective memory of Kassel’s residents. It is only by tracing the conditions of its coming into existence and the disturbing distortions of memory that one can understand the reasoning of the artist and the adoption of the negative form as a viable medium. In 1987, he completed his negative-form Aschrott Fountain. However, the process was punctuated by approximately two years of intense debates that circulated around the reconstruction of the site. The story of the Aschrott fountain begins in 1908 when Sigmund Aschrott, a Jewish entrepreneur from Kassel, presented the city with the original fountain. But with the rise of the Nazis, in 1939, the fountain was dismantled because it was a “Jewish gift” and the remaining pieces catered away. After the war, a second fountain was built and placed in the original Aschrott site and thus the story of the fountain was thought to be settled definitively. But in 1984, and as a response to the awkward recollection of the older local residents who believed that the destruction of the fountain was caused by English bombers “the Society for the Rescue of Historical monuments proposed that some sort of fountain and its history be replaced and that it recall all the founders of the city especially Sigmund Aschrott.”

Hoheisel, trained as a forester and specialized in tropical habitats, recalls his shock when he read the new proposal for the site, “At the beginning the administration wanted to

21 Young, 97.
build a monument for all victims of the city, a big boulder with two lines of flowing water to remember all those fallen in the war, the innocents and the perpetrators. All together in one memorial; I read all this in a local newspaper and decided to write to the mayor and the curator of the memorial.” In the proposal for restoration, Hoheisel rejected the idea of restoring the original building “like if nothing had actually happened” and also the more aesthetized idea of arranging a set of fragments and constructing a sort of post-modern installation of ruins. The first wave of opposition to his almost unacceptable proposal (that is, unacceptable and controversial in Western Germany during the mid-80’s) came from those who indeed accepted public commemoration of the victims of the genocide and the war in general, but refused to concede such a central space in the hierarchy of the city. According to Hoheisel, they offered some space in a cemetery or in the suburbs because these are places to remember safely with no major political implications. Opponents to the memorial argued “this is too big, it belongs to a park,” and others condemned the negative gesture and added, “yes; we will build a fountain, but it will follow the original blueprints.” Then, Hoheisel deeply frustrated with the conservative bureaucracy of the city, ran to the local archives where he located the registers, pictures and addresses of some of the victims, and returned to the administration office. He answered, “When you bring back one of these persons alive I will be the first to set the cornerstone of your fountain.”

22 Horst Hoheisel, Andrea Giunta, Elda Cerrato and Horácio González “Arte y Memoria” Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, (Catedra Libre de Derechos Humanos, Foro No. 9 2004), 2.
In his remarks about the negative-form monument, Hoheisel places more importance in the antagonism that the countermonument sparks rather than the banal remarks about the piece as “good art.” Simultaneously, and I will argue, more importantly, in the construction of the space as a possibility of non-predetermined language. Hoheisel explains the concept of his negative-form monument, “I have designed the fountain as a mirror image of the old one, sunk beneath the old place in order to rescue the history of this place as a wound and as an open question, to penetrate the consciousness of the Kassel citizens so that such things never happen again.”24 The radical gesture of negation that is at work in the fountain is the materialization of his thought that is constantly trying to find paradoxical non-solutions.

24 Hoheisel, quoted in Young’s *At Memory’s Edge*, 98.
Crushed History

In this memorial/demolition/performance the radical gesture of negation reaches unparalleled extents. Realized in the city of Weimar in the Year of Culture “Weimar 1999,” the “memorial” strives to bring to a completion the “demolishing ethos” that has operated in Hoheisel’s previous works. This project can be conceived also as the materialization of the creative destruction that was displayed in Hoheisel’s famous proposal for the 1995 Competition for “Berlin’s Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe.” For that competition he explained that “it was impossible to commemorate the destruction of a people with the construction of yet another edifice; he in turn, would mark one destruction with another destruction.”

Thus, he proposed to blow up the Brandenburg Gate; grind its stone into dust, and spread the remains over the former site. The proposal seemed to respond to some of the difficult issues that had worry the jury throughout the process, namely the inadequacy of the medium as we know it traditionally to commemorate the victims of the fascist past. However, the German government or for that matter any government would not sanction such iconoclastic move so easily.

Although the Brandenburg Gate proposal never materialized in the original site where Hoheisel conceived the work, a few years later the opportunity to demolish history appeared under more favorable circumstances. In the early 90’s the city of Weimar approved the construction of a new building that would be located underground for storing the Thuringian State Archives. However, two old buildings stood in the way: the command barracks and a provisional prison which the Gestapo built in 1936. With a

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25 Young, 90.
26 For a detailed account of the Weimar demolishing history project see Hanno Loewy’s “Identity and Emptiness: Reflections about Hoheisel’s Negative Memory and Yearning for Sacrifice.” "Kunst2-
green light from the municipality, Hoheisel, in cooperation with architect Andreas Knitz, proceeded in their demolition of the traces of the past. In 1997 the artists together with a demolition team arrived at the former Gestapo offices and in a few weeks the old buildings were reduced to rubble. Later, the volume of the remaining fragments was scattered in an area that delimits the perimeter of the former buildings.

The project is not only based on the imperative of demolition and remembrance (taking place in a larger plane where this memory work is conducted) rather, as Hoheisel puts it, the key is to take advantage of this intersection of circumstances and turn the demolition into a performance. But what kind of performance? One featuring bulldozers, containers, and debris? The internal reasoning of the project is explained under a very precise geometry: first, to destroy a place of torture and later to document and save that destruction. The performance produced a new structure with the remains: a new place of remembrance, a site to remember -from negativity- those that are gone. The destruction was documented, the remaining materials of the building were crushed and turned into wood chips and masonry granulates. Then, the demolished remains of the two buildings were spread over so that visitors could further crush them with their feet. As visitors “enter” the memorial, that is, as they walk on the layer of the remaining pieces of stone and concrete they engage with the memory work. But it is hard to understand the nature of the object of commemoration in such a space, where a radical horizontality defines not a negative memorial but an open space free of secondary objects that usually serve as consoling (therapeutic) or instructing (didactic) structures. In their press release Hoheisel and Knitz admit of an awkward technique at work in this specific site, one that

27 Loewy, Hanno. “Kunst2-1.”
seems odd to some visitors but that is effective in formulating the preparedness of
dialogue and overcoming the boundaries of repetition in trauma:

By no means a conventional memorial, but certainly one that will invite the
viewer to engage actively in an act of remembrance by pointing in silent
admonition to the documents of the archives: Goethe’s ministerial
correspondence lying cheek to cheek with Bauhaus files and the
Buchenwald card index system. The Crushed History will be crushed on
under the steps of the staff, visitors and users of the archive.\textsuperscript{28}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{crushed_history}
\caption{Horst Hoheisel and Andreas Knitz “Crushed History” Photo: Courtesy Horst Hoheisel}
\end{figure}

The “work” is underneath. The work is a blanket of crushed history on which participants
perform their mourning.

\textsuperscript{28} Loewy, Hanno. “Kunst2-1.”
A Memorial to a Memorial at Buchenwald

After the reunification of Germany many lieu de memoire such as monuments, memorials, museums, and dates of commemoration were reevaluated new administration’s cultural policies. The Buchenwald concentration camp (Konzentrationslager Buchenwald), a site that testifies of the instable dynamics of memory and politics, is one of these spaces of commemoration. Here, monuments and memorials configure a rather tense but rich landscape of political memory. First, the Buchenwald concentration camp served as a platform to launch an impressive complex where the SED -informed by a communist weltanschauung- attempted to represent the Nazi past. The SED construction, plagued by lack of resources and factional disputes, was finally completed in 1958 and became part of the official narrative that the GDR carefully crafted. But the processes of memory are never homogeneous or one-dimensional. As we have seen, the lines that define the movements of memory along time and space are marked by contingency and counter-narratives. Only eight days after the camp was liberated in April 1945, the first monument was erected by the political prisoners that survived their internment. A much more austere structure (that is, in comparison with the wide plazas and ample open spaces of the Eastern German “monumental park”), the monument was a 30 ft. tall granite obelisk that marked the place and the number of those killed: “KLB - 51,000.” Later in 1961, the obelisk had to be relocated and the site where it stood was left open: the prisoner’s monument was gone and with it the memory of its existence. Subsequently, other groups have reclaimed their stake in the battle for memory and victimization at Buchenwald. The former camp has become a particular theatre where the many constituencies that suffered and die at the
hands of the Nazis struggle to find some kind of artifact that would permit the continuous working of their interests and their capitalization of memory. At Buchenwald the visitor can observe the first memorial in recognition of the suffering of the Romany and Sinti under the Nazi regime; as well as the memorial that honors the Jewish victims who were forced to work in the quarry: a memorial that uses the same stones that the prisoners carried as a prime medium. This panorama was further enriched when in 1995 the director of the Buchenwald museum asked Horst Hoheisel to memorialize the first monument, the monument to the liberation built by the camp’s former inmates in 1945. In other words, the new politics of memory called for a revitalization of the specific narrative of the prisoners’ suffering. In the project of reunification the state employed all strategic narratives to articulate an official line of meaning: new administration, new past.

Figure 4: Horst Hoheisel, “A memorial to a memorial” Buchenwald. Photo: Courtesy Horst Hoheisel

In Buchenwald, Horst proposed an even simpler way to remember the obelisk. A Memorial to a Memorial a rather redundant title, or better, the Warm Memorial as it has been informally called, consists of a representation of the old obelisk from a birds’ eye view and takes shape as a thin sheet of concrete. The plaque has a simple design where it
accommodates the names of the fifty-one national groups victimized there and engraved as its predecessor with the initials KLB. One of the most successful features of this memorial is the invisibility of an emotional connection that is activated only when the visitors physically engage with the work. “Hoheisel built into his memorial slab of concrete a radiant heating system to bring it to a constant 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit (36.5 degrees Celsius) that suggest the body heat of those whose memory it would now enshrine.”

Hoheisel is always attentive to the conditions of space and the relations that operate in the site where his work would initiate a performance of memory:

I pay attention to the circumstances of a determinate place, but never forget to take into account the sensorial component; for example in the Buchenwald plaque. There, I and my friend Andreas Knitz decided to mark down the place where the first obelisk was constructed by the survivors, we only drew the base of this obelisk in a two-dimensional plane and then placed it on the ground. But this ‘memorial’ is different because it incorporates the tactile experience. When people come here they kneel and touch the slab in the middle of a cold weather they feel the body heat.

This strategy allows him to depart once again from the traditional monumental aesthetics. As with other countermonumental pieces, this work points towards participation, reflexive thinking, and the contemplation of loss and absence. However, it is the use of a thermal feature as a main part of experiencing the memorial that transverses the so-called dialectics of seeing and effectively moves the visitor closer to the physical presence of those long vanished. This is not to say that the abysm that separates the victims and post-holocaust individuals is bridged by using a receptive instrumentation or that through the use of temperature the anti-monument opens a new paradigm in countermonumental aesthetics. Instead, what Hoheisel successfully articulated in his plaque is the potentiality to imagine the humanity of those that perish in the camp. The possibility to exercise the

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29 Young, 104.
faculties of sympathetic imagination as a mediation that vehicles the humanity of the victims; not the label “victims” as an anonymous series of numbers or as the set of characterizations that have been assigned as a tool of categorization, but the one man, the individual as a sort of symbolic repository among the ruins of this catastrophe.\footnote{In this case the debate around this memorial wasn’t focus on its metaphysical reading, or its location in the urban landscape, but about who will pay the electric bill for the warming of the plaque year-round. Hoheisel explains that with a little mnemonic exercise he was able to convince the administration of the region of Weimar to fund the thermal part, “I insisted that the municipality of Weimar would be responsible for the cost of the energy because during the duration of the camp they were in charge of it. But it wasn’t easy; it took me two years to convince them. The administration said that they could not tap the lines and they had to pay regular prices. I reminded them that during the operation of the camp, Weimar managed the slave labor (and the lives) of more than 100,000 prisoners. Now, they pay the bill, approximately 3,000 Euros per year; enough to keep the plaque warm year-round day and night.” Wokitoki’s interview with Horst Hoheisel, (accessed 25 February), available from http://www.wokitoki.org/wk/026/horst-hoheisel}
CHAPTER 3

HORST HOHEISEL’S WORK IN LATIN-AMERICA: A SELECTION

“Sao Paulo a City without Memory” (questions on method)

In September of 2001, Horst Hoheisel and Andreas Knitz were invited to take part in the international colloquium “The Art of Memory” at the Goethe Institute in Sao Paulo.31

Puzzled by the invitation to take part in “The Art of Memory,” Hoheisel, before leaving to Brazil, decided to start thinking about how to conduct a parallel, more personal project by meditating on ways to bring “personal” and “public” memories together and create new dialogic configurations. Once in Sao Paulo and as the larger program of “The Art of Memory” unfolded, Hoheisel and Knitz found time to experiment with art and memory by using other media in order to construct a more heterogeneous landscape. Their project “Sao Paulo a City without Memory” brought together a group of 12 students and artists from Sao Paulo and asked them to think about ways in which collective and subjective memories within the context of the urban experience in Sao Paulo, interact. In this heterodox initiative, the group used an array of tactics and formats such as interventions in the public space, personal installations, and symbolic compositions. Each participant was encouraged “to bring a small and handy object which is full of personal memories of public events in Sao Paulo. In turn, those objects should place trails and be a small signpost when searching for traces of public recollection or memory gaps in the townscape of the city.”32

31 The “Art of Memory” project will be discussed in the next section of this paper.
Hoheisel explains, “In Germany, we [Hoheisel and Knitz] cut a sketch-board made of plywood in the form of a pentagon, one for each of the 12 participants. On this pentagon, everybody was to develop his or her own memory work.” They chose this geometrical figure based on their familiarity with Plato’s idea about the dodecahedron. After each participant had completed his work, they planned to merge all the pentagons into a platonic body, the body “that Plato saw as the basic form of the whole world.” However, in the middle of their project, the 9/11 attacks in the United States transformed the course of their idea. After the eleventh day, the pentagon board became a signifier for a complex set of events that were taking place far from Sao Paulo. The pentagon surface on which each person was supposed to articulate his fragment of Paulista history, turned into an awkward reminder of the attacks that had occurred that day, and that shocked the world in their absolute “spectacularity.” “In that moment, our boards became memorials. We looked at them differently, we held them differently in our hands, we carried them with a certain sense of unease through the buildings and streets. A simple piece of plywood in the shape of a pentagon suddenly had become a piece of memory, burdened by the incredible history of that day.”

33 Andreas Knitz, Fulvia Molina et al., 20.  
34 Andreas Knitz, Fulvia Molina et al., 20.  
Even before arriving to Brazil, Hoheisel was interested in understanding, or at least, catching a glimpse of the interplay between individual memories, (memories that are found within the realm of private recollections, familial experiences and intimate fragments), and the so-called collective memories; which we can picture as lines that are drew by groups and form vast and ample curves in the scale of the historiographical. This experiment produces an innumerable amount of recollections from these two groups of memories, and formulates the necessary conditions for the creation of a larger constellation of memory. In their words, “we wanted to find out in a playful and associative manner how far the personal, subjective memory and the selected fragments of memories comply or diverge from the public, collective memory in the form of memorials and other signs of recollection in the city or if they indeed appear at all.”

Different objects slowly appeared in each surface where the participants attempted to symbolize their strongest memories of the city and their experiences growing up. “Dalia

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36 Andreas Knitz, Fulvia Molina et al., 20.
Rosenthal pasted an empty film roll box on her pentagon and said, her memory of Sao Paulo was like this empty box.” 37 In her memory, no pictures existed from the past of this city. The people of Sao Paulo she says “live only in the present. The past was forgotten immediately.” Later in a more reflexive fashion, Dalia transformed her pentagon by removing the film box and placing instead a mirror. She added, “My memory is my image in the mirror. One day I like what I see, on another day I cannot stand it. The same way my memory change as well, they are deceitful.” This may be one of the most interesting proposals for the geometrical surface. First, playing with the idea of an empty container, Dalia seems to formulate a criticism towards a new city with no time for remembering: a relatively new conglomeration of platforms and decentered financial, touristic, and sex industries and districts. Her empty box cannot be read as an empty signifier. The entire contrary, if this gesture points toward the absence of a content, it, at the same time, highlights the presence of a container, one that is available to accommodate new memories, one that is malleable and is ready to expand and take the shape of the contents that left their imprint. Secondly, the decision to place a mirror in the face of the board gives form to the notion of memory as an unstable and contingent property of our psychology. The move suggests a sense of discomfort due to the positing of memory as a devise of indeterminacy. Dalia seems to feel threatened by the infinite variability and the flexible ends of memory which can be easily manipulated.

37 Andreas Knitz, Fulvia Molina et al., 20.
Playing in a more social key, another participant, Juliana Monteiro, places a brick on her sketch-board and adds a light bulb; this is her memorial for Sao Paulo. She argues “the brick symbolizes the enormous growth of the city; the light bulb stands for the sea of light that comes from the metropolis. Those were the strongest memories of her first encounter with Sao Paulo.”

She goes down the street where she lives and asks the people, where they come from, when they arrived, what were their expectations of the city. “A lot of questions thoughts and impressions appeared, but people were my foremost incentive: through their stories I could know Sao Paulo. What could they tell me? How do they incorporate the city? I went out to interview homeless, travesties, merchants and coworkers, only six of them were born in the city and only four gave me good references.” Her memory of the city is affected by the vertiginous growth of Sao Paulo; but also by the differences of invoking the memory of a great European capital and a contemporary New-World city. Sao Paulo does not measure herself up by comparison to the traditional scale of aristocratic memory that characterizes some Old-

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38 Andreas Knitz, Fulvia Molina et al., 21.
World centers. As a magnetic area that grows fervently, connected to channels of capital and investment and basing its appeal on an image of dynamism, slick and sexy tourism and version of multiculturalism, Sao Paulo tends to compete in the same range with cities like Beijing, Miami, Tel Aviv, and other cosmopolitan enclaves that configure their identities on the power of the image. But the city that Juliana wants to re-articulate through her memory work is a very different one: the rudimentary brick deflects our interpretation towards a latent imaginary of a different kind. Juliana’s brick and her light bulb later pasted together, does not talk of neat and clean financial centers but of the favela. The brick is the construction material of the poor. “I selected a lamp (an old remembrance), a brick (the noises, constructions and destroying things) and two card boxes (the homelessness of my neighborhood).” Her stronger memories are manifested by the irresolvable contradiction of ideology. The brick is the everyday bread of the dispossessed in the city: expelled by a powerful alliance between government at all levels and transnational capital, the poorest have being forced out to make room for the new wave of development that inundated strategic sites of the city. And this is what the travel agencies (if they still exist) do not show: the brick and the light bulb in an almost infinite repetition throughout the city. The light bulb stands, as Juliana recalls, for the sea of light of the metropolis. At night, an orange mantle is visible, covering vast areas where the newly-displaced had to re-accommodate themselves. From the distance it seems as if a bright net had been cast on the soft hills of the city. But basing an observation about a specific city image, one that is conditioned by the secure aesthetic distance, could be

39 Andreas Knitz, Fulvia Molina et al., 24.
misleading. Michel de Certeau reminds us of the deceptive quality of such perspectives.  

What lies beneath our exoticizing (and eroticizing) gaze corresponds to a very different reality: vast spaces, generally prone-to-disaster-land, that are informally occupied where the basic services arrive thanks to the resourcefulness of its residents. The brick and the light bulb stand out not as a romanticized imaginary of the tropical charm of this city but as a critical memory that resonates on the younger Paulistas.

Another participant in this project Sissi Fonseca, manages to intersect the lines of individual memory and collective recollection. She remembers the story of her father as taking part in the erection of the monumental horseman statue of the Duque de Caixas at the Praca Princesa Isabel Square in Sao Paulo. She explains, “He built the horse’s feet for the huge bronze founding.”  

After arriving to the Pincesa Isabel square the group encountered an enormous pedestal with a horseman standing and from there, they could only see one horse foot over the rim of the pedestal pointing to the sky. They also noticed that “a homeless man had tied a rain protection to the pedestal.”  

Faced with the dominance of this structure and following the logic of anti-monumentalism the group - encouraged by Hoheisel- decided to put their feet together forming a circle and capture a more democratic anti-monument as an interpellant to the grand bronze horseman: “for a short moment the circle of our feet became the democratic anti-monument of that powerful memorial with horse feet.”  

By performing this apparently insipid act, both, horseman statue and the group become engaged in a relationship that brings them together and reveals the disparate qualities that affect each gesture. Although the group

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42 Andreas Knitz, Fulvia Molina et al., 21.
43 Andreas Knitz, Fulvia Molina et al., 21.
44 Andreas Knitz, Fulvia Molina et al., 21.
seems minuscule and impotent, their response to a signifier of masculine power and war glorification that dominates the Princesa Isabel square, precludes a more radical impulse: one that is characterized by the fluidity of a postmodern life where the empowering of an anonymous individual and the increasing flexibility of identities allow for this nonconformist act to work under the frame of symbolic parricide. The statue as a specifically political mark that serves as a pointer for the control that the state exercises over the citizen does not remain quiet. At the same moment that the camera captures the feet of the group participants, the horseman becomes once again a living monument that truly affects the mental and physical distribution of space and the routine of daily commuters and afternoon strollers. It re-appropriates the role of harbinger within the modernist project of teleological progress of a better national future. But in this institutional critique there is always the risk of a precarious use of the word “democratic.” The possibility of falling into facile and comfortable administrations of a possibly-by-now empty signifier is constantly present. Is the picture of the seven participant’s feet a truly democratic anti-monument, especially when the presence of a homeless individual is explicitly acknowledged and left out? Is the photograph of seven feet a marker of citizens’ participation and a defiant challenge in the face of power?
I would argue that the photograph becomes at best an insufficient attempt to formulate a truly democratic dynamic that would be active in the construction of a more plural public sphere. As an initiative from a heterogeneous group that includes a variety of actively-involved professionals, this anti-monument could be grouped more closely as an intervention in public space than as a truly democratic and spontaneous relational artwork. Nonetheless, one of the most intriguing aspects of this multi-media project, specifically Sissi Fonsecas’s memory of the involvement of her dad in the construction of the bronze horseman, is especially related to a clear overlapping of personal and collective memory, one of the ideas that underlined this initiative as explained by Horst.
This cartography of memory in the city of Sao Paulo reveals the complexity of a multitude of mental experiences that circulate in the minds of its inhabitants: what for some is a dead monument for others represents the work of a relative and is therefore charged with an emotional investment. Not only a monument serves here as a referent, but in more general terms, the totality of the city works as a moving constellation where different associations form, and at the same time dissolve, among the rapid transformation of the urban theater. Every day, the city erases some of its points of reference; simultaneously the construction of new buildings continuously shape the skyline and other more humble constructions keep adding locations and symbols. These irregular and indeterminate set of forces that cross the city with violence allow for the formation of new references, new connections in an ever-changing geographic movement of the city.

The workshop concluded with the installation of the twelve glued mementos that each participant offered on the plywood pentagon. Then, they pasted together the twelve pentagons forming the dodecahedron. Horst remembers: “In the Rua Maria Antonia we put the 12 pentagons with our memory work together to a dodecahedron so that all the memories were on the inside. From outside you could only see a regular body. Plato saw this as the basic form of the whole world. But our body was not perfect. The burnt pentagon in the foil blackened by the ashes seemed like a window. However, you could not see inside to the memories through the blackness.”45 We could argue that this project comes to an end, by negating the representation of what it has strove to achieve. After the participants navigated the whole of the city to find a specific object that would embody a

45 Andreas Knitz, Fulvia Molina et al., 22.
singular memory, Hoheisel forecloses the possibility of an open exposure to facilitate the consumption.

Figure 8: Horst Hoheisel and Andreas Knitz "Sao Paulo a City without Memory" Dodecahedron finished. Photo: Courtesy Horst Hoheisel.

Placing the objects in this proximity produces a dissonance of a higher tension and ensures a struggle over the stronger memory-voice. It can be argued that the paradoxical nature of this gesture exercises a radical violence against the physical representation of these memories. Hoheisel presents these memories inside a white empty structure where they are exhibited and hidden at the same time; it seems as if the empty dodecahedron was saying: these are the memories of the greater Sao Paulo, coming from different people of different backgrounds, encapsulated in one larger object and brought together in order to dialogue among each other in their invisibility.

“‘The Art of Memory’ Installations at Memoria Antonia”

Now I would like to return to the colloquium-exhibition, “The Art of Memory” at the Centro Universitario Maria Antonia in the University of Sao Paulo. This intervention
cannot be understood unless we first become familiar with the recent history of the building where these memory artworks were materialized. In 1964 the military forces staged a coup d’état against the democratically elected incumbent vice-president Joao Goulart, and mounted a military government that would last until the election of Tancredo Neves with the return of democracy in 1985. Domestically, this junta subjected the country to a military regime and closed itself by becoming a full dictatorship with the promulgation of the infamous Fifth Institutional Act in 1968. What ensured was a brutal suppression of the dictatorship's opponents, repressive cultural policies and the use of extralegal tools -sometimes including urban guerrillas- in order to win and maintain the economy of ideological power. The U.S. became the aegis under which the interests of the nation and the economic policy tended to align. In the fight against the dictatorship many movements sprung up to challenge the abuses of power and the suspension of democracy; some of these movements were student-run initiatives that had a special significance on the imaginary of Sao Paulo. Representative Joao Paulo Cunha, from the House of Speakers in Brasilia recalls, “In Sao Paulo, the faculty of Philosophy and Letters of the University of Sao Paulo (USP) located on the Maria Antonia street operated as a major student center fighting for freedom. But on October 2 1968 the military police attacked the students there, and the building on the Maria Antonia street suddenly became a battlefield.” Joachim Bernauer, Head of Arts at the Goethe Institute adds, “the movement was brutally terminated and the buildings in the Maria Antonia street were handed over to the enemies of the resistance. After the end of the military government these buildings became abandoned and fell into decay: a thick layer of amnesia dust, and

47 Andreas Knitz, Fulvia Molina et al., 7.
pigeon droppings stretched over the history that inhabited these buildings.\textsuperscript{48} The university body, specially the philosophy students, having been one of the strongest forces against the military regime, was relocated to a remote campus. In the former university building administration offices were set up and the Nabuco building was assigned to a department of prison administration.

In 1998, the Nabuco building was returned in very poor conditions to the USP. Run down but filled by recent history, the building received three contemporary artists, Horst Hoheisel, Andreas Knitz and Marcelo Brodsky, together with numerous students ex-combatants from the sixties who were invited to share their testimonies and revise once again the history of the rua Maria Antonia always attentive to the question of what to do with the past of this space. The exhibition, “MemoriAntonia” is organized in two parts: the first one described here presents the works of each artist individually and in separated spaces: Fulvia Molinas’s cylinders, Marcelo Brodsky’s photographs, and Horst Hoheisel’s installation, (they were assigned a small room that they could use to construct installations or display photographic works). The second part of the exhibition took place in the largest room of the Maria Antonia Building and consisted of fragments: objects and pieces from the building. For Joachim Bernauer, head of arts at the Goethe Institute these artists presented their memory pieces as “archeological artifacts in the glass case of an ethnological museum, in part with an ironic twinkling eye, in part as shocking documents of terrifying brutality.”\textsuperscript{49} The exhibition staged during the second half of 2003 featured Horst Hoheisel and Andreas Knitz both from Kassel, Marcelo Brodsky from Buenos Aires, and Fulvia Molina, from Sao Paulo. Each of these artists used the spaces of the

\textsuperscript{48} Andreas Knitz, Fulvia Molina et al., 12.
\textsuperscript{49} Andreas Knitz, Fulvia Molina et al., 12.
building to begin the materialization of the memory work: a politico-ethical-aesthetic discussion that encompassed forms of dialogue, the recalling and transmitting of painful memories, and diverse ways of questioning the politics of the past and present.

For her exhibition at MemoriAntonia, Fulvia Molina crafted six vertical life-size cylinders that showed the pictures of the faces of students killed during the 1968 confrontations in transparent slides. On the acrylic surfaces, photographs were arranged in a way that they would overlap documents that show the handwriting of many students that signed open letters and petitions at the time. By mixing image and text the structures become a sort of hieroglyph, where the haunting image of the past is brought to life. They are more reminiscent of documents and letters of the victims of the holocaust than Humanities’ students in Brazil during the sixties. A number of television sets that had been accommodated around the room at ground level showed interviews about the fights that took place during that decade. The interviewees were student activists that had come to visit the Maria Antonia building for the first time since the years of the dictatorship. Fulvia comments, “All these people had intense experiences during the 1968 events and where deeply moved when entering the building. For most of them it was the first time in 35 years. It was like opening a tomb; in the words of Lorenzo Mammi, ‘the feeling you get from those tombs in which you enter, open the door, and everything inside fades away.’”

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50 Andreas Knitz, Fulvia Molina et al., 132.
The Argentinean photographer Marcelo Brodsky presented a video documentation of his earlier work “Column with the Torch Carrier” at the Masch lake bank in Hannover. For this project in Germany he installed a blind at the base of the stone column. This blind covered the eagle that stands at eye level and is reminiscent of the Third Reich symbolic index. When the blind was closed it read Kasimir Malevich’s quote “Black Chart on a White Background.” Brodsky explains, “I chose the image because it was being exhibited in the neighboring Sprengel Museum and it allowed me to focus on the open contradiction between the symbolism and ideology of the pieces in the museum, as
opposed to the presence of a fascist monument in the lake.”51 This iconoclastic intervention not only generated a public discussion aroused by Brodsky’s blind, but provoked the vandalizing of the modest installation two times (June 12th and August 31st) which the police categorized as “a possibly politically motivated act.”52 The second part of Brodsky’s exhibition featured his photographic work (which is collected and organized in his 2001 book Nexo, un ensayo fotografico). Here he documents his project “Los Desterrados de la Tierra,” and “Buena Memoria.” Using Franz Fanon title as a starting point to remind us that the places of memory are not restricted to countries that experienced dictatorships, “Los Desterrados de la Tierra” presents the exhumation of a series of books that Brodsky and his friends had to hide under the dirt of the ground at the height of the dictatorship and remained buried there for over twenty years. We should remember that at some critical points during the dictatorship, getting arrested in possession of this type of literature constituted evidence of subversive activities and was enough to arouse the suspicion of the authorities. In the year 2000, the photographs of the recovered books were exhibited by Brodsky in the Buenos Aires Book Fair. During the Book Fair, Brodsky decided to photograph the spectators as they looked “at the installation and painfully remembered the books from their own libraries, which they had buried, burned, or abandon in the streets.” He recalls, “I was particularly struck by a moment between a father and a son, in which the father describes why he had buried his own books, perhaps a difficult explanation for a child to understand.”53

51 Andreas Knitz, Fulvia Molina et al., 145.
52 Andreas Knitz, Fulvia Molina et al., 145.
53 Marcelo Brodsky, Nexo Un Ensayo fotografico (Centro Cultural Recoleta: Buenos Aires, 2001), 82.
Hoheisel also gestures towards the idea of the aesthetization of the theorization of violence. His installation materials consisted of two desks, two office chairs and two table lamps. In the first desk, the two table lamps are directed towards the wall where they highlight two copies of Hegel’s “Esthetics” that are hung at the eye level. Each of these copies is perforated by a bullet hole. Through a magnifying glass placed above one of the holes in the book, we can read the word *sehen*, “see” in English. In the second writing desk another book also perforated by a bullet hole rests on the surface. This is Norbert Haase’s, “Das Reichskriegsgericht und der widerstand gegen die Nationalsozialische Herrschaft” (The Martial Superior Court and the Resistance against the Nazi domination). Both works not only refer to the systemic violence of Fascism but to the violence against books themselves. The installation performs an explicit reference to the exhibition context, to the Maria Antonia building (which held the department of philosophy) with its memory of the resistance against the Brazilian military dictatorship as well as the Nazi prosecutions of intellectuals and their burning of books. In consistency with many of his other works, Horst uses the minimum of means available to
produce installations that can lead to truly critical questions; his simple design succeeds in interrogating the premises of censorship and ideology. However we need to remember that the installation is a curiously paradoxical format. As Rosalind Krauss has noted, the installation as a medium is problematic because it departs from one specific tradition and revolves around the use of diverse media. Certainly, this multiplicity of traditions operating under one single piece could inhibit the work from turning self reflexively against itself. Hence, it difficult to determine what the medium of installation art is and how it could achieve self-reflection critically. While partially agreeing with Krauss on the critique of installation, it would not be prudent to reject cases where installation art might effectively operate, albeit in a non-paradoxical logic. Yes, in Horst’s installation for MemoriAntonia the allusion to violence/legality/ethics is at work in the polysemic of the components of the piece. However, the critical discourse that is articulated by the multiplicity of elements that compose this artwork does not return upon itself (to critique the medium itself) but to the politics of the state; a critique that is displaced from the framework of the aesthetics towards the realm of the evidently political. In this installation one can also perceive a certain type of circuit where abstract ideas such as “violence” become the subject of transference. The “circulation” of the gaze in the desk installation, (circulation because the objects seem to direct our attention in a cycle of meditation), suggest a movement that materializes of forms of violence upon divers bodies. In a way, these desks are a kind of heterotopias where the confluences of multiple

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sites of struggle are superimposed on one closed space. Here violence is replicated in its two opposite stages, its epistemological condition and its physic realization.55

Figure 11: Horst Hoheisel “The Art of Memory” at Memoria Antonia. Sehen, installation. Photo: Courtesy Horst Hoheisel.

Maria Antonia Building (The Language of Ruins)

The second part of the exhibition in the main space of the Maria Antonia building, displayed a number of interventions by the three artists. These interventions aren’t original installations like the ones described above, but the excavation and recuperation of certain components of the building. By now these artists had experienced the oppressiveness of the space and decided to present their work following a criminological

55 The impulse of violence is not restricted to a physical exemplification, but to its most embryonic stage, that of the ideas. This installation brings these two stages together and replicates a circulation of the idea of violence: the conception and the introduction into the material realm.
approach. The main structure of the building as well as many of the services, (windows, bathroom facilities, floors, faucets, lamps) were found in such stage of abandonment that by themselves they became a sort of evidence of the suffering inflicted by the state upon these students. These fragments, “pushed the visitors into a place of ruins giving them the feeling of being unable to assign those fragments; the operation was precisely the recovery of the amputated past which was inherited from the dictatorship.”

It is worth recalling that these spaces held intense amounts of violence; a violence that is somehow still present in the building. The Maria Antonia building is a curious palimpsest of discontinuities: starting in 1949 it served as a place where the philosophy department functioned and imparted their lessons, after that, in October 2 and 3 of 1968, it was transformed into a battleground and a place of horror when nationalistic groups supported by the military police irrupted, (attacking students and culminating in the killing one high school student who cooperated with the “philosophy guys,”) and destroyed half of the complex. Later, it was used as the prison center of the city which administered over the dissidents and opponents of the system. It is through these discontinuities and fragments that Horst works in order to extract what is left of a ruinous history. In a way, the small pieces that could appear indifferent, inert or even insignificant are modest resources that Horst uses and that mediate what they can convey -in their precariousness- of the tragedy of the past. The building can certainly speak if an interpellation that uses the language of the aesthetic is unfolded in the face of its materiality. They are asked to speak about the unspeakable; compressed under different layers of violence they are inquired about the last utterance, about the last scream. As a way of avoiding the commonplace of the literal

56 Andreas Knitz, Fulvia Molina et al., 45.
57 Andreas Knitz, Fulvia Molina et al., 7.
analogy or what the artist “wanted to say,” Horst disjoints the objects of memory (broken glass windows, shattered pipes, lamps, floors, etc.) from their “naturalized” context where they dwell and operate under a prescribed logic and pushes them into the public sphere. And he does so not through political art, but through a plastic praxis that reconstitutes the dialogue of art with a political commitment. His gesture works not by turning art political by means of literal ideas but extracting from the Benjaminean ruins certain objects that testify of the passing of tragic times.

The Argentinean critic Horácio González in a roundtable with Horst and other activists of public memory in Argentina explains that Horst’s gesture is archeological in method and
courageous in form “[we could ask ourselves] why remember a wall? Why remember a set of water pipes? Why remember something that is insignificant for the political history? Horst is able to see these things that are embedded in a completely dead place, inhospitable, forgotten and even stupid; he sees true history, history of people that struggle and suffer.”

He explains that Horst’s work in Maria Antonia forces some of these “dead objects” to talk in their utmost impossibility, “in this sense the walls that appear mute are turned into monumental entities, uprooted, rescued and redeemed. In fact this impulse could be read as an almost sacred redemptive act. Horst selects these objects from their innocence and places them as monuments of a past repression.”

In a letter sent to the Centro Universitario Maria Antonia in 2003 Horst Hoheisel explains, “To take away these, at first look, banal things from the original rooms, to perform them into artificial objects and to give them a new context as works in an art exhibition means to give them a new value as art works. They do not lose their signification as exhibits of the political conflict that altered them in 1968, and of the long period of time of the military dictatorship. In their future new context in a museum or a house of culture, these exhibits will continue to tell their stories, even stronger than before [when they dwelled] in the empty rotten building, where only the pigeons, the symbol for peace, distracted the files of the military dictatorship.”

Horst talks about displacement, and in this particular case, I think there is a sort of movement that in its dynamic modifies the very value of the new art works. There is no creatio ex nihilo, but instead the “linguistification” of the operativity of the ruin.

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58 Horst Hoheisel, Andrea Giunta, Elda Cerrato and Horácio González “Arte y Memoria” Facultad de filosofía y Letras, (Catedra Libre de Derechos Humanos, Foro No. 9 2004), 9.
60 Andreas Knitz, Fulvia Molina et al., 52.
As a material object in the context and function of the ruin, the broken door or the decaying sink constantly of witness of abandonment. But this role was circumscribed a priori to the position of “mute witness,” we can recall González’s words and his language of “impossibility.” I argue that it is only through the displacement from the sphere of the ruin to the sphere of aesthetics that the potentiality of the ruin to open up to language is articulated. Once the rusted object is subjected to the shift from “mute witness” to art-of-memory, the ability to arrive at a stage of babbling or precarious speaking is achieved. In a way, as noted above, the old toiled covered in pigeon waste or the disjointed pieces of a broken window pane are, by the nature of this horizontal displacement, given a voice that resonates in the spheres of critical memory, a voice that informs and serves as a pedagogical device, a voice that ultimately talks for the tragedy.
Figure 14: Horst Hoheisel, “The Soul of Buildings” Photo: Courtesy Horst Hoheisel

The Maria Antonia Building is one of the most interesting examples in the work of Horst where the relation of conception, medium processes and reception become entangled in an invisible network of relationships with each other. The role of the artist as a catalyzer of memory is emplaced in one complex single location where these practices come together and share the same space: one of remembering and repetition, one therapeutic for the participants in the 1968 events, one that holds the last physical remnants of the corporeality of those oppressed by the state. Horst functions as force that probes the limits of memory and art, someone whose main purpose is to start off processes of debate, negotiation and renegotiation amidst innumerable lines of memory. In the MemoriAntonia project the spaces of suffering and representation are many times the same one: death and abandonment, constantly haunts the body of the building. The story of the building can be told in the best magical realist style: from archives, to pigeon waste, to derelict rooms, to later recovery. Here, justice and the aspiration to justice,
becomes shit, in its absolute. Here, hundreds of due proceedings files of those detained and those disappeared where stored in the building and left there to decay with time. As if this was an explicit political project, the neglect and the deliberated desertion of the facilities reflects the indifference of power towards the victims and their families, towards the due cause of legal processes, and the relative conformity of the city. The bodies of victims, the corpus delicti, is displaced and submitted to a sort of juridical transubstantiation; what is left of them is a heap of old legal papers that represent their immateriality. These papers, this last mater of their being is slowly transformed by the natural process of life and now is resting layer over layer in the dilapidated rooms of the Maria Antonia building.

“La Química”: counter-narratives in motion

Figure 15: Horst Hoheisel, Maria Antonia Sanchez, Marga Steinwasser “La Química de la Memoria.” Buenos Aires, 2005. Photo: Courtesy Horst Hoheisel

In 2004, Horst returns to Latin America and together with other activists, decides to begin an experiment with the borders of memory and subjective recollection in the project “La
Química de la Memoria.” Working with the sociologist Maria Antonia Sanchez and the visual artist Marga Steinwasser they attempted to create a passage in the Argentinean context between the contemporary past and the present using a selection of personal objects and stories. In an accompanying essay for the project, professors Maria Antonia Sanchez and Maria Marta Quintana explain, “this initiative wants to hear the whispering of our memory, a memory which the artist clearly does not share, and we want to accomplish this through the search and the recollection of objects; mediating materialities between the time of state terrorism and the present. This was an invitation to conjugate time and space in an installation of which no one claims authorship.”61 “La Química de la Memoria,” conceived as a project from below, did extend an open invitation to all those who desired to participate. During the time of its exhibition many were asked to bring an object that would remind them “biographically” of the time of the dictatorship; this object was to be attached to a small information card that would explain details about it or why it was selected. Their proponents explain, “This wasn’t about trying to arrange a collection of valuable pieces from a historical perspective, rather we wanted to narrate a specific time of our country adopting as a starting point the everyday experience from both the older and younger generations.”62

The logic of this initiative responded to the formulation of relationships first among objects and later, with the presence of each visitor, among the shared lines of memory that would intersect in and over the plane of the installation table. The process of recollection and reconstruction was habilitated by coming into contact with others, whose experiences could enhance the subjectivity of a specific memory, could distort it, or

61 María A. Sánchez and María M. Quintana, “La Química de la Memoria” (University of Buenos Aires, Eje 3, 2005), 3.
62 Sánchez, 5.
simply challenge its narrative. The aim of the project was not so much the individual collection of memories but the interesting dynamics that are prompted when the objects and the owners of these objects of memory come together in a sort of memory lab. They reaffirm the constructive difference that highlighted their work, “This was an intersubjective task: first, we have to turn our gaze against ourselves and then ask self reflexively, why this object rather than other. This constitutes an often complex and painful experience. We should remember that memory work is always exposing us to a certain mobility, and in this process, it allows us to turn into a narrative that which sometimes we force ourselves to bear.”

During a period of about a year, many of the objects of “La Química de la Memoria” found their way into the exhibition space and rested on three large white tables where the “chemistry” of their elements catalyzed active processes. The organization of the objects responded to date and generational differences among the participants. In the first table, they placed objects that were brought by those who “were living during the dictatorship and were aware of its power.” The second table held objects brought by those who “knew about the dictatorship but where unaware of its abuses.” The third table displayed those objects that were offered by the following generations, those who were born after 1976. Sanchez and Steinwasser like to think associatively vis-à-vis the postructuralist view of the archive. They explain, “In this nuclear space that is assumed by the installation, all these signposts of our fractured experience were brought together. This appeared as a collection of objects that simulated an archival classification but that nonetheless attempted to mock it.” They compare the archive with the instable condition of memory: “While the archive is frustrated if it’s not the recipient of ‘everything,’ our memory, on the other hand, not aiming at totality, it’s

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63 Sánchez, 2.
fully aware of the fragmentary nature of its matter. Thus, our memory could practically rearrange the whole room and be represented, (or at least operate under a certain “represent-ability” I would add) once again. This might be due to the condition of possibility, because it was only there where it [their memory] started to murmur.”64 It seems as if these objects were given the faculty of possibility, one that under the Heidegger’s thought only corresponds to the human being. That is, for the creators of this installation, these dead objects -pure reality in their impossibility of being- are turned into something else: something that escapes the inert nature of a machine and points toward the “possibility.” It is this possibility, according to the philosopher, the one that signs beings only: the possibility of death. It seems that this exhibition adjudicates to the many old objects the potentiality of a being-there; one that is thrown into the world arbitrarily, one that is cognizant of the multiplicity of its possibilities. It is the premise of possibilities, or “-abilities” that is apparently moved onto the objects of memory.

Figure 16: Horst Hoheisel, Maria Antonia Sanchez, Marga Steinwasser “La Química de la Memoria.” Buenos Aires, 2005. Photo: Courtesy Horst Hoheisel

64 Sánchez, 3.
“La Química” can also be read from a more historical angle. In what follows, I attempt to interpret the nature of the project through the lenses of Walter Benjamin’s Historical Materialism. In order to gain a comparative view, I engage with some ideas from Rubén Chababo, (Director of the Rosario Memorial Museum in Argentina) because they help to uncover a different layer, or a hidden discursive power that is at work in the instability of these practices. Rubén writes, “These objects do not work under the rules or the syntax of the markets. So, instead of losing their value because of their age, they increasingly bear a great symbolic power.”65 For Chababo then, in settings like this one a specific new language can be uncovered. That is, in this movement, “La Química de la Memoria,” articulates the revalorization of a different historical discursivity. Here, the relationships that unfold, allow for the critical questioning of their presence; they allow for a reading that does not obey to the formal one-sided logic of the commodity, but one that reveals a different history. An untold history: not the one propagated by the mediality of the Debordian spectacle, but one that maps out the cartography of state terrorism and death. For him, it is in places like Horst’s Aschrott fountain in Kassel or in the processes laid down in La Química de la Memoria where the other history can effectively be re-appropriated. In his words, artworks like these are able to “to make visible the invisible.”66 With this double-history in mind Chababo compares the town of Cachabuco, a former salt mine in Chile, (later turned into a prisoner’s camp by the Chilean military government) with the Aschrott fountain in Kassel in order to sustain his proposal of

65 Rubén Chababo, “Restos de un Naufragio: Anotaciones a la muestra ‘La Química de la Memoria,’” via email from the autor, 2.
uncovering a formerly invisible geography. Located in the Chilean desert, Cachabuco is today nothing more than a bunch of old buildings that once served the mining town: “derelict remains of a church, the ruins of a theater, and a stand in the square that was used by the miners as a resting spot.” But the history of Chacabuco as it is remembered today has little to do with its infamous use in the 1970’s as a military camp for political prisoners. As it was the case with the Maria Antonia Building in Sao Paulo, government policies regarding illegal sites of detention, torture and murder, followed the line of systematic negligence, and encouraged a culture of forgetfulness. However, in Chacabuco lives a peculiar man, Roberto Zaldivar. A sort of informal archeologist of history, or at least of the local history: a figure to which Chababo likes to assign a certain corresponsability with the role that Hoheisel performs as the architect of the inverted Aschrott fountain in Kassel. Zaldivar was one of the dissidents that “had arrived to the camp in 1974 and one of the few that came out alive.” And who after the return to democracy had decided to start a local initiative (without any kind of governmental support) that functioned as a place where people could learn about the tragic history during the 1970’s. In a precarious setting he had managed to arrange a collection of personal objects that testified of the two histories of the place: the period as a mining site, and later, the occupation of the mine by the military as a detention center. In other words, Zaldivar had recuperated a physical and an epistemological space where both narratives dialogued and complemented each other. He was able to point intertwining lines which developed a wider framework of the history and the politics behind the bleak materiality of the place. Chababo argues that in a way, “the voice of Zaldivar is analogous to the

67 Chababo, 3.
68 Chababo, 3.
sculptural gesture of Hoheisel; both strive to show the existence of something hidden that deserves unveiling.”

These different layers, this other history respond to what Walter Benjamin called Historical Materialism, defined as a critical appraisal of Historicism. As with many of Benjamin’s ideas, his theory of history elides easy articulation, however for our purposes and always having in mind pieces like the Aschrott negative fountain in Kassel or projects like “La Química” in Buenos Aires, I will limit my explanation to the basic lines that encompass his thought and tentatively risk an interpretation of the relationship between these two processes. Benjamin’s unique thinking and specifically his theory of history is defined by a certain proximity of two traditions; on the one hand his Jewish messianism inflects his Weltanschauung and configure it under a notion of apocalyptic pessimism together with a continual and mystical call for redemption; on the other, Benjamin’s attention to the life of the image and the implication of this reproductive technology on the economic conditions responds to his critical revaluation of Marxist theory. For Benjamin, history should not be seen as progress, for the evidence of human suffering is clearly permeating the porous reality, neither in terms of a cynical “eternal return” predicated by Nietzsche. Rather, Benjamin argues that a true historical materialist must produce a sort of conflation between the times of history. In his words, and with his methodology already at work (visual reproducibility), he calls for a dialectical image, one where the past and the present collide to enable a revolutionary Jetztzeit, a “now-time.” This is not to say that history because of the pitfalls of objectivism and the reductionary views of Ranke’s Historismus, should be renewed under

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69 Chababo, 4.
a subjective and capricious command. Benjamin asserts that “materialist historiography” does not “choose its objects arbitrarily. It does not fasten on them, but rather spring them loose from their order of succession.” Simplifying, we could say that Benjamin argues for a history that has relevance to the present: one that evades the tales of progress and the movement towards betterment, and in a dialectical gesture reveals the many oppressions and denials that humanity endured in the name of that illusion. In his sixth thesis on the Philosophy of History, 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. Historical materialism wishes to retain that image of the past which unexpectedly appears to man singled out by history at a moment of danger. The danger affects both the content of the tradition and its receivers. The same threat hangs over both: that of becoming a tool of the ruling classes. In every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it.

This contingent moment, this threat, is always awaiting an opportunity for unleashing.

For Benjamin, this instant determined the ever-present danger of class struggle, the possibility of a revolutionary spark. His messianic impulse is at work in the current of history where the Messiah does not arrive in a linear temporality (empty homogeneous time) but is filtered as a fragmentary and intermittent appearance in the world; as a crack that opens for a moment the sphere of rubble and ruins that is history and demands its appraisal as a monad: a political image of “the sign of a Messianic cessation of happening, or, put differently, a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past.”

Benjamin attempted to locate these particular historical redemptive junctures within the linear empirical history in order to locate revolutionary points in the past and

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73 Benjamin, 263.
at the same time to formulate a radical separation in the present from the negotiations of tradition in order to create a revolutionary “now.” In this space, or better, at this point the historian and his task come to a halt. “The individual episode of oppressed history, its ‘otherness’ and singularity, is both ‘preserved and cancelled’ in and through its contemporary analysis.” And here is where the materiality of the historian’s work comes into being; that is, for Benjamin, it is the dialectic at a stand-still of the image that determines the contemporary study of the historical moment: “It's not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past [sic]; rather, an image is that in which the past and the now flash into a constellation. In other words: image is dialectic at a standstill. For while the relation of the present to the past is a purely temporal, continuous one, that of the past to the now is dialectical – isn’t development but image, capable of leaping out.”

Speaking in all their particularity, projects like the Kassel Fountain, or “La Química,” articulate a similar historical approximation to the past. But this is not an objective past, (one that as we have just seen above proclaims an illusion of grandeur and progress on a false linearity throughout an empty homogeneous time), rather, through a sort of Benjaminean maneuver that strives to re-appropriate the image at a point when it becomes endangered by the threat of forgetfulness or commodification. These two projects together with the processes of memory that are uncovered in the small austral town of Chacabuco, point towards something that Benjamin already noticed, namely, the excavation in moments of history where man appears alone at a moment of danger. In a way, Horst through his plastic production and Zaldivar in a more pedagogical way are

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75 Williams and Chrisman,10.
performing the task of the materialistic historian: an ethical call to break the hegemony of
the invisible determinants that have been invested by a dominant class as bastions of
progress. These architects of processes of memory, (that always are processes of political
antagonisms) recuperate the previously erased lines of history: through their production,
the palimpsests of a vanished past materialize fragmentarily and uncannily. That singled
out man of which Benjamin speaks, that has been left outside of history, is the one from
whom these artists try (in all their impossibility) to reconstruct an image. Rubén Chababo
notes, “The German fountain as well as the voice of that Chilean survivor (Zaldivar)
remind us that this life is not a unity but it is actually split in two halves: that which we
see and that which we fail to see. We do not see the dead, those that were wiped off the
world by criminal forces.” In a way, Zaldivar’s gesture excavates the hidden past, by
superimposing on the memory of a mining past, the disturbing years of the prisoner’s
camp. He brings to light the incomprehensible past and attempts to give it a voice so that
it becomes able to interrogate the present. This constitutes the activation of a neglected
narrative that attempted to destroy men, as well as its destruction in self-consummation.
Hoheisel and Zaldivar, apparently working under oppositional mechanisms use strategies
of appropriation and “re-signification” vis-à-vis the past.

Perhaps we can think of these archeologists as “critical historians” if we follow
Nietzsche’s typology against historicism. This is a historian who unlike the
“monumentalist” and the “antiquarian” who constantly strive for imitations of golden
ages is “dedicated to the service of life.” In his practice, the critical historian is
conscious of the injustices that inhabit the past as well as the ramifications that extend

76 Chababo, 6.
77 Friedrich Nietzsche “On the uses and disadvantages of history for life” in *Unimely Meditations*, Ed.,
Daniel Breazeale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1997), 75.
until his very day; he understands that the absence of justice in a chaotic world should not be covered by a mantle of lies that presents itself as a coherent story. This historian has to “temporarily suspend his forgetfulness and engage with the past critically; that is, taking the knife to its roots.” He must recuperate history in its totality, “bringing them before the tribunal, scrupulously examining it and finally condemning it; for every past is worthy to be condemned.” Accordingly, this reflective gesture is a dangerous one because it also attempts against man and life itself. “For since we are the outcome of earlier generations, we are also the outcome of their aberrations, passions and errors, and indeed of their crimes; it is not possible to wholly free oneself from this chain.”78 Following this premise the antimonumentalist, as we have seen, not only attacks the past and its inherent evil but has to question his/her own position unapologetically. It is in this dire part of the procedure that artists like Hoheisel consciously articulate with some measure of success the precariousness of their praxis.

**Llakillakisqa/Dolor por la Falta de Alguien**

In October 2010, within the framework of the seminar “Memorias Diversas, Lugares Comunes: diálogos y conflictos en los procesos de la memoria,” that took place in Lima, Horst Hoheisel together with other Latin-American artists, activists, and professionals on the topic of memory (Patricia Tappata, Rommy Schmidt and José Antequera among others) were brought together by the Instituto de Democracia y Derechos Humanos and asked to reflect on different spaces of memory and related debates within the Peruvian post-dictatorship context. The seminar came about in the wake of the recent

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78 Nietzsche, 76.
announcement of the German government’s intentions to offer a donation in order to fund a museum that would remember the victims of the internal armed conflict. 79 Memorias Diversas attempted to foster an environment of “discussion regarding the reasons that motivated the constructions of different sites of memory and the ways in which memories could be materialized with the goal of enlarging the horizons of the public debate and to facilitate legible criteria to the pertinent constituencies.” 80 After the end of the armed conflict in 2000, the public sphere has held many conversations about the growing culture of memory and its significance vis-à-vis the wider register of post-conflict cultural policies on reparations, memory and representation. The widely criticized rejection of the European funds to start the construction of the Museum of Peruvian Memory became an opportunity for the distinct actors involved to formulate their own proposals and counter proposals, and to expand the interpellation of traditional forms of deploying government-sanctioned narratives and matrixes of mnemonic self-validation. In the midst of this cross-fire, the less privileged and the many categories of victims of such a long conflict were naturally left with little room where they could configure their own suggestions.

Disappointed with the prevalence of a statist discourse and the bureaucratic stagnation of the capital city, Hoheisel decided to travel to the different regions where the massacres had taken place. After visiting Ayacucho and meeting with the mothers of the ANFASEP (Asociación Nacional de Familiares de Detenidos, Secuestrados y Desaparecidos del Perú), local branch, Hoheisel -in collaboration with the artist Sandra Nakamura and sensitive to the stories of the locals and the relatives of the victims-

offered to design a space of reflection and commemoration for those that were directly affected by the violence. Although the Llakillakisqa project is not yet finished, the basic aesthetic and ethical blueprints have been lay down and they offer provocative insights for consideration. The Llakillakisqa project has to respond to the unusual encounter of three cultures attempting to commemorate a tragic chapter of their past. Perhaps the Ayacucho proposal is one of the most challenging projects for Hoheisel: first, his place of enunciation results, to say the least, problematic. As a foreigner working with such delicate issues he has felt the need to stimulate the development of collective memories that in turn would uncover almost forgotten pasts, but as a way to avoid entanglement in other peoples’ stories, he constantly emphasizes his role as a “catalyzer” and an activist of counternarratives against power. A second problem that the memorial has to address is the fact that some of the families of the deceased belong to distinct ethnic and linguistic groups. They will perform different rituals of mourning in different modes; this will be a test for the effectiveness of the memorial. Thirdly, the place itself where the memorial would be located is also the “sanctuary” that holds the human remains of those that were killed during the period of the violence.

82 See note 2.
The description of the project pays attention to this plurality of actors who have a stake on the memorial and with whom different stages of the building process would have to be consulted. It also strives not only to respect the local traditions and to find a place or a home for the Andean cosmology within the site, but to enlarge the possibilities of a particular ritual within the memorial itself thus serving as a platform for the different groups to perform their individual mourning. The project has a buffer-zone function as well. The proposal states as one of its goals the necessity to “stop the construction plans of a military housing complex that would destroy the evidence of the crimes and at the same time would turn this space into a forgotten portion of the local landscape.”

On the aesthetic side, the main idea of the memorial works in accord with the existing topographic conditions and the resulting geometrical patterns left after the exhumations. “These interventions in the terrain would serve as a reference to create a modular...

structure that could be reproduced invariably and inserted in other territories marked by a period of violence.”

Each of these “interventions” is based in the rectangular void (6 x 2.5 x 1 ft.) that was left in the ground after the excavation had occurred. The wooden frameworks would be anchored to the ground but they can be removed and used in other parts of the memorial space. The empty spaces, accommodated in a simple grid, “would represent the absence of the disappeared.”

The key operative idea behind the apparent lack of a memorialistic substance in this project resides in the possibility for the actual use of this series of empty spaces. Hoheisel and Nakamura hope that with time these areas of exposed soil could be appropriated by the relatives and used according to their local traditions and expressions of mourning: what we want is that the victims and their relatives “find an area to leave offerings, pay homage, conduct ceremonies, or just be there in the presence of the overwhelming landscape.”

Although it might be too early to risk a sociological assessment of the project and its performance of absence through the use of negative volumes, what we perceive in the outline of the memorial is a sustained concern (that works in many of Hoheisel’s pieces) with the voice of the victim. We can recall the project of the Chilean survivor Roberto Zaldivar who runs the informal site of memory in an abandoned prisoner’s camp. Like Zaldivar, who decides to rescue the infamous spaces of imprisonment and torture, Hoheisel struggles to recover and maintain a certain history which is constantly threatened by larger forces. Following a self-

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84 Hoheisel, “Verlust-Schmerz,” 2.
85 Hoheisel, “Verlust-Schmerz,” 2. In this respect it is hard to avoid thinking about the Official 9/11 Memorial Reflecting Absence. Whether Hoheisel imagined the negative spaces before Michael Arad’s proposal matters little. What is relevant here is to read these pieces of funerary architecture as signs in a larger text that permit us to decode the contemporary logics of trauma, representation and politics. Perhaps a fruitful way of thinking about this globalized culture of memory vis-a-vis memorials consists in understanding the dialectic relation between Holocaust commemorative language (as it has develop over the last 50 years) and general trends in the commemoration of other tragedies.
86 Hoheisel, “Verlust-Schmerz,” 2.
reflexive methodology, Hoheisel is able to circumvent the usual pitfalls of the contemporary practices of funeral architecture and find critical avenues that allow him to rescue, interpret and materialize local narratives of tragedy.

As a self-conscious “outsider,” Hoheisel is painfully aware that his projects in non-western cultures should be attentive to the particularities of specific historical conflicts and sensitive to the vernacular of memory and mourning: that’s why he emphasizes the dialectic logic of contradiction that is always working in his memorialistic practice. In Buenos Aires we had an opportunity to hear the artist himself explaining his positioning in the face of these problematic configurations. His “function” -as he has put it many times- revolves around the concept of the catalyzer of memory. He insists to limit his role by starting some kind of initiative and helping those concerned with the future of certain memory to formulate their stories and facilitate artistic guidelines. Although not finished yet, the Llakillakisqa project helps us to understand better the way in which the counter-monumental thinking in Hoheisel adapts to the difficulties of working in a foreign culture.

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87 See Above “Empty Box”
CHAPTER 4

COUNTERMONUMENTS: TOWARDS AN EXPANDED DEFINITION

In this last section I would like to lay down the components for a possible expanded definition of the countermonument as such. I believe that the category of the countermonument needs to be updated and extended beyond the historically bounded definitions, and the terminology which is often used to describe it. This, in turn, will expand the space of interpretation and explore the many possibilities that remain passive or unacknowledged. The task will consist in unlocking the memorial/monument from the mechanics of a didactic or a cathartic operability, and release certain structures from the predetermined nature of this paradigm. First, I will guide my discussion following Joel McKim’s article “Agamben at Ground Zero, a memorial without content,” where he evaluates different theories of art regarding the monument/memorial, and later uses Agamben’s definition of language as “pure transmissibility” to question the critical consensus that has formed around contemporary memorial aesthetics. With Badiou’s and Agamben’s premises in mind, I proceed to elaborate on a short description that connects the philosophical ideas with concrete memorials or unrealized projects. My critique is based on a tentative and instable list of three countermonuments that seemed adequate to start a first discussion of the new countermonumental. Later, I offer new criteria to assess the countermonument as a new public space that responds to more recent events and works within the parameters of the landscape of globalized of memory.

In his *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, the French philosopher Alain Badiou outlines three definitions that organize the Western conception of the nature and function of art. In
what follows I summarize these categories: for Badiou the first is the *didactic* schema which is usually suspicious of the persuasive character of art. Since Plato, art and its promise for unmediated truth, is seen as a simulacrum because even if art appeals to mimetic strategies, in the end it is incapable of truth. Then, art must be under the control of the authorities, or in Plato’s Republic, where the reasoning is taken one step forward, the poet should be expelled from the polis. Art should be used as an instructive tool in projects of education. The second schema is the *romantic* and it’s placed in opposition to the didactic. Based on the thesis that art alone is capable of truth, this perspective privileges art as a way to redeem a fragmentary world and as the alternative to the inadequate procedures of philosophical systems. Accordingly, art is seen as a possible approximation to a true unveiling of the world; as the opening and preservation of a world. The last schema is positioned in balance between the two previous accounts and follows Badiou’s reading of Aristotle when the later claimed that art “involves the deposition of the passions in a transference onto semblance.” Thus, neither cognitive (didactic) nor revelatory (romantic), the purpose of art is not “truth” or the realm of knowledge, but the cathartic as such. In this *classical* schema art should “correspond to our imaginary assumptions of reality, unperturbed by intrusions of the truth of the Real, as what is likely is not necessarily true. The register of art is therefore shifted from the realm of truth to that of verisimilitude.” Under this view, art is displaced onto the field of psychoanalysis and provides a threshold where the object of desire (which according to Freud and Lacan remains beyond symbolization) emerges as an excessive Real at the limits of the symbolic. By assigning art a therapeutic notion and removing it from the

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89 McKim, 87.
sphere of truth and knowledge, the classical schema reduces art to a subservient role where it works as a device for relief.

These abridged categories of art defined by Badiou provide an excellent platform from which one can study the aesthetic components of monuments and memorials. In fact, they allow for a prospective examination or a brief history of the monument/memorial in the twentieth century which could be organized around these different properties. The didactic, romantic and classical views could work together to articulate a more comprehensive study of Western funeral architecture which would depart from traditional organizational frameworks. That work however remains to be written. For now, it is sufficient to see how contemporary memorials have moved away from the didactic to the therapeutic.90 Here, Maya Lin’s highly acclaimed memorial epitomizes this shift. Her minimalist black stone wall refrains from outright representation of the heroic and invites the visitor to work with a surface, as if the wall was a propitious volume that receives the visitor’s emotional burden. Ellen Handler Spitz positively reviews the memorial because the “viewer is forced to move her body, to walk rather than to stand still, to go downward, and to observe her own face reflected in the black engraved marble of the monument.”91 Predictably, memorial’s discourse is deeply populated by psychoanalytic vocabulary: loss, repetition, and reckoning. Sites of remembrance like these become inextricably linked with functions of working through the traumatic events of the past. As Noel Carroll suggests, the cathartic mode of operation has long become the norm for contemporary memorials because they “can articulate

90 For a richer description of this change see Mike Rowlands “Remembering to Forget, Sublimation as sacrifice in War memorials” in The Art of Forgetting. Adrian Forty and Susanne Kuchler Eds., The Art of Forgetting (Materializing Culture), (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2001).
focus to the unease the loss had caused and allow for the reassessment of the event in retrospective." The shift from the didactic to the cathartic was praised as an unquestionable productive movement. It represented an acknowledgement and the inclusion of the individual in the functioning of public spaces. It reflected progressive cultural policies that aimed to create plural and democratic ways of representation. The Vietnam Memorial was positively reviewed for its openness towards a personal instant of reckoning; “I wanted something that all people could relate to in a personal level.” The memorial with its flat surfaces allows the visitor to work with a plane, as if they were paying their respects to the absence of loved ones. However, this change in contemporary memorial aesthetics needs to be examined more critically. If we analyze this event within the schemes of art provided by Badiou we notice that he remains suspicious of the movement of art into the sphere of catharsis. This is a problematic step because, according to his evaluation, in this sphere art is no longer preoccupied with the production of shared “generic truths,” but instead becomes limited to the role of assuaging personal despair. Indeed recent trends in contemporary memorial design seem to uncritically place much emphasis on a subjective internalized response to past events. This is evident not only on the formal aspects of each design but in the language that is used to explicate these structures. This unquestioned emphasis prevents us from delving into a non-therapeutic critical discussion: this dominance of a cathartic experience seems to diminish the political potential of these sites. The question is whether these sites of

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92 Noel Carroll cited in McKim, 88.
memory are effective in producing modes of awakening a political subjectivity or whether they remain serving a predetermined function for the public and the state. At this point we must consider the work of the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, specifically his ideas in _The Man without Content_ as a possibility to depart from the crossroads of the three categories of art as explained above and the function of the memorial in our contemporary condition. First, I will explain the way in which Agamben makes a key distinction in Badiou’s third category of art, (the classical view) and how thanks to this insight we are able to overcome the impasse of the contemporary memorial in relation to the three functions. Then, based on McKim’s reading, I briefly explain Agamben’s notion of language as pure transmissibility. This last section dealing with the potential of langue, I argue, will guide us towards a new way of conceiving the memorial as something else beyond an urban marker of past tragedies.

In his “Memorial without Content” McKim introduces Agamben’s perspective on Badiou’s classical definition of art. Agamben reminds us of the Greek distinction between the concept of praxis and poiesis, “the former signifies an action, a ‘to do’ motivated by the will, while the latter is conceived as an experience ‘of production into presence, from concealment into the full light of the work.’”94 This crucial distinction resides in the movement of the will insight the act itself. That is, praxis is defined as an action where the desired effect is present from the beginning. To use McKim’s elementary example, “When I begin to walk across the room to fetch a book, I already have the wanted outcome in mind. The completion of the act is the fulfillment of this predetermined desire.” Poiesis on the other hand, for Agamben is the faculty par excellence of art in which something passes from not-being to being; poiesis consists in

94 McKim, 90.
the action of ‘bringing forth’ in the widest sense of the term. It can be explained as the act of un-concealment and preservation of a truth. For Agamben, poiesis is not the expression of will, but a possibility of production in a space that allows for free and willed activity. This poiesis also involves a sense of passivity, a notion of entering a terrain of productivity that is characterized by the suspension of will.

With this differentiation in mind we should proceed to consider the role of language and its possibilities. We should think about language in relation to concepts like communication and communicability; transmission and transmissibility. Agamben maintains that it is an openness to language itself apart from any contents of communication that remains the constant in every specific ritual of memory. This pure transmissibility is exemplified in Agamben’s deliberation on the meaning of the word “revelation” in Christian and Jewish traditions. Here we can clearly see the way in which this thinker unfolds the concepts of content, transmission and potentiality. He argues that the word “revelation” corresponds to an unveiling of not only something that we do not know, but the very possibility of knowledge in general. The “revelation” consists in a revelation not of content but of the potential of transmission. This operation in the liturgical context has a secular counterpart; namely the concealment of language itself. Language is a source of “bringing into presence that which never fully discloses itself in the act of creation.”

I believe this conception of language as poiesis is a necessary element in the problematization of the memorial today. The potential of language; namely, a potential that goes beyond content, represents a fundamental point in the configuration of this discussion of the countermonument in an expanded definition. Here, it is important to pay especial attention to the use of the word “potential.” As the reader

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95 McKim, 94.
familiarized with the work of Agamben may already know, the question of potentiality is central to the larger project of the philosopher. This potentiality, that is, the potentiality of language is structured within Agamben’s famous conception of man as an animal that is capable of his/her own impotentiality. He explains, “other living beings are capable only of their specific potentiality; they can only do this or that. But human beings are animals who are capable of their own impotentiality. The greatness of human potentiality is measured by the abyss of human impotentiality.”96 Thus, if we actualize this or that potential, (writing or walking thanks to our faculties to carry out these activities) we are enacting an expression of will, and as such, an act of praxis. The true potential however rests in our state of suspension, that is, in our capability to write or to walk without actualizing this or that potential. The impotentiality is the experience of potential itself. Only in this experience, an experience of poiesis, can something come into being which is not predetermined. Or, only through impotentiality can something radically new come into being.

The Productivity of Language: “Warum?” and “City of Refuge”

It is the nature of this “radically new” that takes us back to the discussion of memorials and countermonuments. In the last decades a number of memorials and countermonument proposals have delved with the notion of a non-cathartic representation. The production of sites that engage with Agamben’s challenge is certainly not undocumented. Perhaps, even Horst Hoheisel’s Aschrott Fountain can be located in the category of “precursors” of the new countermonument. In his negative shaped fountain, Hoheisel wants the visitors to initiate an experience of dialogue, as the countermonument invites the observer

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96 Agamben quoted in Mckim, 95.
to question the absence of a surface of mourning or a more traditional sculptural representation. Another proposal that seems to take into account some of the simple tenets of Agamben’s philosophy is the unrealized design by Jochen Gerz for the Berlin Holocaust Memorial. The proposal entitled “Warum?” (Why) did not function following a therapeutic contemplation or an instructive narrative, but instead asked visitors to begin a conversation about the reasons of why the Holocaust could have happened. The project envisioned a division of the “massive five-acre site into two parts: three quarters of the space would be paved in stones and thirty-nine light poles of fifty-two feet high in fiber optic cable asking in the thirty-nine languages of the victims from Europe asking ‘Warum?’ The other quarter would be devoted to a building called ‘The Ear.’”\footnote{James Young, \textit{Memory’s edge After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture} (New Haven: Yale, 2000), 148.} The central focus of the memorial would be the building in which people could meet and engage in conversation and productive discussion. McKim praises the proposal because “it does not seek to materialize an aesthetics of trauma, but instead calls for the formation of a community with no other presupposition that a desire to engage through language a set of historical events and their impact on the present.”\footnote{McKim, 98.} However, Gerz’s project seemed unsuitable to the committee because of the ominousness of the question “why.” The question appeared “unending in and of itself, an invitation to mystification. Whereas “what happened” and “how did it happen,” can be answered historically, “why” seemed to invite metaphysical, philosophical, even religious speculation.”\footnote{Young, 150. Note that the ideal way to answer this question rests in its translation into the realm of historical logic.} The memorial’s commissioners named Gerz’s proposal as one of the fourth finalists and declared that “although they had sympathy for the memorial conceptual aims; the brilliancy of the
concept was not matched by the formal execution of the design.” In the view of the Findungskommision, Gerz’s plans for the functioning of the memorial as a site of engaging in the “radically new” of language denoted a conceptual move that was perhaps excessively bold. The nature of the “Ear’s” question seemed inappropriate for the initiation of a productive zone of conversation. In lieu of a site of potentiality such as the one proposed by Gerz, the committee opted for a much safer approach that successfully conveys a solitary and meditative experience. The Eisenman memorial with its concrete slabs produces this atmosphere of sanctity, where visitors feel that they should enter and experience the memorial in a quiet mood: into “respectful and even prayerful repose.”

Figure 18: Jochen Gerz “Warum?” Proposal for the Berlin’s Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe. Photo: Courtesy James Young

100 Young, 151.
101 Young, 213. To be fair, the selected memorial works positively at other levels; it categorically rejects the didactic “we wanted to respect the architect’s attempt to foster a sense of incompleteness; it will not be a memorial with a narrative, beginning, middle, and end built into it.” Also, the proposal is attentive to the malleable substance of memory. It reflects the “preoccupation with the idea of a memorial that evolve over time projecting the kind of significance every generation will find in the memory of Europe’s murdered Jews.” See Memory’s edge, 216.
Perhaps the most fascinating example of this change in memorial aesthetics, from the cathartic into the possibility of using non-instrumentalized language, is the proposal by Krzysztof Wodiczko, “The City of Refuge: a 9/11 memorial.” Guided by Emmanuel Levinas’ Talmudic discussion of the Biblical cities of refuge, Wodiczko crafted a multilayered project that refused to continue and disseminate the aesthetic and ethical implications of a memorialistic practice dominated by a cathartic telos. Instead, his proposal advocates for an active memory, one that complemented “by a concentration on learning and proactive programs will encourage new and informed practical initiatives and actions.” Based on the notion of our condition as one that is “half-guilty and half-innocent,” in a world that is increasingly interconnected, Wodiczko aimed to create a space that could channel the pragmatic and generally positive spirit of Americans towards proactive modes of engaging in critical memory. This would help to bring forth an “active memorial” that places its emphasis in finding ways to “contribute to the prevention of global injustice, arrogance, ignorance, and disrespect.”

102 The modern concept of the “City of Refuge” as used by Wodiczko here derives from the ancient six cities that under the Law of Moses served as a place of refuge for someone that committed homicide whether intentionally or unintentionally (mostly the accusations dealt with deaths brought from foreseeable accidents that involved negligence). “There he or she could remain in safety because the borders of these cities would be controlling the possible infiltration by the relatives of the victim, ‘avengers of blood.’” In his review of the interpretation of the Cities of Refuge, Wodiczko continues, “Yet, as the Bible implies and Talmudic writings elaborate, the city of refuge was above all a place for study. Levinas reminds us, the safe sanctuary of the Cities of Refuge came with the responsibility to continue in-depth learning of the Torah.” Krzysztof Wodiczko, *The City of Refuge: a 9/11 memorial* Ed., Mark Jarzombek and Mechtild Widrich (Black Dog Publishing: London 2009), 16.


104 The “half innocent and half guilty” refers to the refugee that seeks protection in one of the six cities. He or she is half innocent and half guilty because of the condition of bringing death to someone perhaps by accident. Wodiczko, 17.

105 In *City of Refuge*, 12. Wodiczko’s impetus to provoke and engage in more productive activities moves him beyond contemplation and meditation or spirit of mourning or prayer and places his language in the sphere of the political and the poiesic: “Although now after September 11, we are part of a global, politically divided, and ethically perplexed society, feeling unintentionally implicated in the government’s crimes at home and abroad, most of us also feel the need to move forward, beyond mere study, discussion.
not reject in toto the now finished official 9/11 memorial, Michael Arad’s Reflecting Absence, but seeks to complement it with the political, humanitarian and moral functions that his City of Refuge seems to embody. His project wants to facilitate the conditions in which a true process of poiesis could be conceived and developed. If we recall Agamben’s notion of impotentiality as the point in which we enter into an open space of “rhythm and pause” where the radical potential of pure language is experienced, it is not difficult to imagine that Wodiczko strives for similar spaces and areas of free language.

In the City of Refuge, the artist wants to configure a series of spaces (he delineates seven components: facilities for historical philosophical study, a communication center for working with similar groups and organizations, and an open agora for debate, among others) that could benefit the coming of a new type of community. This new community, as we have seen above, would be one that is constantly working to produce spaces that are as much zones of risks as places of comfort; opportunities to enact not a praxis, as a willed action, but the poiesis as the faculty of bringing from not-being into being, the potential of un-concealment of truth. This new community ideally would be bounded by the immediacy of a non-instrumentalized form of communication. “Poiesically” speaking, some of these spaces

and reflection. This dilemma should be the starting point toward a new, pragmatic, both constructive and deconstructive but above all proactive political project. 106 For the complete list see Wodiczko’s The City of Refuge: A 9/11 memorial, 35. In Agamben’s oeuvre the reflection about this possible future community is expanded in his The Coming Community. Here, the potential as such becomes the whatever being, “What could be the politics of whatever singularity, that is, of a being whose community is mediated not by any condition of belonging (being red, being Italian, being Communist) nor by the simple absence of conditions (a negative community, such as that recently proposed in France by Maurice Blanchot), but by belonging itself?... The novelty of the coming politics is that it will no longer be a struggle for the conquest or control of the State, but a struggle between the State and the non-State (humanity), an insurmountable disjunction between whatever singularity and the State organization.” Giorgio Agamben, The Coming Community, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1993), 85.

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would foster that which never fully discloses itself in the act of creation; namely the pure potential for the truly new.

Figure 19: Krzysztof Wodiczko “City of Refuge A 9/11 Memorial” Proposal for the National September 11 Memorial. Photo: Courtesy Krzysztof Wodiczko

Formalistically, his design consists of a total of five floating spherical structures. Four smaller spheres that would be arranged around a larger one which would hold the main offices of the memorial: an auditorium/forum, the “situation room,” a space for a prospective Conflict Transformation Center, a Peace Building Institute, and a Cultural and Clinical Trauma Healing Center, and also smaller rooms for roundtable inner debates. The main sphere would be linked to the satellites and the mainland thanks to special ferries that would travel regularly. As a way to strengthen the reach of his memorial/peace center, Wodiczko planned to connect his project with other institutions and organization that work in similar field in the city of New York. In “The City of
Refuge: A 9/11 memorial” we find an appendix that outlines the “potential symbolic sites, institutions and organizations to be affiliated with the City of Refuge.”

Figure 20: Krzysztof Wodiczko “City of Refuge A 9/11 Memorial” Proposal for the National September 11 Memorial. Photo: Courtesy Krzysztof Wodiczko

This impossible memorial of Wodiczko, just as Gerz’s “Warum?” will remain in the realm of theory and speculation. Their actualization —in the vocabulary of Boris Groys—is now a reality for the future. The fact that these avant-garde forms of memory, or “working memorials” did not materialize for many ideological reasons does not mean that they should be forgotten as eccentric gestures of the time, rather, their un-fulfillment allows them to be released into future historical inscription. Even more, their non-materialization permits them to evolve with time as if they were self-constituting and autonomous machines. If (for now) these innovative approaches to construct a proactive critical memory remain confined to paper or stored in hard discs, that same condition

107 The proposed sites to work in association with the project are more than thirty institutions such as the National 9/11 Memorial, United Nations - Unesco Headquarters, Columbia University, The New School for Social Research, American-Arab Antidiscrimination committee, Jewish Community Center in Manhattan, and others. Most importantly, the artist decided to include Homeland Security offices like New York State Homeland Security Office, Underwater Security Associates, and the Department of Homeland Security OIG. Wodiczko, 83.
enables them to increase in articulation and relevancy. Wodiczko is completely conscious that his project represented utopia for the perplexed committee that was in charge of selecting the official 9/11 memorial. His proposal does not even include the basic requirements deemed essential for the World Trade Center Memorial and museum: there is no list of names of those killed; there is no reference to the tragic events of that day, no relics from the site or remains of the disintegrated bodies. In other words, his project closed the doors to realization a priori. But perhaps this gesture, in all its violence and radical invocation of something new, permits us to understand better our contemporary situation in relation to memory and memory work. Like Gerz and his “Ear,” Wodiczko’s memorial refused the distortioned language of “victim and hero,” refused to participate in a larger discourse of intrumentalized politics; it advocated instead for sophisticated modes, not so much of commemoration and honoring, but of prevention. Wodiczko closes his explanatory essay in a Benjaminian note, warning that future terrorist attacks will still be taking place, he exhorts us to consider the past under a more critical gaze and to find ways to successfully act on our knowledge “We must infuse the past with the present, as if the past had always been pregnant with the seeds of the present. This will help us to actualize the past and in turn, will make the past useful for the future, a future wherein generations with no direct remembrance of 9/11 will continue to be informed, visionary, critical, proactive and practical.”

As we have seen, the departure from the semantics of trauma and catharsis, allows for a new series of ideas to enter the discursive space and stimulate other types of exchanges. I argue that the new countermonument is not operating in the sphere of the didactic or cathartic but is able to release itself from the predetermined; from the

108 Wodiczko, 36.
repetition-in-trauma, and ultimately from the fate of most monuments and memorials: obsolescence and forgetfulness. This new countermonumental uses the sculpture, landscape architecture and architecture proper as platforms that allow for the creation of a temporal community; this community will be one that belongs-in-language. This is a contingent community which attempts to use a space free of obstacles in order to act and enact an immaterial site of communication. These types of communities point towards potentially true dialogical moments. In our contemporary condition initiatives such as these —memorials that serve as centers of discussion or countermonuments that work as a site of dialogue and understanding— represent the firsts efforts in the creation of a new type of public space; a public space that could capture the moment of indeterminacy as pure potentiality: this moment is the starting place for the process of poiesis, of the coming into being of something we do not quite understand yet, something that as it is being conceived is being revealed to us. In these projects, the political enters the physical space through language. And this language, again, should be able to appear in a site that motivates a productive passivity; that is, in a poiesic way. The new definition of the countermonumental understands that something must emerge from the site that goes beyond a willed act of memory or learning about a past event. It seeks the productive at the level of the political subject in order to nurture global debates on freedom, poverty or other contemporary issues.\footnote{In this logic, more recent proposals coming from the field of contemporary art and the new relational aesthetics also work towards the development of what is called “Useful Art.” Cuban artist Tania Bruguera, through her “Cátedra Arte de Conducta” has explored ways in which her performances could take a useful turn. Instead of a merely “public” or “social” function, her works aims to construct and bring into the positive different types of concrete results; her projects search “through art, not only to give service, but to create a service that did not exist before.” Her “Immigrant Movement International” project in New York City whose mission is to “help define the immigrant as a unique, new global citizen in a post-national world” can be seen as one possible articulation of this idea. Although her inclusion into the new definition of the countermonumental remains to be discussed in other place, I believe that her work, specifically the}
methods of remembering while creating a place for a more active critical and engaged memory—a memory in action.

A cursory and even reductionarily tentative survey of western aesthetics in regards to funerary architecture reveals that there is indeed a successive displacement from regimes of commemoration: from the instructive authoritarian monument of the first half of the century, to the contemplative one where silence and a mausoleum atmosphere would replace the tyranny of the state. Then, from the first countermonumental that experimented in the mid 80’s with non-traumatic semantics at times and with non-didactic strategies, to the new countermonumental where the operation is not so much residing in a therapeutic or instructive task but it is at work at the level of bringing into being something new in the threshold; namely a potentiality of language. In the same way that the first countermemorialists reacted against authoritarian abuses of art by their own government, these new unapologetic generation of memorialists is creating works in response to facile reduction of the cathartic that is accompanied, and it comes as no surprise, by its instrumentalization on behalf power. The countermonument as a label coined in the late 80’s originated as a way to classify West German artists who were opposed to the practices of Holocaust commemoration as well as the employment of monumental aesthetics by the Nazi state. The countermonumentalists did not make up a cohesive group or an art-school, they were not even artists sometimes; but common citizens and intellectually active people that felt disenchanted at some times puzzled by

IMI in New York shares similar preoccupations with Wodiczko’s “City of Refuge” vis-à-vis the ethical at the local level and the production of new spaces of dialogue.
the way in which the tragedies of the Second World War were represented. They sought to build structures that would provoke, that would bring alterity and change, that would disappear and demand interaction, public art that would invite violation and desanctification.

The new expanded definition of the countermonumental is based on the premise that project’s like Gerz’s “Ear” or Wodiczko’s “City of Refuge” are working under the same logic that encourages the production of thinking and conversation. That is, their projects articulate a surplus that is non-traumatic and non-didactic; in their proposals there is a concern for creating favorable conditions to catalyze productive processes of memory. These artists need to be classified under a different banner other than memorialists or “first wave” countermonumentalists because they respond to events—tragic or not—that move beyond the traditional aesthetics of Holocaust representation. In other words, the West German countermonumentalists need to be addressed in a critical way, historicizing their praxis and identifying the “new” components that they successfully integrated into their designs. Whereas in the first definition of the countermonumentalists we, as a public, were provoked and invited to interact, we were encouraged to violate the surfaces, to profane a semi-sacred symbol of the state, in this expanded definition we are asked to engage in non-predetermined language, in a poiesic process (where you do not know the end result) as a way to open the political. In this expanded definition people are encouraged by the literal emptiness of the space or by the absence of a surface-to-work to allow for a productive passivity. Furthermore, in the first definition of the countermonumentalists, the West German artists responded to the necessity of giving an account of the unspeakable horror of the Holocaust. They
attempted to honor the victims of their own government’s wrongdoings from the perspective of a second generation in a gesture that also defined them as too young to be involved in direct responsibility. But this type of commemoration was materialized, through the negative space. Sometimes, it went beyond the negation of a traditionally-shaped volume to represent past tragedies; it bordered the notion of self-punishment via guilt architecture. Here one can think of Hoheisel’s “Aschrott Fountain” and Gerz’s “Monument Against War and Fascism” as a sort of topographic hara-kiri as the Vaterland searches for some way to redeem past crimes. The new definition of the countermonumental does not work with the negative (in the physical or philosophical way) but try to construct optimal sites of non-material production. In a poiesic way, they strive to bring forth something unexpected and potential. The expanded definition of the countermonument seeks to include projects like “City of Refuge” and “Warum?” which are constructions that, beyond the didactic or cathartic operation, launch alternative methods for new procedures in politics that are neither circumscribed to the framework of the nation-state or to the personal processes of conducting emotional restoration. Their projects seem to suggest that what must be sought after is not a new political future as an immediate answer, but the creation of the very space where politics could take place. They struggle to codify in their structures physical spaces where the possibility of an open communication could be favorably concretized.

In finishing, I would like to leave open this tentative classification in order to evaluate future projects that might use the tools and procedures explained here to devise new and productive situations. This category should be examined and critically assessed in other places in order to use it productively in appropriated contexts. The countermonumental
gesture, whether coming from sculptors or architects, contemporary artists or activists of memory, represents an affirmative avenue towards a more productive way of engaging with memory. As such, it should be theorized more critically and brought into other disciplines with the aim of problematizing apparent situations of consensus in the contemporary debate on cultural production.
APPENDIX A

“MEMORY”

Some reflection regarding the Art of Memory and the Memory of Art

Horst Hoheisel, Buenos Aires/Kassel 2005

Everything that artists do to remember the crimes of the past is simply wrong, including my work. What is left for us is to try to rehearse the same gesture time after time: sometimes better, sometimes worst. But what we can never achieve is to draw the true image of the true history. What is the true History after all? Is it the record that is passed on by the winners of history in order to keep their power, or perhaps the story of the subjugated?

It is generally accepted that up till today the most extreme event in human history is the holocaust. All the efforts done to find an artistic metaphor just reveal a great metaphor: the impossibility to represent and remember the holocaust through art.

Every monument that I know of is commissioned by politicians or by groups of the public sphere with their own interests very present. For the most part, their monuments represent compromises between these politicians and their different constituencies. That’s why few of these monuments are “good art.” This good art is uncompromising. Most monuments are really mediocre pieces of art, and although they are built to remember the victims of power, more often than not they say more about our current political constellation, they reveal more about today’s art trends, the contemporary paradigms, fashions and subjective taste than about the true story and the suffering of the victims. In some cases memory is lost altogether in the middle of the commemorative excitement:
this becomes one more business opportunity. When anniversaries or important dates approach, the network of politicians, business marketing and intellectuals come revolve around the same issue.

“There is no business like Shoa Business.” This was a rather pointed sentence that circulated around the time of the construction of the Holocaust Berlin memorial.

Yes, I did partake in this business with my commemorative work. And this paper itself for this book belongs to that monumental “business” (that’s why I neglected this text for so long, I find myself writing it with malaise as the deadline approaches) “Deadline”

What a word in this specific context! However, the more I work in this commemorative business the more painfully aware I become of its nature. Memory disappears with commemoration! I try harder and harder to find means and mediums to escape the rush of the commemorative business. I built anti-monuments, negative shape memorials; I try to stimulate processes of “memory from below.” These initiatives do not come top down. They do not originate from the powerful, the institutions, the mainstream commemorative groups, the important (public) intellectuals or the major artists. As an artistic catalyzer I increasingly restrict myself to jump start processes of memory. If I succeed at least in one of the participants, a personal experience with memory could originate. Perhaps, small shards of the restored memory could be recuperated in this process.

In Buenos Aires I encouraged this mnemonic process; but only from the place of a catalyzer. For the Military Junta is not my history. Germany’s history is another history. Some friends in Argentina try, based on my project, to forge their own “monument.” This personal monument doesn’t come as a boastful gesture from power but is started from bellow like a whisper and then, spreads among the community. Some have joined and
some have started their own variations. But right now I don’t want to write more about it because I would be in contradiction. I would be using the thirtieth anniversary of the military dictatorship as an opportunity to publicize this idea.

We do not know how this project of memory would take place from below. Nevertheless, we have constructed a specific memory. As soon as our initiative from below reaches higher points—the sphere of institutions, the administration, and power, everything becomes more problematic. Then, memory succumbs to the whirlwinds of the establishment and capitulates.

The Rio de la Plata is a monument for the disappeared. I proposed that instead of illuminating with big light poles the sculptures of El parque de la memoria, to redirect their light towards the body of the river. For me the river is the true monument.

I have strolled along the shores of the river especially at night and I have seen the fishermen with their fish rods in the water. I thought about memory as a stream. Memory could be that river in which we constantly try to catch fragments of our past.

Translation: Juan Felipe Hernandez
I see in your pieces a dialectic movement of thought. It seems to me, that you are always positioning your works within a tension. The move in Buenos Aires with the “empty box” elucidates that self-reflexivity that I notice. The paper “Algunas Reflexiones acerca del Arte de la Memoria” that you presented in Buenos Aires in 2005 signals towards that uncomfortableness of earning a living by doing creative work about past catastrophes.

I always study the particularity of place even before conceiving the work: I pay attention to the country, the region, the political situation, as well as the rituals of the people, the different social struggles, and the battle for what we can call the “true memory.” I’m interested in the past and present circumstances of the spaces. I strive to meet people from different groups; all coming from distinct angles and social classes. After these conversations and experiences about the history and the current state of the place, varied ideas start to flow in my mind; sometimes when I do not expect them, for example when I go for a walk.

As an international “memorialist” how do you respond to the challenge that arises out of your own praxis in a foreign country? How you and your work deals with reactions that oppose the intrusion of an estranger (in this case you) to tease and play with the complex network of cultural memory?
In Germany I always work based on my own history: my own life-story and that of my family’s often overlaps with the history of the country (evidently the Holocaust and its culture of commemoration). When I work abroad, I always try to function as a catalyzer simply because their story isn’t mine. I just present an idea, but ultimately its realization is contingent and lays on the particularities of the social landscape. I emphasize it is their story and their memory. That’s why I really like the project “La Quimica de la Memoria” in Buenos Aires because with time they stopped informing me about the process. The only trace of my intervention over there rests on occasional reports. Sometimes they say “according to the German artists Horst Hoheisel…” Recently, the Buenos Aires-based foundation “Memoria Abierta” started a project based on the same criteria of “La Quimica” that took place on the ESMA, without even mentioning me. When I work in other countries I try to engage with artists and locals from different backgrounds that feel identify with the idea. We think through the work together.

_How does the “green aesthetic” enter your own artistic and memorial production?_

_You, as an artist, just plant some trees and let them grown or you intervene more directly; in other words, how far does your hand go? Also, why building green memorials now and not 10 or 20 years ago?_

I am fascinated about this because, memory, like life itself, needs time. For me, certain memories grow in the same way as trees and plants grow. When I read academic history books, I always note that History unfolds in terms of construction: building as an act, edifices, and completions. But I think that History is something else — something that grows like a tree with branches and leaves. Perhaps it grows like a forest where a path has
to be cleared and where one could easily get lost. In the project “Wachsen-mit-
Erinnerung” (Growing with memory), I use the center of the town, where the synagogue
that was destroyed by the Nazis once stood, to shape a new space that no one will ever
enter. Only the vegetation will fill with time that void. In fifty years’ time the volume of
the synagogue will take shape as a forest of memory. But like vegetation and life, this
memory will remain at a constant state of change. And I really like that image; the flora
represents sustainability, this should also be part of our memory.

What have been key influences on your own work? Perhaps other German
“memorialists,” or, Conceptual art, Minimalism, Fluxus or the earth works of the 60s
and 70s?

I think that the strongest influence is my own story; my story and that of my family,
always of course affected by the war and the Holocaust. My father spent ten years as a
German prisoner of war in Siberia while my mom fled from Latvia via Poland all the way
to Germany. Then around 1968, many young people started to question certain
institutions and asked their parents and relatives about their role during the years of the
war.

Certainly as a sculptor during that period, there was an influence of the American
minimalism and conceptual art. But I wasn’t very interested in questions of style. I pay
more attention to the place where I will build, its situation and its own history, afterwards
I start thinking from a formalistic mindset. When I’m bringing ideas together to start a
project, I try to keep in mind and possibly to configure into the memorial the act of
thinking. As a conceptual tool, this image of thought –immaterial and transient- works in
part on my own production. When someone is thinking or focusing in some idea he/she tends to lower the head and look downwards. And I like to think that’s the reason way many of my pieces were built underground. When the everyday man walks on the Negative-shape Aschrott Fountain he is thinking about the history under his feet, for me, this is the true monument.

When you build in Latin-America, how does the vernacular shape your artistic conception?

I like the South American way of life since my days as a practicing forest engineer in Venezuela during the 1973 to 1975. Later, in 1980 I lived for a year with the Yanomami people close to the Venezuela/Brazil border. This opportunity to live with them reminded me of Beuys’s famous dictum that “everyone is an artist.” In this society art and work are not divided under the logic of the capitalist organization of institutions, like it is the case in our cultures. What I found fascinating is that they were able to integrate practices of creativity with their everyday tasks. For me these people know more, without knowing, that is, what is art. The experience on my consciousness of this way of life determined a new way of seeing the world and marked a shift from a scientist to an artist.

When working in other countries I try to be informed about the local social and economic dynamics of a place, but I’m always aware that I’m not part of that specific culture. My analysis is always conditioned by the position from where I see things –that’s an advantage as well as an impediment. This aesthetic distance allows me to see different vistas that sometimes remain hidden to the locals. At the same time I feel that I lack the
understanding of some of their struggles and their emotions. For instance, in Cambodia my art reached its limits. The Buddhist doctrine that regulates normative commemoration in that society explicitly forbids the individual from engaging in reviving the past. They say “do never touch the evil in the past.” Their reasoning in this premise is based on the idea that these catastrophes could come back into the present and history will effectively be repeated. I think that in their conception of past and memory they are diametrically located vis-à-vis our position.

In the process of the Ayacucho memorial in Peru, have you found any kind of opposition or some conflict between your ideas and the locals?

The debates of memory in Peru are very heated. Recently, I found out that they will build the Museum of Memory in Lima in the Miraflores area. Miraflores is one of the most affluent parts of the city; that’s where all the upper and ruling classes live and where the financial district is located. And as such they have little to do with the indigenous, the victims of the massacres in isolated regions and the millions of deprived Peruvians. Most of these people live outside any kind of coverage of the state. This is why I want to collaborate in the Llakillakisqua project with artist Sandra Nakamura; so that we can rescue some part of their subordinate memory. The relatives of the victims, whether they are victims of the Peruvian military and their cleaning operations or were targeted by the retaliatory forces of Sendero Luminoso who wanted to punish them for not mobilizing in their Maoist project, until today haven’t received a proper place to mourn. We want to help them get their own site that works according with their rituals and their ways of overcoming the trauma of the past.
How has a post-communist landscape affected your production? After the Fall of the Berlin wall you produce your art in a different way? In this globalized capitalism your creation is altered, maybe more radical?

After the fall of the wall I was invited to participate in competitions to build monuments praising the reunification in Berlin; and later that year in Leipzig because the first demonstrations started in that part of the country. However, I find it very hard to build positive and heroic monuments. I think it goes against my nature. I turn critical when I find myself in the face of power; it doesn’t matter what face. In terms of globalization and my work I would like to cooperate with the Occupy Movement. But at the same time, I prefer to focus on my drawings and in a more intimate art. I don’t have that urge anymore of changing the world through my memory art.

What other art affects your creation? You mention Holderlin one time. Is there maybe an influence by Celan and other post war poets? Music, Literature, Visual Art, Sculpture etc?

Of course Holderlin. At the present moment I am working in a small memorial for the victims of the euthanasia (Aktion T4). I’m using a text by Georg Buchner “Lenz.” I always work while listening to classical music. And I’m also interested in artists who deal with the theme of tragedy. I’m more concerned with the attitude of the artist rather than a specific piece. For example, Gerhard Richter is someone that constantly changes styles, but at the same time his eye remains fixed in the right place. He says, “Painting is not a matter of style, it’s an attitude of life.” And this reminds me of a counterfactual but
complex question: If Raphael had been born with no hands, would he still be the great genius that we know him as?

_How has your training as a forester influenced your creation?_

I have a very strong relationship with nature; with the jungle and the desert (I have crossed the Sahara desert twice). I wouldn’t be able to live in a place like New York. I like the fact of being able to take a walk by the forest or run with my dog; it is usually there that good ideas come to mind. Because of my training I was familiarized since very early with the procedures of analysis and reason. But to analyze means also to divide, to destroy. For instance, I remember that in the Venezuelan jungle in order to analyze a few elements of the local orchids KA, CA, N, we had to crush and pulverize them. At the end with analyzed all the bio-elements of the flower in grams and measures, but we didn’t go beyond pure a descriptive and procedural logic. We didn’t take into account the formal composition of the geometry for example or the integrity of its functioning. This is where I believe that art can play a supplemental role.

_In your paper “algunas reflexiones acerca del arte de la memoria” you mentioned that “memory disappears with commemoration.” Do you think that after the commemorative dates and celebrations the sculptures or memorials stop working effectively?_

I believe that the memorials by themselves can have a very limited function; they human participation or rituals. With this kind of participatory engagement the particularity of memory as an aleatory, malleable and unstable force can be activated or reactivated. But again at this point we have to be careful which memory we want to celebrate: the
memory of a ruling class? The memory of the victims? There are many processes at work within the narratives of memory. These processes are often contradictory. We use science, and art, pedagogy and activism in order to get closer to the “true” story, in order to approach it the way it happened. But time after time, in spite of all our attempts, or perhaps, because of them, we just get farther and farther to the past; it seems that we keep adding layers on that history.

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