

# Memory Vanished, Absent, and Confined

## *The Countermemorial Project in 1980s and 1990s Germany\**

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### INTRODUCTION

The 1970s–1980s boom of traditional (nineteenth-century) memorials to Germany’s Nazi past led many theorists to overturn conventional conceptions of representation (or re-presentation).<sup>1</sup> Memorial activity, which I call *Denkmal-Arbeit*,<sup>2</sup> had become increasingly popular in West Germany during the 1970s, leading to what scholars have termed the memory boom. An emergent popular historicism—known as the New History movement—sought to reclaim a usable past, “to mourn and atone for its victims, to emphasize its diversity, and to celebrate its potential for a truly democratic society.”<sup>3</sup> Growing antiquarianism emphasized the preservation of artifacts, monuments, and structures. By 1980, all West German federal states had passed legislation protecting historical sites. For many West Germans, the goal was to refocus German memorial activity on a collective identification with the West and with Europeanism. They began to emphasize the need for a German identity that worked through the experience of fascism during the Third Reich and told of a more affirmative national history.<sup>4</sup>

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, *Denkmal-Arbeit* began to shift its focus from the broader German experience with fascism toward the experience of the Holocaust. This shift was accompanied in time by an array of Holocaust novels, plays, and avant-garde films, leading some critics to speak of the “Shoah business.”<sup>5</sup> The results of the memory boom were derided for aestheticizing the history of Nazism and the Holocaust. *Denkmal-Arbeit* became associated with the redemptive “normalization” of the German past through the construction of narratives and traditional monuments.

The new generation of the mid-1980s therefore found itself confronted on the one hand by overconsumption of memory,<sup>6</sup> and on the other by resentment against collective blame.<sup>7</sup> They turned to artists for new representations of the Nazi past that could disentangle *Denkmal-Arbeit* from the quest for redemption. The aesthetic and political response was the countermemorial project. Countermonuments would be memorial spaces conceived to challenge the very premise of the monument—to be ephemeral rather than permanent, to deconstruct rather than displace memory, to be antiredemptive. They would reimpose memorial agency and active involvement on the German public.

Among the first to examine countermonuments critically, James E. Young sparked renewed interest in the problems of representation particularly in the public sphere.<sup>8</sup> In his widely acclaimed studies of Holocaust representations, Young explored countermemorial *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory). The links developed by Pierre Nora between *lieux de mémoire* and collective (national) identity are certainly present in Young’s analyses.<sup>9</sup> Yet Young examines only the aesthetic and conceptual contributions of countermonuments. He does not scrutinize their production and consumption as collective memorial processes, which I define as the social activities and rituals (or representations) through which a community builds its narrative and constructs its social identity.<sup>10</sup>

This gap in the literature is by no means surprising, since countermonuments began to appear in Germany only two decades ago. Nevertheless, their popularity, both within and outside the academy, begs a social historical inquiry. After all, countermonuments have become icons of a postmodern discourse with reunified Germany’s “memorial conundrum” and have become entwined in debates on the new German identity and on *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (working through the past). And if we

are to understand the memory boom itself as a historical phenomenon, we must examine the social trends that emerge from the German public's engagement with the countermonumental project. As Wulf Kansteiner has argued, the history of collective memorialization is a "complex process of cultural production and consumption that acknowledges the persistence of cultural traditions as well as the ingenuity of memory makers and the subversive interests of memory consumers."<sup>11</sup> Only through an interconnected examination of the conception (by "memory makers") and the reception (by "memory consumers") of countermonuments can we truly understand them as collective memorial processes.

This study aims to begin to fill that gap by examining two countermonuments in their socio-historical contexts and as *lieux de mémoire*. I will consider these countermonuments from the space between their *conception* and their *reception*. While surely all monuments are subject to audience reception and interpretation, countermonuments depend almost entirely on their audience to interpret their intent, making the artist a sort of prisoner of his/her audience. Their reliance on social interaction, their stated objective to bridge the distance between spectator and object, makes their public reception vital to their successful social implementation. In this context, the received understanding of the countermonumental project is therefore far more socially and historically significant than is the initial conception by the artists.

Through this reception history, I will suggest that countermonuments failed to escape the symbology they resented in traditional monumental forms and thereby failed to create a sphere of social interaction outside the didacticism of traditional monuments. While the artists conceded the confinement of their countermonuments as works of public art, the goal of the countermonumental project was nevertheless to escape the preexistent (problematic) metaphors of the experiences of the Nazi era. It is in this task that countermemory failed. While the countermonumental project certainly succeeded in creating a more attenuated vision of memorialization, it did not suggest a new social formulation of re-memory.

The selection of sources for a reception history, as with all social history, is difficult. I choose to gauge public reception from recorded public reactions, either by the local media or as retold in secondary literature. Local newspaper articles and letters to the editor provide a window into countermonuments as social figures. Such sources are

certainly not comprehensive, particularly since criticism tends to be voiced more readily in the media than support. Still, in examining the public discussions of my two cases, I have found certain common tendencies among the reactions of both critics and supporters. It is not my intention to prove that the German public disliked countermonuments, for the countermemorial project by no means sought to find publicly pleasing memorial forms. Rather, I seek to show that the reception of these countermonuments, regardless of aesthetic judgment, located them within the confines of traditional memorial forms. And when this reception is compared to the conception of the countermemorial project, we see the failure of countermonuments to produce a new discourse of representation. In the course of my analysis, I will therefore return to these conceptions as stated both by the particular artist and by Young since the two are in effect entwined.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, I should note my exclusion of ethical or crypto-theological arguments, particularly the highly contestable argument regarding the so-called “irrepresentability” of the Holocaust.<sup>13</sup> Chief among these is Theodor W. Adorno’s claim that “the aesthetic principle of stylization ... make[s] an unthinkable fate appear to have had some meaning; it is transfigured, something of its horror is removed.”<sup>14</sup> While I do take a highly critical lens to the countermemorial project, I both recognize its contribution to the understanding of collective memorial processes and assume, after Elaine Scarry, the possibility and, indeed, necessity of a successful expression of traumatic pain that eludes appropriation or stylization.<sup>15</sup>

Questions of how to produce such successful expressions—how monuments should be designed, constructed, “consumed,” and regarded, or whether traditional monument forms are flawed at all—are clearly outside the scope of this study. I seek only to juxtapose on the one hand the stated objectives (conception), and on the other the real social results (reception) of the countermonument project through the lens of my two case studies. I hope to show that even these internationally renowned countermonuments carry with them a social history that not only evolves from conception to reception, but also never extends beyond the confines of a traditional symbology. In other words, the countermonument still retains an intimate, a priori relationship to metaphor and narrative.

THE NONSITE OF COUNTERMEMORY:  
HARBURG'S MONUMENT AGAINST FASCISM

The countermonument of Jochen Gerz and Esther Shalev-Gerz—their design for the Harburg Monument against Fascism, War and Violence—and for Peace and Human Rights, known colloquially as the Harburg Monument against Fascism—is perhaps the most celebrated of the 1980s countermonuments.<sup>16</sup> During the height of the 1970s rise of conservative parties and ideas, Harburg's Social Democratic (SPD) faction first considered creating a memorial to the victims of fascism. This 1979 proposition came at a time when the German Left was defining itself as the leader of *Denkmal-Arbeit* with monuments and memorials dotting the West German landscape. It was not until 1983, under Christian Democratic (CDU) majority and a reinvigorated national quest for memorialization, that the Harburg Municipal Council agreed to open a design competition to six artists.<sup>17</sup> By then, Hamburg had become a center of *Denkmal-Arbeit*, having resolved the previous year to mark important historical buildings, streets, and squares in a broad campaign entitled “Sites of Persecution and Resistance, 1933–1945.”<sup>18</sup>

At the time of the competition, and throughout much of the memory boom of the 1970s and early 1980s, the German memory debates and *Denkmal-Arbeit* centered on the experience of fascism. They focused on the problem of German public involvement in and support for fascism in the 1930s and 1940s and the impossible reconciliation between the generation that allowed the rise of Nazism and the rebellious generation of the 1960s. For this reason in 1983, the Harburg Municipal Council commissioned a monument that would recall the terror of fascism and become a beacon for peace, hence the “Monument against Fascism.” Only in the mid-1980s did the Holocaust, specifically the systematic extermination of the Jews, become a focus of *Denkmal-Arbeit*. The Harburg monument, although begun with an intended focus on fascism, spanned the course of this shift in the memory debates. It remained, however, a Monument against Fascism and, while occasionally categorized with Holocaust monuments, should be distinguished from more specifically Holocaust-focused representations like my second case.

The guidelines of the Harburg monument commission stated that the council “wanted a memorial keyed to the present.”<sup>19</sup> The Gerzes read



Fig. 1. The Harburg monument soon after its unveiling.  
Photograph courtesy of James E. Young.

this as a welcome challenge to traditional monument forms which displaced memory beneath obelisks, statues and mausoleums. The Gerzes therefore submitted what would later be called a countermemorial proposal. Unveiled on 10 October 1986, this twelve-meter-high, one-meter-square stele was made of hollow aluminum and plated with a thin layer of soft lead (see figure 1). At its base lay a temporary inscription in German, French, English, Russian, Hebrew, Arabic, and Turkish, which read:

We invite the citizens of Harburg, and visitors to the town, to add their names here to ours. In doing so, we commit ourselves to remain vigilant. As more and more names cover this 12-meter tall lead column, it will gradually be lowered into the ground. One day it will disappear completely, and the site of the Harburg Monument against Fascism will be empty. In the end, it is only we ourselves who can rise up against injustice.<sup>20</sup>

The project invited Harburg's citizens to use a steel stylus to engrave their names into the lead coating of the column as a sign of opposition to fascism. As soon as a reachable part of the stele was covered with writing, it was lowered 140 centimeters, a total of eight times before disappearing completely on 10 November 1993.<sup>21</sup> All that remains visible of the monument today is a small observation window into the underground shaft in which the monument is now enclosed and a tablet describing the chronology of its sinking.

Even prior to its 1986 unveiling, newspapers repeatedly printed descriptions of the monument design, explaining how Harburg citizens were intended to interact with the stele. The Gerzes themselves often stood by the monument, particularly immediately following its unveiling, to explain to passersby that they could use the stylus to write on the stele. Still, the citizens of Harburg—be they supporters or critics—responded to the monument as a traditional representation of the experience of fascism, not as a countermonument. I will show that this reception illustrates a failure of the countermemorial project, the inability of the countermonument to escape the bounds of traditional discourses on the representation of Nazism.<sup>22</sup>

### Constructed Banality

The local art committee's guidelines intended the monument to be built in a park, which Gerz describes as standing for "tranquility and introspection."<sup>23</sup> Part of the Gerzes' proposal, however, was to relocate the site of the monument to a busy corner in the middle of downtown Harburg. Gerz described the site, on a pedestrian walkway between Harburger Ring Street and Harburger Sand Street, both heavily commuted streets, as noisy, public and more heavily traversed than a park.<sup>24</sup>

Not on a historic site, or a "historically burdened" one, nor in a quiet park, as the commissioning authority had initially wanted. But atop a small plaza, projecting like a balcony above a pedestrian subway, between a commuter train station and a fish store, a Chinese restaurant and the market square, dry cleaners and a bakery.<sup>25</sup>

The Gerzes' monument would penetrate the very center of Harburg's



quotidian public life. It would oppose the convention of traditional monuments erected in out-of-the-way parks or in specific Nazi-related sites (if one could so define the ambiguous terminology of a “historically burdened” site). Rather, it would attempt to confront Harburg citizens in the ordinary urban space of a market square:

The point is finding the form in which to publicize something, a form that isn’t denunciative, that exerts only the slightest pressure, that doesn’t point any fingers at anyone, but instead—by removing and withdrawing all the means of pressure you have—brings what has been repressed to light in the midst of the square.<sup>26</sup>

Supporters of the countermonument, and the Gerzes themselves, touted its controversial position towering over the citizens of Harburg during their daily activities—commuting to work, grocery shopping, or picking up dry cleaning. Unlike traditional monument conceptions, the Harburg monument seemed to impose *Denkmal-Arbeit* on the most banal moments of German daily life.

Yet in so doing, it seemed also to relinquish its call to a more meaningful discourse than the banality of traffic jams and pedestrian detours. Even before its inauguration, local newspapers repeatedly printed articles discussing the problematic detours forced upon pedestrians on Harburger Ring Street by the monument’s construction: “At this prominent location between Harburger Ring Street and Harburger Sand Street, even the slimmest find it not at all easy to maneuver around oncoming traffic.”<sup>27</sup> That the monument had already become a nuisance to the Harburg public is abundantly clear. Local newspapers did not debate the values of the design, though several attempted to introduce the monument’s conception to the citizens of Harburg. Discussion centered on the monument’s construction site as simply one of a handful of construction sites throughout the city.

The comparison of the monument with other public spaces such as highways and tunnels began as early as its inauguration. A continuous argumentative thread—paradoxically among both critics and supporters of the monument—was its price tag. The DM 280,000 (roughly equal to US\$144,000) spent on a monument that disappears was seen by many Harburg citizens as a “waste of money.”<sup>28</sup> One letter to the editor in



February 1986 discussed the rumor of a DM 400,000 price tag, concluding: “These DM 400,000 would truly be better spent for the beautification of our city.”<sup>29</sup> Young even attributes such criticism to Harburg’s disgruntled mayor, who felt the money could have been better spent repaving a highway.<sup>30</sup> While the origins of the comparison of this sum with the cost of highway repaving is difficult to pinpoint, it was positively spun by Jobst Fiedler, the SPD head of the Harburg municipality, in defense of the monument only a year after its inauguration: “What was discussed in public was this fact and the cost, although the latter was not more than what is spent on 100 meters of federal highway.”<sup>31</sup> It seems this “apples to oranges comparison” was so prevalent that it served both critics and supporters of the Harburg monument.<sup>32</sup> And yet the banality of such a comparison, that a monument to fascism be compared to road construction, that it be criticized as a “waste of money,” “schlimm” (awful), and a misuse of taxpayer funds, begins to set the tone of the local discourse of the Harburg monument.<sup>33</sup>

#### Silenced Archive

The inscription on the Harburg monument implored passersby to sign their names, to “commit [them]selves to remain[ing] vigilant.” The initial response of the Harburg public included many who signed their names in neatly ordered rows and columns. The intent of the monument was to give the citizens of Harburg—and perhaps more generally the German people—an opportunity and a call not only to remember the wrongs of the past but also to become aware of and act against those of the present:

The “trick” is to use a version that exists in the tradition of art history to mirror the expectations people place on a monument, reflecting these back on them, and to pass back the task the monument was meant to perform to the people. That means that they are seduced into articulating.<sup>34</sup>

By “committing” themselves to vigilance, the citizens of Harburg would turn memory into action, would themselves become the agents of *Denkmal-Arbeit*.

Indeed, the Harburg monument was, by design, extremely public, and further became highly political. One perhaps farcical, and yet quite evidentiary, example of this is the role of public officials in the ceremonious lowerings of the monument at more or less yearly intervals. For the Gerzes, as for Young, the pomp and circumstance seemed ironic: "That so many Germans would turn out in such good faith to cheer the destruction of a monument against fascism exemplified, in the artist's eyes, the essential paradox in any people's attempt to commemorate its misdeeds."<sup>35</sup> The statement made by such a paradox was not, however, received by the Harburg public. In fact, in response to the postponement of the monument's first lowering, one newspaper wrote, irritably: "The date has been postponed by the municipality, as it happens, to the latter half of May. The reason? Hamburg's Senator for Culture, Helga Schuchardt does not have time earlier. Can you believe that?"<sup>36</sup> In a sense, the Harburg public's expectation of the "fanfare and celebration" of the ceremonial unveiling and lowerings was simply affirmed. The Gerzes' monument would therefore be no different, no less politicized, than traditional monuments.

In this way, the Harburg monument collapsed two aspects of the German memorial experience: private memories of the wartime experience itself and public commitment to a redemptive tolerance and active antifascism: "In the act of creation," writes Marcia Tucker, "as well as in the viewer's response to what has been created, this interchange of inside and outside surfaces, a metaphoric turning of the body inside-out to render the private public, and vice-versa, is central."<sup>37</sup> The private memories that would be etched into the monument would be on display until the next lowering of the stele. Moreover, that same memory would be transformed into a very public, and highly political commitment to action. This interaction of the private individual with the public monument becomes vital to the ability of the monument to trigger re-memory.

A notable shift from traditional monuments is therefore achieved in the Gerzes' countermonument, as Irit Rogoff suggests, "from the confrontation of the viewer with a visually embodied narrative structure of which he or she is the spectator, to the activity of commemoration as the site upon which a form of memory production is triggered."<sup>38</sup> Yet this translocation of private memory into the public realm is problematic. Individual private memories are not only displaced through this politicization, but also collectivized (and thereby further displaced). The danger of

such collectivization has been treated extensively in sociological and historical literature.<sup>39</sup> In the public domain, such collected memories become appropriated metaphors, malleable and selective. Particularly in a space dedicated to antifascism and peace, these memories join a kind of meta-narrative told by the monument, indeed creating a “visually embodied narrative structure.” Losing their individuation, they become symbols not unlike the icons of traditional memorials. To the extent that one can speak of the meta-narrative of obelisks and eternal flames—and certainly critics of traditional monuments have found occasion to do so—the Harburg monument thus collected, over time, its own meta-narrative.

This meta-narrative then slowly descends into the ground and becomes invisible, further displacing the collection as a whole. After its final lowering in 1993, the Harburg monument became a sort of silenced archive. And while one may argue, as Young does, that the best memorial “may be no monument at all, but only the memory of an absent monument,” it is clear that the disappearance of the monument, the finality of its existence, also implies the archiving of its content and its *Denkmal-Arbeit*. As one Harburg citizen asked, “What kind of monument disappears?”<sup>40</sup> For the Harburg monument displayed and archived a meta-narrative of the remembered experience of fascism, but was silenced by its own disappearance.

### Appropriation of Victimhood

It was not long after the unveiling that graffiti and scrawl found their way onto the Gerzes’ stele. Many of Harburg’s citizens scratched out names, scribbled names on top of names, and etched slogans, gang signs, and such misplaced messages as “Jürgen loves Kirsten.” The so-called “senseless scrawl”<sup>41</sup> also included Stars of David and smiley faces colored in marker. While the soft lead coating of the monument had been intended to repel paint, the monument was quickly covered in spray painted messages. There were even nighttime attempts to remove the lead plating from its base.

The citizens of Harburg quickly condemned the monument as an eyesore and a trap for graffiti. Many even likened it to the most banal of graffiti-laden spaces: “With a thick black pencil, slogans were written on the lead column that can be read—equally uninventive—in almost every underpass in Harburg.”<sup>42</sup> Another went so far as to etch into the monument

his/her own opinion: “Lower me at last!” which was quickly reprinted in local newspapers.<sup>43</sup> Again and again, the monument’s detractors would refer to it as the *Schandsäule* (column of disgrace).<sup>44</sup> One newspaper reported after a panel discussion with the Gerzes and local officials and scholars: “A majority of 300 Harburg citizens who had been interviewed in front of the monument and whose taped opinions about the pillar were screened yesterday during a panel discussion, voiced criticism or rejection of the monument.”<sup>45</sup> This rejection is contemporaneous with the general support for construction of other, “more ‘passive’ testimonials” within Hamburg.<sup>46</sup> Many Harburg citizens were vehemently opposed to the Gerzes’ monument, specifically because of its “disgraceful” appearance. One letter to the editor stated, “This monument is a disgrace to our beautiful city.”<sup>47</sup> The ugliness of the monument was perceived as a specific victimization of the Harburg public, a tarnishing of “our beautiful city.” Harburg citizens felt that they had become victim to an imposed disgrace over which they had little or no control.

Such an interpretation was by no means uncommon in the context of 1980s Germany. Following the anti-nuclear movements of the 1970s, and the massive protests in the early 1980s against the stationing of Pershing Missiles in their country, West Germans, and particularly leftist youth, envisioned themselves as victims to political elites and the growing American imperialism of the Reagan administration. In the search to recover a usable German past, West Germans turned primarily to the working-class movement, to Nazi resistance, and to the history of the victims of Nazism.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, public memory in West Germany had, since the 1950s, emphasized “that Germany was a nation of victims, an imagined community defined by the experience of loss and displacement during the Second World War.”<sup>49</sup> This self-ascribed victimhood serves to contextualize the Harburg public’s interactions with the Gerzes’ monument. Just as West Germans envisioned themselves in the 1980s as victims of the Third Reich, so too did the citizens of Harburg identify themselves as victims of the imposed “disgrace” of the *Schandsäule*.

### Representation and Metaphor

The citizens of Harburg linked the Gerzes’ monument directly to traditional discourses of the experience of fascism. The Harburg monument

was an official commission, a specifically public monument, and one that was criticized from its conception as a “waste of money” because of its taxpayer funding. As already mentioned, it was always both highly publicized and highly politicized. Criticisms of its “disgraceful” appearance only naturally flooded into the broader questions of representation of the Nazi era and the debates over *Denkmal-Arbeit* in Germany at the time.<sup>50</sup> The Harburg monument was an a priori part of the reception discourse of traditional monuments. The reception of the monument as *Schandsäule* is therefore not only significant for its emphasis of the resentment of the Harburg public toward the monument—which, as we shall see, would affect the reception of its disappearance. It is also significant for its location of the monument always already within the larger (at very least German national) *Denkmal-Arbeit* debate. The Gerzes’ monument was never received as being outside the scope of postfascist discourse—or even, if we like, as the “counter-discourse” of postfascist discourse. Rather, the monument was a priori a representation of Nazism, already a metaphor.

I therefore disagree with Claude Gintz’s claim that

Gerz’s antimonument is not inscribed in advance, that is to say, [Gerz] does not authoritatively invite us to recall to mind an event or a man from the past. It’s up to the passerby to evoke that past, the very moment he appends his signature on the inscription surface proposed to him.<sup>51</sup>

Rather, I maintain that the Gerzes’ monument *was* in fact “inscribed in advance,” that it *did* represent, a priori, the event of fascism. While the Gerzes’ design was certainly distinct from traditional, often iconic designs, its reception came always from within the reception discourse of such traditional designs. One Harburg citizen even said, “not so bad as far as chimneys go, but there ought to be some smoke coming out of it,” imagining the stele as an iconic representation of a crematorium chimney.<sup>52</sup>

The *countermemorial* as representation thus becomes no more than an attenuation of the *monument* as representation. It was conceived to escape the didacticism of the monument, as Young states:

A monument against fascism, therefore, would have to be a monument against itself, against the traditionally didactic function

of monuments, against their tendency to displace the past they would have us contemplate—and finally, against the authoritarian propensity in monumental spaces that reduces viewers to passive spectators.<sup>53</sup>

Yet as Rogoff has argued, the Gerzes' countermonument fails to eliminate didacticism, or even to create a new didacticism in which the relationship between spectator and monument would escape the dialectic of presence/absence:

We are still, albeit in a far more attenuated and speculative way, within a trajectory of a presence/absence, since all of the activity of eliciting a response from the viewer hinges on the existence of some form of presence which triggers off re-memory. Though these presences may be partial, self-negating, vanishing, transparent or self-destructing, although they are enormously self-conscious about both the form and process of commemorative activity, nevertheless they begin this work through staging it, in and around and through a concrete entity.<sup>54</sup>

The physical space of the Gerzes' monument is a necessary presence for the production of the *Denkmal-Arbeit* it seeks to trigger. The countermonument has not done away with didacticism for it too attempts to evoke a specific narrative, albeit one that is more attuned to the conflicted discourse of the memory of fascism. This didacticism involves the monument as narrator of an event, a representation of the very event that the countermemorial project claims cannot be meaningfully represented. For it is only by the presence of the physical monument, the *Schand-säule* itself—or, after 1993, the presence of its absence—that the countermonument can succeed. It is therefore unsurprising that the Harburg public would envision the Gerzes' monument as an abstracted version of conventional monuments and anchor their reception within the same discourse of metaphoric representations.

#### Celebrating Absence

The Gerzes' monument created a specific popular resentment that occupied the focus of the monument's discursive and physical interactions.

Furthermore, we should not overlook the role of specifically neofascist graffiti in fomenting that resentment. For there is perhaps no greater taboo in the “sacred space” of Nazi-era memorialization than the reassertion of Nazi ideology. And it was only days after the unveiling of the monument that the first neofascist graffiti appeared. While Gerz asserted that “even a swastika is a signature” (and Young further comments, “how better to remember what happened than by the Nazis’ own sign?”), it seems abundantly clear that Harburg’s citizens would not tolerate such a *schlimm* magnet for neofascist graffiti.<sup>55</sup>

A distinction must be made between the positive uses of public controversy as a means of engaging masses and the general resentment that blinds and debilitates discourse. I would argue that the Harburg monument overwhelmingly elicited the latter. The Harburg monument, in evoking resentment, did achieve some degree of individuated *Denkmal-Arbeit*. Rogoff is correct in asserting an “active engagement” involved in the countermonument:

When a graffito appears on its surface which claims that “Erich loves Kirsten,” it is not necessarily a trivialization of the enormity of the political legacy but perhaps a manifestation of banality, of the oversaturation of the culture or possibly of the anxiety of those who come into contact and are faced with the need to respond without having a discourse of response. However we may understand this response, we need to see that it is a form of active engagement rather than the expected one of pious genuflection.<sup>56</sup>

Still, the overwhelming anger among the Harburg public focused primarily on the prevalence of graffiti and scrawl on a monument that was understood to embody the “untouchable” meta-narrative of the Third Reich. The expectation among the Harburg public was that the monument *would* be treated with “pious genuflection.” Hence the resentment of a monument that seemed only to invite swastikas. Günther Boyer, then head of Harburg’s parliamentary CDU party, vehemently opposed the monument for this reason (and perhaps for political reasons as well). A newspaper reported:



Such a work of art, he said, almost invites certain parts of society to besmirch it with hate slogans against foreigners and police or even disfigure it with symbols from the time of the Nazi regime. The Harburg monument ... is in Günther Boyer's view yet another example of Hamburg's authorities deciding over the heads of Harburg's citizens and thus acting in a way that completely loses them.<sup>57</sup>

The expectation, and consequent criticism, resulted from the invitation of irreverence. It is because of such an apparent lack of deference, inherent in the social interaction necessary for the countermemorial intent, that Harburg citizens rejected the monument.

The Gerzes responded ambivalently to the graffiti and scrawl. On the one hand, they asserted that the scrawl was a "social mirror," a reflection of the troubling reality of the state of the Harburg/German community and its grotesque response to the past. "As a social mirror," writes Young, the monument "became doubly troubling in that it reminded the community of what happened then and, even worse, how they responded now to the memory of this past."<sup>58</sup> The *Harburger Rundschau* (23 October 1986) echoed this interpretation (and revisited the issue of monetary cost), stating that the "filth"

brings us closer to the truth than would any list of well-meaning signatures. The inscriptions, a conglomerate of approval, hatred, anger and stupidity, are like a fingerprint of our city applied to the column. It may be that, in this sense, this monument which everyone claims cost too much has been worth the expenditure.<sup>59</sup>

The acts of violence, along with the well-meant acts of signature, were equally valid forms of expression. In essence, the Gerzes envisioned the monument as a work-in-progress, a blank slate on which to reflect public sentiment back onto individuals. As Gerz stated, "Germans tend to be speechless when it comes to fascism. But here, you see, they have been given a blank page on which to vent their feelings."<sup>60</sup> The monument would provoke Harburg citizens to do the work of *Denkmal-Arbeit* themselves, to themselves become the monument, and to act against the resurgence of fascism and intolerance.

On the other hand, the Gerzes were angered by the Harburg public's response. In a panel discussion, Gerz asserted "The scrawling hurts.... We are not satisfied with this public."<sup>61</sup> He also complained, that while he understood the commission to include public discussions that would include both critics and supporters, local politicians did not provide these forums. Those panel discussions that did take place were limited to supporters of the monument. Clearly, the Gerzes were not prepared for the response their monument would provoke.

Resentment therefore plagued both sides of the divide over the monument. With scratched-out signatures and spray-painted swastikas, Harburg citizens could only resent their victimization to a monument. One vehement citizen even stated, "they ought to blow it up."<sup>62</sup> The *Schandsäule* attitude fomented resentment so intense that many demanded the demise of the monument: "The opinion of many Harburg citizens is: This column should have disappeared long ago."<sup>63</sup> The disappearance of the *Schandsäule* would thus be viewed as a relief. With the monument underground, the "disgrace" is no longer visible, no longer imposing upon "our beautiful city." The monument would no longer taunt the Harburg public. Its absence would be the completion of *Denkmal-Arbeit*.

On 10 November 1993, therefore, the Harburg public "celebrated" not only the absence of the Harburg Monument against Fascism, but also the absence of its meta-narrative of fascism and neofascism. Gerz and Young claim that this absence has given back the agency of *Denkmal-Arbeit* to the citizens of Harburg, or macrocosmically, to the German public as a whole. "There aren't any solutions for us in this situation," says Gerz, "Art can only give the challenge back to the people."<sup>64</sup> Yet even that absence—what Matthias Winzen calls the nonsite—of the Harburg monument, maintains the meta-narrative of fascism.<sup>65</sup> Passers-by can still see the top portions of the monument through a small viewing window. And the tablet which once bore the oft-quoted invitation of the Gerzes' to the citizens of Harburg ("In the end, it is only we ourselves who can rise up against injustice") remains where the monument once stood, now complete with photographs of the eight stages of its disappearance (see figure 2). The nonsite has become an archive of the physical history of the monument itself. It is the very absence of the monument—or perhaps its invisible presence—that still maintains its meta-narrative. As one Berlin professor said: "What remains in the place where a monument



Fig. 2. The Harburg monument after its final lowering.  
Photograph courtesy of James E. Young.

has disappeared? Only the name of the artist.”<sup>66</sup> Indeed, what remains of the Harburg countermonument is its signature, its own narrative, the discourse of the monument that was from the outset the discourse of representing Nazism. The monument’s absence by no means rendered it meaningless. For the nonsite retained the social meanings of the site.

#### COUNTERMEMORY (IN)VISIBLE: KASSEL’S ASCHROTT FOUNTAIN

In 1984, the city of Kassel opened a competition for artistic projects to restore the destroyed fountain outside City Hall. The Aschrottbrunnen

(Aschrott Fountain) had been a forty-foot-high neo-Gothic pyramidal fountain built in 1908 and funded primarily by a local Jewish entrepreneur named Sigmund Aschrott. Designed by the city hall's architect Karl Roth, the fountain, surrounded by a reflecting pool and located in the Rathausplatz (City Hall Square), was Aschrott's gift to the city. With the rise of Nazis to power, however, the fountain was condemned as the "Jewish Fountain" and destroyed overnight by local Nazis on *Reichskriegertag* (Reich Fighters Day) on 9 April 1939. In 1943, when Kassel had already become *judenrein* (Jew-free), the city filled the fountain's basin with soil and planted it over with flowers, dubbing it "Aschrott's Grave." By the 1960s, few of the city's citizens could recall the original fountain or its association with the name Aschrott. The city turned "Aschrott's Grave" back into a standard fountain in 1963, nothing like its original design. The history of the Aschrottbrunnen, and by extension that of Kassel's Jews, seemed fading. "When asked what had happened to the original fountain," Young writes, "they replied that to their best recollection, it had been destroyed by English bombers during the war."<sup>67</sup> Former Kassel mayor, Hans Eichel, recalls from his childhood in Kassel in the 1960s, "The fountain had become a symbol of memories repressed, the desire to forget."<sup>68</sup>

In 1984, the Association for the Preservation of Historical Monuments in Kassel—itself of course a product of the memory boom—initiated a design competition for restoring the Aschrottbrunnen in some form that would recall its original donors, particularly Sigmund Aschrott. The memorial was also to commemorate other, non-Jewish donors, including celebrated entrepreneur Oscar Henschel. The Henschel family had donated another fountain—the Henschelbrunnen—on the other side of the Rathausplatz shortly after the Aschrott family donation. Bombing raids by the Allied forces had severely damaged the Henschelbrunnen in 1944 and 1945, but it was restored in the early 1950s.

The design competition in 1984 was fraught with controversy, accepting none of the submitted proposals. Local CDU parliamentarian Anneliese Augustin even made the surprisingly well-received suggestion that the Aschrottbrunnen be reconstructed to commemorate the Brothers Grimm, making it a central point of reference on the German Fairy-Tale Road from Bremen to Hanau.<sup>69</sup> Nonetheless, in December 1986, Horst Hoheisel was commissioned to execute his design for the Aschrottbrunnen.

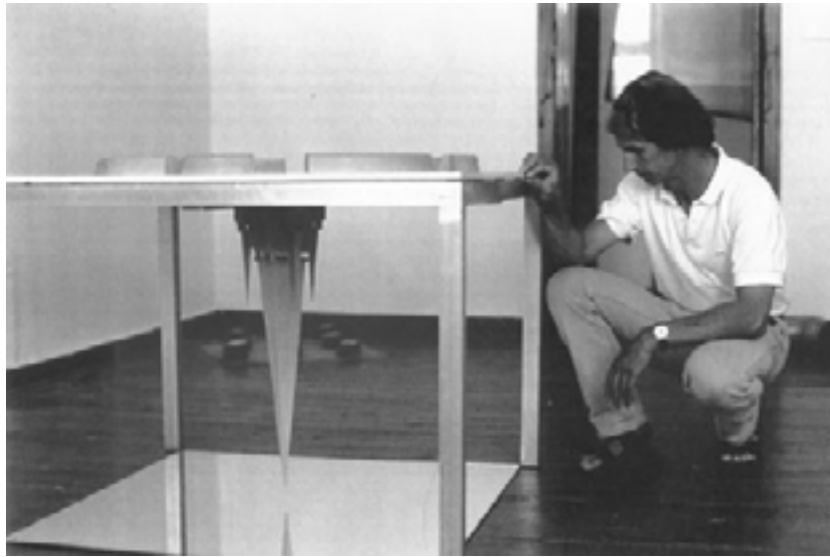


Fig. 3. Horst Hoheisel with a model of his Aschrottbrunnen. Photograph courtesy of James E. Young.

In his proposal, Hoheisel rejected the *Wiedergutmachung* (reparation, literally “to make good again”) overtones of a pure reconstruction. He felt a pure reconstruction would be self-congratulatory and encourage forgetting rather than memory.<sup>70</sup> Hoheisel therefore proposed a counter-monument: the construction of an exact mirror image of the original Aschrottbrunnen upside down and underground

in order to rescue the history of this place as a wound and as an open question, to penetrate the consciousness of Kassel citizens so that such things never happen again.... The pyramid became a funnel into whose darkness water runs down. From the “architectural play” as City Hall architect Karl Roth called his fountain, a hole emerges which deep down in the water creates an image reflecting back the entire shape of the fountain.<sup>71</sup>

Hoheisel attempted to commemorate the Aschrottbrunnen by constructing its ghostly specter, its negative shape underground (see figure 3). The very absence of the fountain, as with the absence of the Harburg monument after its disappearance, was central to Hoheisel’s project. For Hoheisel, as for the Gerzes, the passerby becomes the monument: “With the running water, our thoughts can be drawn into the depths of history, and there perhaps we will encounter feelings of loss, of a disturbed place, of lost

form.”<sup>72</sup> The passerby is expected to look into the depths of the negative fountain, to see in it the “subterranean history” of the city, to individually and privately become the true embodiment of *Denkmal-Arbeit*.

The Aschrottbrunnen did not elicit the kind of international attention received by the Gerz Monument against Fascism though their aesthetic and conceptual similarities are immediately evident. The Gerzes’ monument also demanded a far more direct form of social interaction than does the Aschrottbrunnen. Nevertheless, both countermonuments insisted on some form of social interaction, some more active relationship between spectator and object, and both failed to elaborate a new social articulation of memorialization that would escape the didacticism of traditional monuments.

### The Nonsite of Negative Memory

The inversion of the original Aschrott Fountain in Hoheisel’s design was the linchpin of the countermemorial design and the feature that led Young to call it a “negative monument.” This inversion in reconstruction (if one can call it that) became, for Young, the countermemorial element that opposes the historicizing, redemptive nature of reconstructions: “In this way, the monument’s reconstruction remains as illusory as memory itself, a reflection on dark waters, a phantasmagoric play of light and image.”<sup>73</sup> Thus the reconstruction would itself not even be a monument, and would certainly not be a representation, but would rather evoke an affective memory response in the spectator. The physical monument was to redirect the agency of *Denkmal-Arbeit* back to the individual—the Kassel citizen—to counter the obsessive memory boom that confined *Denkmal-Arbeit* to “historically burdened” spaces and displaced true re-memory. In Hoheisel’s words: “The sunken fountain is not the memorial at all. It is only history turned into a pedestal, an invitation to passersby who stand upon it to search for the memorial in their own heads. For only there is the memorial to be found.”<sup>74</sup>

The Aschrottbrunnen, however, did not express that break with traditional monuments to the public of Kassel. Instead, it reinforced preexisting representations of the Holocaust meta-narrative, reviving old metaphors: the Holocaust as abyss, a dark history in the depths of German consciousness. One newspaper photograph of the Aschrottbrunnen under



construction had as its caption, “The *depth* of history.”<sup>75</sup> Another newspaper made more explicit the comparison: “One can gaze into the *depth*—and so also into the *depth* of one’s own history.”<sup>76</sup> Reactions to the monument thus rested on its dark invocation of the mimetic obligation to “never forget.” For the citizens of Kassel, the Aschrottbrunnen already incorporated the cliché Holocaust imagery of depth and darkness.

Like the Gerz monument, the Aschrottbrunnen was received within the confines of the spectator–monument relationship. In other words, the citizens of Kassel understood it as a “sacred space,” a monument from which the spectator is distanced precisely because of its “irrepresentable” referent, a place for “pious genuflection.” Even before the monument’s construction, a citizens’ initiative was formed in Kassel to oppose the planned monument. Including many notable city figures, the group collected signatures to petition against the Hoheisel proposal. They wanted a dignified memorial, as one Kassel citizen commented in a letter to the editor: “The most simple and dignified shape a monument for the horrible events could take is the re-erection of the old Aschrott Fountain.”<sup>77</sup> The citizens’ initiative was also concerned with the location of the monument on the Rathausplatz.<sup>78</sup> The group felt that a Holocaust memorial belonged in a park, a response exactly like that of Harburg’s citizens. The citizens of Kassel did not want so abysmal a “negative monument” in the town’s central square. Their suggestion of a park can be seen as arising from two complementary motivations: on the one hand as a move to relocate a less-than-appealing monument to a less central location, and on the other hand as a preconception that a Holocaust representation belongs in the “tranquility and introspection” (recall Gerz) of a park. Both illustrate the degree to which the Aschrottbrunnen was always already a representation of the Holocaust event.

By inverting the structure, Hoheisel has turned the “reconstruction” of a monument to the city of Kassel into a “negative monument,” a monument that is nothing but the mirror image of its referent. It remains metaphoric. In its structural darkness—inversion of the pyramid, downward flow of water into a seemingly endless abyss—the Aschrottbrunnen returns to a “world gone mad” metaphor for the Holocaust, perhaps even representing the “irrepresentability” argument itself. Moreover, the nonsite of the inverted fountain remains nevertheless a monument site, just as does that of the Gerzes’ monument after its disappearance. And while



Young argues that the Aschrottbrunnen remains “present only in its absence,”<sup>79</sup> it is indeed this presence (or present absence) that is the nonsite of *Denkmal-Arbeit*. Even Eichel writes that, “When all is said and done, the new Aschrottbrunnen has indeed become a ‘*Symbol of Remembrance*’.”<sup>80</sup> Others, like Manfred Schenckenburger of *documenta 8* also conceived of the Aschrottbrunnen as metaphor: “It firmly *depicts* what went before and what is now irretrievably lost. The fountain has been transformed into a *symbol* of the Holocaust, free of empty rhetoric.”<sup>81</sup> The fountain inverted is the fountain made metaphor.

### Appropriated Space

Like the Gerz monument, therefore, Hoheisel’s countermemorial project failed to elicit the public response that would have asserted a new form of *Denkmal-Arbeit*. The location and use of the negative fountain, now known as the Aschrott Fountain Memorial, and its submersion into the void of Holocaust memory essentially undercut its countermemorial project. For the Aschrottbrunnen quickly became a symbol, not only in rhetoric as we have already seen, but also physically. In 1991, the new head of the Gesellschaft für Christlich-Jüdische Zusammenarbeit (Society for Christian–Jewish Cooperation), Eva Schulz-Jander, approached Hoheisel with the proposal of making the Aschrottbrunnen the Society’s official logo (or “emblem”). The Society’s major goals were, wrote Schulz-Jander,

to raise the general awareness as to the deep wound that Germany had inflicted on itself through the destruction of the European Jewish Community, to search for traces of that destruction and to counterbalance the general amnesia. Which emblem could better express these aims than Horst Hoheisel’s blueprint draft for the Aschrottbrunnen?<sup>82</sup>

This rhetorical question serves again to demonstrate that the Aschrottbrunnen was a symbol in the mind of the Kassel public, for the “dark” Holocaust. Moreover, the fact that the Aschrottbrunnen blueprint did indeed become the logo of the Society, precisely shows the susceptibility of such a symbol—as with other Holocaust representations like the

Auschwitz gate inscription (*Arbeit macht frei*) or the statue at Dachau—to appropriation.

This was precisely the appropriative potential that countermonuments had sought to oppose—the disdained displacement of true *Denkmal-Arbeit* with the mass production/consumption of icons. Yet even the countermonument became appropriated, and displaced *Denkmal-Arbeit*, under the guise that its mimesis would resist representation: “Each letter sent out by our organization,” writes Schulz-Jander, “is a reminder of a lasting void, a void resisting representation only to be constituted as an absent monument.”<sup>83</sup> The very absence of the monument, this nonsite, did not resist appropriation by such well-meaning organizations as the Gesellschaft für Christlich-Jüdische Zusammenarbeit. Its commodification, moreover, makes the Aschrottbrunnen a redemptive symbol, one that can be appropriated to symbolize *Zusammenarbeit*, not *Denkmal-Arbeit*. This despite the countermemorial intent of creating anti-redemptive monuments.<sup>84</sup>

The appropriative value of the Aschrottbrunnen became again apparent when a neo-Nazi demonstration took place at the memorial in June 1998. The neo-Nazi group was granted permission to demonstrate outside city hall, precisely at the Aschrottbrunnen nonsite, standing atop the original fountain’s foundation stones and waving black flags. The neo-Nazis knew very well the fountain’s history and it was no chance irony that they chose to stand atop the ruins of the original fountain during their demonstration. For Hoheisel, however, this “appropriation” demonstrated the fulfillment of his hope that the Aschrottbrunnen would become, in Young’s words, “a negative center of gravity around which all memory—wanted and unwanted—would now congeal.”<sup>85</sup> Indeed this was inherent in the commission, which sought to paradoxically collapse victim (Aschrott) and persecutor (Henschel) into one memorial.<sup>86</sup> For the citizens of Kassel, however, the staging of the neo-Nazi protest at the Aschrottbrunnen was a disgrace, one that could not be reconciled with the particularly victim-centered Holocaust meta-narrative of the memorial. It did not convey the type of reverence due a Holocaust representation. They therefore staged a counter-demonstration across the Rathausplatz.

Similar criticisms were leveled at the proximity of café tables to the Aschrottbrunnen and the ensuing problem of cigarette disposal:

A fountain, a few tables, sunshades, sunshine, summer idyll. And cigarette butts, carelessly thrown into the fountain. Annoying, some think who in the past days have complained about the dishonor bestowed upon this work of art. For the Aschrott Fountain is not just any fountain. It is also a monument, as can be read in the plaque set into the ground in front of the circular structure.<sup>87</sup>

Thus the Aschrottbrunnen could not escape the “pious genuflection” association that was problematic also for the Gerzes’ monument. It was understood as a Holocaust metaphor and was necessarily treated with the very distance it sought to break down. It was perhaps the irreconcilable duality between a seemingly decorative city hall fountain and a traditional Holocaust memorial to be revered that led to a general dislike of the Aschrottbrunnen: “A hated object in Kassel’s inner city: the Aschrott Fountain on City Hall Square. It seems that this structure radiates a discomfort.”<sup>88</sup> It is clear that the Kassel public considered the Aschrottbrunnen a sacred space. With its dark imagery and its currency as a symbol, it was considered a Holocaust memorial not unlike other traditional forms. It therefore demanded, in the eyes of Kassel citizens, the same dignified distance and reverence as conventional monuments.

### Memory (In)visible

The space of invisibility, the nonsite of the countermonument becomes the very visible space of memory displaced and—to take from Hoheisel’s terminology of the subterranean monument/history—buried. While the Aschrottbrunnen, like the Harburg monument, attenuates the problematic didacticism of conventional, redemptive monuments, it fails, again like the Harburg monument, to prevent these social results. Hanno Loewy has already argued that Hoheisel’s countermonuments conceptually contradict themselves:

Hoheisel’s concepts and realizations are “counter memorials” in the sense that they subvert the traditional formulae for pathos inherent in national symbolic institutions and their expression in public monuments, but his memorial-fantasies and the spatially realized

installations and social processes associated with them are also subversive of the artist's own symbolic intention.<sup>89</sup>

Even the Aschrottbrunnen could not in fact subvert the traditional pathos of national symbolic representation. Like conventional memorials, it was susceptible to appropriation into the meta-narrative of redemptive memorialization. The “negative monument” became a redemptive symbol for cooperation for the Gesellschaft für Christlich-Jüdische Zusammenarbeit. “These plans,” writes Loewy further, “do not avoid the problem of applying meaning to meaninglessness.”<sup>90</sup> Hoheisel's countermemorial project, like the Gerzes', could not avoid the conventional formulations of Holocaust monuments and didacticisms. It too created a nonsite of memory, a present absence that is palpably (in)visible, an articulation that could as easily become appropriated and redemptive.

#### CONCLUSION: THE END OF THE COUNTERMONUMENT

Both the Gerzes' countermonument in Harburg and the Hoheisel countermonument in Kassel have, by virtue of their social reception, become susceptible to (and enveloped in) the discourse of traditional representations. The Gerzes' countermonument in Harburg, for Young the most prominent example of the countermemorial project, is also the most prominent example of its failure. Even after its disappearance, the Gerzes' countermonument, in its presence as a nonsite, continues to tell the meta-narrative of the experience of fascism. Hoheisel's “negative monument” in the Rathausplatz of Kassel, like the Gerzes' monument, was a nonsite that, in its reception, became redemptive. Like the Harburg monument, Hoheisel's countermonument became a nonsite that depended on a didacticism not unlike that of conventional monuments and was therefore always already a metaphoric representation. The countermonument—whether focused on the experience of fascism or the experience of the Holocaust—was only an abstract and somewhat attenuated formulation of a monument. Contrary to Young's claim that the disappearing monument demonstrated “memory against itself,”<sup>91</sup> the countermonument proved in fact to demonstrate “*counter*memory against itself,” the a priori failure of the countermemorial project to ever escape

the didactic discourse of the monument, the relationship between the experience of Nazism and its representation.

Surely an examination of two examples out of the array of counter-monuments—among others, Renata Stih and Frieder Schnock's Bayerische Platz (1993), Jochen Gerz's "2146 Stones—Monument against Racism" in Saarbrücken (1993), Micha Ullman's Bebelplatz (1995), Horst Hoheisel's Buchenwald Memorial (1999)—that dotted the German landscape in the 1980s and 1990s cannot encompass the entirety of the countermemorial project. Yet these two prominent examples, ones that have been singled out internationally, serve to suggest that the countermemorial project has not accomplished its stated objectives. Their failure does not suggest two localized incidents, but a more general flaw in the countermemorial project per se. As artistic endeavors, countermonuments have certainly presented a new class of representations that begins to address the dichotomy between the Holocaust as event and the Holocaust as post-Holocaust phenomenon. Still, the Gerz and Hoheisel countermonuments suggest that the countermemorial project could not but rewrite and re-present the same "problematic" period of German history. Though justifiably esteemed by scholars like Young for their engagement with criticisms of memorialization, they did not achieve the dissociation attributed them from traditional, redemptive memorials.

Even Young's defense of the countermemorial project waned in the face of the so-called "politics of memory." As a member of the planning committee for the Berlin Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in 1997, Young shifted from the position of spokesman for countermonuments to that of a pragmatic juror who could not support a countermonument in the heart of the new Berlin.<sup>92</sup> Indeed, Young rejected Hoheisel's countermemorial proposal for the central monument. Hoheisel had proposed to blow up the Brandenburg Gate, grind its stone into dust, spread the dust over the former site, and cover the entire memorial site with granite slabs. In Hoheisel's proposal, two empty spaces would be created—which he calls a "double void"—the first at the site of the Brandenburg Gate and the second at the site specified for the memorial, between the Brandenburg Gate and Potsdamer Platz.<sup>93</sup> At the outset of the competition, Young had supported a countermemorial project for the Berlin memorial, coining his mantra: "Better a thousand years of Holocaust memorial competitions and exhibitions in Germany than any

single ‘final solution’ to Germany’s memorial problem.”<sup>94</sup> Hoheisel’s proposal embodied the counter memorial objective: creating a monument that would be an open wound, an open question, a memorial that would reflect *Denkmal-Arbeit* back onto the spectator and resist redemptive signification. Yet as a member of the jury, even Young could not support the counter monument. The winning design for the monument, by Peter Eisenmann and Richard Serra, though abstract and certainly thought provoking for the critical eye, is by no means a counter monument.

While many Germans protested Hoheisel’s proposal for the Berlin memorial, the counter memorial project has become paradoxically accepted, at least conceptually. There seems to have been widespread acceptance of counter monuments in Germany, suggesting, above and beyond their individual reception, that the counter memorial project itself has been internalized by the German public. Indeed, the word “counter” seems to have vanished entirely from “counter memorial.” As one newspaper reported, referring specifically to Hoheisel’s proposal:

By now, what used to be a *bon mot* by the American monument historian James Young years ago, has become commonplace: that the debates about a monument are the actual monument. Just how generally this view has become accepted is apparent from the single fact that not only are the award-winning, or otherwise mentioned, proposals for the central memorial being publicly displayed, but so are those that were submitted with the proud certainty of defeat.<sup>95</sup>

Sociologist Helmut Dubiel attributed this paradox to a sort of new *Tendenzwende* in Western Europe:

With this fresh staging of shame as a medium of self-reflection, we are experiencing an almost landslide-like change in the way in which Western societies shape their patterns of legitimization. This no longer involves triumphalist writing of history but rather consideration of the corpses in the cellar.<sup>96</sup>

While the explanation of this paradoxical phenomenon—a macrocosm of Young’s own internal ambivalence—can here only be left to speculation, I would suggest that it may be attributed to an appropriation of the

countermemorial project into the new German identity. After reunification, with a new identity crisis that now looked for a unified “Germanness” that could withstand its problematic past, Germany seems to have accepted a more nuanced relationship with Holocaust representation, one that could self-consciously demand of itself a never-ending debate and, simultaneously, erect a traditional central memorial. This is perhaps New Germany’s “consideration of the corpses in the cellar.” It is the conflation of ambivalences—guilt and absolution—that lies at the heart of the new German identity vis-à-vis remembrance of the Nazi era. For as Loewy asks, “Are destruction and remembrance, denial and memory, repression and breaking of taboos not finally different sides of one event, in which the fantasied collective presents itself and entangles itself in an inextricable identity created by force?”<sup>97</sup>

I would suggest that memory and countermemory, monument and countermonument, are the same representations of the same memory and belong indeed to the same collective memorial process. The opposing forces of memory and countermemory—the very debates over their opposition—have become the new focus of German identity formation. The countermemorial project, as a collective memorial process, appropriated and historicized countermonuments as symbols of rupture for the ambivalent, always self-conscious, reunified (and thereby redeemed) Germany. Not only has memory (and re-memory) become a form of reconciliation, it has become an identity-forming process. Indeed, there may be redemption in and through the antiredemptive project; or, to use Martha Minow’s terminology, consolation through provocation.<sup>98</sup> While further studies are necessary, perhaps this examination of the failure (in light of its social history) of the countermemorial project will encourage more nuanced examination of the role of countermemory in the formation of a new German identity.

## NOTES

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Pearsall for their criticism, and to Gerrit Jackson for his assistance with translation. This paper is dedicated to my grandparents, four of my most profound teachers. All translations from German are mine unless otherwise noted.

1. Recognizing the inadequacy of the terminology of “representation” and “representability,” I seek to examine historic/memorial symbols as representations of a mimetic relationship with the past—a past that has elsewhere been represented (other memorials, narratives) and is now again presented, or re-presented.

2. The more commonly used term *Erinnerungsarbeit* refers only to memory or recollection as initiated privately. While the more grammatically correct term *Denkmalsarbeit* would refer to memorialization, I use *Denkmal-Arbeit* to create a double-entendre with the word for thinking, *Denken*. *Denkmal-Arbeit* thus refers not only to memorial activity as collectively or publicly initiated, but also to the work of the individual in memory, or re-memory.

3. Rudy Koshar, *From Monuments to Traces: Artifacts of German Memory, 1870–1990* (Berkeley, 2000), 230.

4. See Jane Kramer, *The Politics of Memory: Looking for Germany in the New Germany* (New York, 1996), 259.

5. See Saul Friedländer’s critique of “Holocaust kitsch” in *Reflections on Nazism: An Essay on Kitsch and Death* (New York, 1984). More recently, compare Tim Cole, *Selling the Holocaust: From Auschwitz to Schindler, How History Is Bought, Packaged, and Sold* (New York, 2000); and Norman Finkelstein, *The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering* (London, 2001).

6. Pierre Nora, often called the father of the memory boom, suggests that even the memory boom is itself a displacement of memory, which becomes less and less experienced “from the inside.” See his “Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*,” trans. Marc Roudebush, *Representations*, no. 26 (spring 1989): 7–25.

7. See Andreas Huyssen, “Monument and Memory in a Postmodern Age,” in James E. Young, ed., *The Art of Memory: Holocaust Memorials in History* (New York, 1994), 15: “In Germany, the Holocaust signifies an absence of Jews and a traumatic burden on national identity, in which genuine attempts at mourning are hopelessly entangled with narcissistic injury, ritual breast-beating, and repression.”

8. See James E. Young, *At Memory’s Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture* (New Haven, 2000), and *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven, 1993).

9. See Pierre Nora, ed., *Les Lieux de mémoire*, 3 parts, 7 vols. (Paris, 1984, 1986, 1992); abridged version published in English as *Realms of Memory*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York, 2000).

10. I borrow from Roger Chartier’s definition of the three levels of represen-

tation: “First, on the level of collective representations that embody, within individuals, the divisions of the social world and organize the schemes of perception by which individuals classify, judge, and act; second, on the level of forms of exhibition and stylization of the identity that those individuals or groups hope will be recognized; third, on the level of the delegation to representatives (single individuals, institutions, or abstract instances) of the coherence and stability of the identity thus affirmed.” *On the Edge of the Cliff: History, Language, and Practices*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane, (Baltimore, 1997), 5.

11. Wulf Kansteiner, “Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies,” *History and Theory*, no. 41 (May 2002): 179–97.

12. The classification and characterizations of the countermemorial project are of course Young’s, but they were nevertheless appropriated by the artists in discussing their intentions.

13. A good recent survey of the “irrepresentability” argument is Thomas Trezise, “Unspeakable,” *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 14, no. 1 (2001): 39–66.

14. Theodor W. Adorno, “Commitment,” trans. Ronald Taylor, in idem, *Aesthetics and Politics*, ed. Ernst Bloch (New York, 1994), 189.

15. Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York, 1987). Compare Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York, 1992).

16. Hamburg-Harburg (hereafter Harburg) is an industrial, working-class suburb of Hamburg. Voting records from the rise of the Nazis in 1932–33 show that both Hamburg and Kassel were no more (nor less) supportive of the fascist party than the national average. See Alfred Milatz, *Wähler und Wahlen in der Weimarer Republik* (Bonn, 1968). Thus I take the reactions of working-class Harburg or Kassel citizens to the countermemorial to be representative of a more general German reception.

17. Stephan Schmidt-Wulffen, “The Monument Vanishes: A Conversation with Esther and Jochen Gerz,” in Young, ed., *The Art of Memory*, 69. The other five artists invited to contribute designs were Lothar Baumgarten, Jochen Hiltmann, Sigfried Neuehausen, H. D. Schrader, and Timm Ulrichs.

18. Koshar, *From Monuments to Traces*, 245. This campaign also heavily emphasized memorialization of sites and people associated with the German underground resistance who had fought against the Nazis and had been captured and killed.

19. Gerz quoted in Achim Könneke, “An Interview with Jochen Gerz and Esther Shalev-Gerz in November 1993,” trans. Mary Fran Gilbert, in idem, ed., *Das Hamburger Mahnmal gegen Faschismus/the Harburg Monument against Fascism* (Ostfildern, Germany, 1994), 20. Since Jochen Gerz is more often quoted and cited in both primary and secondary literature (perhaps because of his familiarity

with the German language), I cite his intentions as representing those of both artists. This is not meant to exclude the contributions of Esther Shalev-Gerz, but is rather a result of the available sources. Indeed, both artists assert that the Harburg countermonument was a collaborative project.

20. Quoted in Young, *At Memory's Edge*, 130.

21. Jochen Gerz, *Res Publica: Public Works 1968–1999* (Bonn, 1999), 52.

22. I have specifically chosen not to engage in the much broader discourse of the dichotomy between high art and the mass public. To be sure, many critics of the Harburg monument have argued that the abstract conception of the countermonument is simply beyond the comprehension of its intended working-class audience. Still, I assume the accessibility of counter memorial concepts to the public precisely because the counter memorial project is by definition intended for the mass public.

23. Gerz quoted in Könneke, “An Interview,” 22.

24. Ibid.

25. Petra Kipphoff, “Das verschwundene Denkmal,” *Die Zeit*, 19 Nov. 1993.

26. Gerz quoted in Könneke, “An Interview,” 22.

27. “Harburg—Heimat der Baustelle,” *Harburger Rundschau*, 6 Aug. 1986.

28. Quoted in Marcia Tucker, “A Monument in Reverse,” in Könneke, ed., *Das Hamburger Mahnmal gegen Faschismus*, 49. In a 1987 interview, Shalev-Gerz responded to the debates over the monument’s price tag: “It seems as though people are looking for issues so that they won’t have to confront the actual topic” (Schmidt-Wulffen, “The Monument Vanishes,” 72).

29. Erich Eickhof, “Schlimm,” *Harburger Anzeigen und Nachrichten*, 2 July 1986.

30. Young, *At Memory's Edge*, 135.

31. Fiedler, “Weg von der hastigen Meckermentalität,” *Harburger Rundschau*, 24 Sept. 1987.

32. Tucker, “A Monument in Reverse,” 49. She goes on to suggest that such a comparison “probably made sense to the citizens of a lackluster industrial suburb who might have preferred some traditional “beautification” for their immediate environment.”

33. Eickhof, “Schlimm,” seems the most prominent example, but many other local articles criticize the costs involved in the monument’s construction, though often less vehemently. It is worth noting, however, that even the most conservative journalistic treatments of the monument (including articles in *Die Zeit* and the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*) found it necessary to mention the price tag.

34. Gerz quoted in Könneke, “An Interview,” 23.

35. Young, *At Memory's Edge*, 135.

36. Adolf Brockmann, "Keine Zeit, keine Zeit!," *Harburger Rundschau*, 15 April 1987.
37. Tucker, "A Monument in Reverse," 52.
38. Irit Rogoff, "The Aesthetics of Post-History: A German Perspective," in Stephen Melville and Bill Readings, eds., *Vision and Textuality* (London, 1995), 133.
39. Maurice Halbwachs showed that, unlike private memory, collective memories belong to the realm of the public, the political. See his *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago, 1992). They essentially lose a degree of their private individuality and the strength of their inalienability.
40. Quoted in Young, *At Memory's Edge*, 135.
41. The term *Schmierereien* was used repeatedly in local reports, the earliest of which appears to have been "Böse Schmierereien," *Harburger Anzeigen und Nachrichten*, 13 Oct. 1986.
42. Ibid.
43. "Wunsch eines Harburgers," *Harburger Rundschau*, 12 March 1988.
44. This term is first referenced in *ibid.*
45. "Harburg mit Kübel ausschütten," *Harburger Rundschau*, 1988.
46. David Galloway, "Report from Germany: Happening in Hamburg," *Art in America* (May 1990): 87.
47. Erich Eickhof, untitled letter in *Harburger Anzeigen und Nachrichten*, 15 Sept. 1989.
48. Over three-quarters of all commemorative plaques to the Resistance in West Germany appeared in the 1980s.
49. Robert G. Moeller, *War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Berkeley, 2001), 6.
50. As one letter to the editor stated: "I think we taxpayers, 50 years after the end of the war, do not want to put up with the daily disgrace on view in this memorial for all times" (Eickhof, untitled letter).
51. Claude Gintz, "'L'Anti-Monument' de Jochen & Esther Gerz," *Galleries Magazine*, no. 19 (June–July 1987): 87.
52. Quoted in Michael Gibson, "Hamburg: Sinking Feelings," *ARTnews* 86 (Sept. 1987): 105–7.
53. Young, *At Memory's Edge*, 96.
54. Rogoff, "The Aesthetics of Post-History," 133–34.
55. Gerz quoted in Gibson, "Hamburg: Sinking Feelings," 107; Young, "The Counter-Monument: Memory against Itself in Germany Today," *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 2 (1992): 283.
56. Rogoff, "The Aesthetics of Post-History," 132–33.

57. "Neue Kritik am Mahnmal," *Harburger Anzeigen und Nachrichten*, 12 Nov. 1986.
58. Young, *At Memory's Edge*, 139.
59. Quoted in Michael Gibson, "Vanishing Monument against Fascism," *International Herald Tribune*, 7 Jan. 1988.
60. Quoted in Michael Gibson, "A Monument against Fascism: Hamburg City Fathers Create a New Concept," *The World & I*, Aug. 1987, 270.
61. "Harburg mit Kübel ausschütten."
62. Quoted in Gibson, "Hamburg: Sinking Feelings," 105.
63. Eickhof, untitled letter.
64. Quoted in Könneke, "An Interview," 25.
65. Matthias Winzen, "The Need for Public Representation and the Burden of the German Past," *Art Journal* 48, no. 4 (Winter 1989): 313.
66. Aleida Assmann quoted in Miriam Niroumand, "Wettstreit der Meister-Verschwinder," 12 April 1995.
67. Young, *At Memory's Edge*, 97.
68. Hans Eichel, "Preface," in Horst Hoheisel, ed., *Aschrottbrunnen* (Kassel, 1998), 21.
69. "Der Müll—Die Stadt und Der Aschrottbrunnen" [source unknown], 14–27 June 1986 (clipping given to the author by James E. Young).
70. Hanno Loewy, "Identity and Emptiness: Reflections about Horst Hoheisel's Negative Memory and Yearning for Sacrifice," in Margot Levy, ed., *Remembering for the Future: The Holocaust in an Age of Genocide*, vol. 3 (New York, 2001), 779. There is an interesting parallel between the Aschrottbrunnen and West Germany more generally in the opposition and ambivalence between the desire to remember and the desire to forget (i.e. the desire to memorialize in order to forget, the desire to memorialize in order to remember). On this, see Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge, MA, 1997).
71. Horst Hoheisel, "Rathaus-Platz-Wunde," in *Aschrott Brunnen: Offene Wunde der Stadtgeschichte* (Kassel, 1989), no pagination.
72. Ibid.
73. Young, *At Memory's Edge*, 99.
74. Hoheisel, "Rathaus-Platz-Wunde."
75. Cathrin Kahlweit, "Das unsichtbare Denkmal," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 26 March 1988 (emphasis added).
76. Petra Wettlaufer-Pohl, "Ehrfrucht gleich Abstand?" *Hessisch Niedersächsische Allgemeine*, 27 July 1991 (emphasis added).
77. Hiltgunde Thiele quoted in Johannes Schweikie, "Ein Trichter zur Quelle des Vergessens," *Deutsches Allgemeines Sonntagsblatt*, 13–14 June 1987.

78. Hoheisel, "Aschrottbrunnen—Denk-Stein-Sammlung—Brandenburger Tor—Buchenwald: Vier Erinnerungsversuche," in Nicolas Berg, Jess Jochimsen and Bernd Stiegler, eds., *Shoah—Formen der Erinnerung: Geschichte, Philosophie, Literatur, Kunts* (Munich, 1996), 255.
79. Young, *At Memory's Edge*, 99.
80. Eichel, "Preface," 5 (emphasis added).
81. Manfred Schneckenburger, "A Symbol Free of Empty Rhetoric," in Hoheisel, ed., *Aschrottbrunnen*, 29 (emphasis added), reprinted and translated from "Ein Symbol ohne tönende Rhetorik," in *Aschrott Brunnen: Offene Wunde der Stadtgeschichte*.
82. Eva Schulz-Jander, "Memory Invisible," in Hoheisel, ed., *Aschrottbrunnen*, 26.
83. Ibid..
84. Young: "They 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" (*At Memory's Edge*, 96).
85. Ibid., 102.
86. During the war, Henschel's armaments factory used slave laborers from nearby Buchenwald. Henschel was interned by American forces from 1946 to 1949 and fined 2,000 DM. He later became a prominent member of the Kassel leadership and was awarded several city medals in the 1950s (Hoheisel, "Aschrottbrunnen—Denk-Stein-Sammlung—Brandenburger Tor—Buchenwald," 253–54). It is interesting to note that Young does not mention Henschel in his accounts.
87. Wettlaufer-Pohl, "Ehrfrucht gleich Abstand?"
88. "Der Müll—Die Stadt und Der Aschrottbrunnen."
89. Loewy, "Identity and Emptiness," 779.
90. Ibid., 785.
91. Young, *At Memory's Edge*, 96.
92. Ibid., 194–95.
93. Hoheisel, "Aschrottbrunnen—Denk-Stein-Sammlung—Brandenburger Tor—Buchenwald," 261–63.
94. Young, *At Memory's Edge*, 92 and 191.
95. Niroumand, "Wettstreit der Meister-Verschwinder."
96. Quoted in Albert H. Friedlander, "German Identity, the Holocaust and the Year 2000," in Levy, ed., *Remembering for the Future*, 3:293.
97. Loewy, "Identity and Emptiness," 784.
98. Martha Minow, *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness: Facing History after Genocide and Mass Violence* (Boston, 1998), 142: "Provocation, not consolation, is the goal of such countermonuments."