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### Counter-monuments: the anti-monumental and the dialogic

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# Counter-monuments: the anti-monumental and the dialogic

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In recent decades, counter-monuments have emerged as a new, critical mode of commemorative practice. Even as such practice defines itself by its opposition to traditional monumentality, it has helped to reinvigorate public and professional interest in commemorative activities and landscapes and has developed its own, new conventions. Terminology and analysis in scholarship on counter-monuments have remained relatively imprecise with writers in English and German employing the term 'counter-monument' or *Gegendenkmal* in different and sometimes confusing ways. In this paper we draw together literature published in English and German to clarify and to map various conceptions and categorisations. To do so we distinguish between two kinds of projects that have been called counter-monuments: those that adopt anti-monumental strategies, counter to traditional monument principles, and those that are designed to counter a specific existing monument and the values it represents.

## Introduction

A monument reminds. Its location, form, site design and inscriptions aid the recall of persons, things, events or values. In contemporary English usage, 'monumental' means large, important and enduring. Monuments generally honour, and their prominence and durability suits, subjects of lasting merit. But the derivation of monument from the Latin verb *monēre* suggests remembrance that serves to admonish or warn people in the present, a function captured by the German category *Mahnmal*, as distinct from *Denkmal* (a monument that reminds) and *Ehrenmal* (a monument that honours).

In the twentieth century monuments were often criticised for failing to remind, for failing to hold people's attention or for representing values that had become obsolete or objectionable. Despite such misgivings, in recent decades there has been a notable resurgence of public memorialising, officially sanctioned and otherwise. The motivations for creating monuments have diversified, which has also broadened the scope of subjects that monuments address and the design strategies that are used.<sup>1</sup> The increasing number and variety of monuments in public space, and the contrasting intentions behind them, suggest the need for a systematic analysis of the types of design strategies

employed, particularly those strategies generated by a reconsideration of the purposes, meanings and design features of traditional Western monuments.

One type of contemporary monument identified in recent academic literature is the 'counter-monument'. This term appears frequently, but its meaning remains imprecise and it is often used interchangeably with other terms that may have very different connotations, including anti-monument, non-monument, negative-form, deconstructive, non-traditional and counter-hegemonic monument.<sup>2</sup> In order to bring more clarity and precision to the ongoing discussion of this proliferation of alternative forms of commemoration, we adopt the terms *anti-monumental* and *dialogic* to describe two distinct ways in which critics and designers have conceived a monument to be 'counter'. A monument may be contrary to conventional subjects and techniques of monumentality, adopting *anti-monumental* design approaches to express subjects and meanings not represented in traditional monuments. Or it may be a *dialogic monument* that critiques the purpose and the design of a specific, existing monument, in an explicit, contrary and proximate pairing. Anglophone scholarship rarely discusses this conscious, precise dialogism, which is mostly to be found in Germany, although some examples do exist in North America, the UK and Australasia. Depending on the target of its critique, a dialogic monument is not necessarily anti-monumental.

As modes of commemorative practice, anti-monumental and paired dialogic monuments have reshaped and reinvigorated collective mem-

ories, activities and landscapes. Even as such practices define themselves through their opposition to traditional monumentality, they have cultivated their own particular publics and developed their own formal conventions. We draw together key publications in English and German to distinguish between these two approaches to creating counter-monuments, to map the proliferation of examples and to analyse the scope of contemporary counter-monumental principles.

### *Anti-monumental approaches*

Widespread English use of the term 'counter-monument' to refer to commemorative practices that reject features of traditional monuments began with James E. Young's writings on the complex field of Holocaust memorialisation.<sup>3</sup> For Young, counter-monuments are those which reject and renegotiate 'the traditional forms and reasons for public memorial art', such as prominence and durability, figurative representation and the glorification of past deeds.<sup>4</sup> His paradigmatic example is Jochen Gerz and Esther Shalev-Gerz's 1986 Monument against Fascism, War and Violence—and for Peace and Human Rights in Harburg, a suburb of Hamburg, Germany (Fig. 1). This 12m-high column invited passers-by to inscribe their names into its lead surface as a pledge to vigilance against fascism. Selected by the local council following a limited competition specifically calling for a monument against fascism, war and violence, the Gerzs' design aimed:

not to console but to provoke; not to remain fixed but to change; not to be everlasting but to



Figure 1. Jochen Gerz, Esther Shalev-Gerz, Monument against Fascism (1986/1996), Harburg-Hamburg, Germany (Image courtesy of Gerz studio; photograph: Kulturbehörde, Hamburg).

disappear; not to be ignored by its passersby but to demand interaction; not to remain pristine but to invite its own violation and desanctification; not to accept graciously the burden of memory but to throw it back at the town's feet.<sup>5</sup> The Harburg monument exceeded the artists' own expectations about confronting tradition and sanctity. They had anticipated citizens adding their own names in neat rows, which would resonate with the convention of memorials to war dead. Yet people also scrawled banal graffiti, added funny faces, Stars of David and swastikas, and tried to scrape away existing markings. Young notes that such 'unsightly' 'violations' of the monument lent it added significance as a social mirror, a reminder of the public's differing sentiments toward the troublesome past and toward attempts to commemorate it in the present. Over the course of several years the column was gradually lowered into the ground, so that its existing markings disappeared and were refreshed with new ones. In opposition to the traditional functions of monuments, Young argues that Harburg's vanishing, self-consuming counter-monument, 'illustrate[s] concisely the possibilities and limitations of all monuments everywhere [functioning] as a valuable "counterindex" to the ways time, memory, and current history intersect at any memorial site.'<sup>6</sup> Lowered for the last time in 1993, all that remains of the column are the memories retained in people's minds of the object and the issues and debates it provoked. The ethical burden of remembering the past was thereby returned to the public.

A second example Young gives is Horst Hoheisel's 1987 Aschrott Fountain, outside Kassel's city hall.<sup>7</sup> The monument reproduces, in inverted form, the pyramidal fountain which the local entrepreneur Sigmund Aschrott donated to the city in 1908 and which the Nazis demolished in 1939 for being a 'Jews' fountain'.<sup>8</sup> The fountain is sunk beneath the ground; all that remains visible at ground level is its planar base, surrounded by channels from which water can be heard gushing down into a cavity below. Frustrating familiar expectations of a monument, the Aschrott Fountain challenges passers-by with its absent presence, shifting the burden of interpretation to the viewer. When one approaches closely, one can only see the base of the fountain but one can hear the water below.

Young's two paradigmatic examples possess four features that distinguish them from traditional built monuments: they express a position opposing a particular belief or event rather than affirming it; they eschew monumental forms (indeed, in their inversion of form, both became nearly invisible); they invite close, multi-sensory visitor engagement; and, rather than being didactic, they invite visitors to work out the meanings for themselves.

These two memorials were designed in the 1980s, a period Karen Till calls 'transitional times' for public commemoration in Germany, when states and citizens' groups were deeply critical both of traditional monuments, indelibly stained as fascist, and prevailing, didactic post-war forms such as the *Mahnmal* (an admonishing monument) and *Gedenkstätte* (an historic site, such as a concen-

tration camp, with a museum or interpretive centre).<sup>9</sup> Young's analysis arose in this context of critical scrutiny and debate in Germany concerning the ongoing 'memory work' required to negotiate the past and its implications for the present.

Since the 1992 publication of Young's essay 'The Counter-Monument: Memory against Itself in Germany Today', Anglophone scholars have applied the terms counter-monument and counter-memorial to a wide variety of built monuments and also to a range of other commemorative practices lacking new permanent monuments.<sup>10</sup> The diversity of alternative commemorative practices keeps increasing. Members of the public create informal or 'spontaneous' memorials immediately after unexpected tragedies.<sup>11</sup> Citizens and artists appropriate existing memorials, as with the appropriation of Paris' Flamme de la Liberté as a memorial to Princess Diana<sup>12</sup> and Hans Haacke's 1988 draping of a Virgin Mary statue in Graz with a swastika in order to recall a Nazi parade fifty years earlier celebrating Austria's annexation by Germany.<sup>13</sup>

Other practices include ritualised performances and ephemeral works such as Krzysztof Wodiczko's subversive audio-visual projections onto existing landmarks and Norbert Rademacher's light projections, triggered by passing pedestrians, at the site of a former forced labour camp in Berlin's Neukölln district.<sup>14</sup> Based on her review of German scholarship on commemorations of National-Socialism,<sup>15</sup> Brinda Sommer classifies 'new monument art' according to the following categories: coupled counter-monuments (*Gegen-Denkmäler*); temporary installations; abstract, decentralised, experiential and participatory memorials; spaces of communica-

tive exchange; spaces where information is provided; and the artistic reconstruction of historical relics and sites.<sup>16</sup>

Our interest in this paper is with monuments, proposed or built, that are anti-monumental because they differ from traditional commemorative works in at least one of the following five respects: subject, form, site, visitor experience and meaning.

### Subject

Traditional monuments are typically affirmative: glorifying an event or a person, or celebrating an ideology. In contrast, anti-monumental works generally recognise darker events, such as the Holocaust, or the more troubling side of an event that in other times might have been glorified, such as a war. They may warn of the evils of an ideology, such as fascism or racism. Whereas traditional monuments recognise famous figures or the heroism of unknown soldiers, a growing number of anti-monumental works recognise the suffering victims of conflict or persecution and admonish the perpetrators.<sup>17</sup>

Since 1945 numerous monuments in Europe have been dedicated to Jewish and Communist victims of National Socialism, with increased recognition of other victim groups such as the Sinti and Roma, homosexuals and the disabled. Begun as a covert art project in 1996, Gunter Demnig's *Stolpersteine* (Stumbling Blocks) are small, engraved brass plaques set into the pavement, individually identifying former residents of adjacent buildings who became Holocaust victims, giving their names, dates of birth, deportation and death (Fig. 2). Citizen groups across Germany have endorsed the



Figure 2. Gunter Demnig, Stolpersteine (Stumbling Blocks; 1996-ongoing), examples in Berlin (photograph: Q. Stevens).



idea and lobbied for local installations; there are now over 30,000 such plaques.<sup>18</sup> The American Chris Burden's 1991 sculpture *The Other Vietnam* attempts to name the three million 'enemy' Vietnamese deaths during the Vietnam War.<sup>19</sup> Memorials in the United States recognise the internment of ethnic Japanese during the Second World War,<sup>20</sup> and memorials in Australia are dedicated to Indigenous children removed from their families by the government.<sup>21</sup> More generally, monuments have also sought to represent identities marginalised within traditional narratives and so disrupt official

histories.<sup>22</sup> Some commemorate the heroism of deserters (such as Hannah Stütz-Menzel's 1989/2005 *Deserteurdenkmal* in Ulm) or of ordinary people (Marc Quinn's 2005 temporary sculpture in London, *Alison Lapper Pregnant* (Fig. 3), portraying a physically disabled woman).

### Form

Possibly the most notable and most common feature of anti-monumentality is its opposition to conventional monumental form and the employment of alternative, contrasting design techniques, materials and duration. Given that anti-monumentality typically addresses troubling memories and feelings, it is not surprising that anti-monumental form is often the inversion of traditional monumental forms. Abstract form rather than figuration is one such response. Sol LeWitt's 1989 *Black Form* (Dedicated to the Missing Jews) in Hamburg is a black rectangular prism. Maya Lin's 1982 *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* is a black granite wall covered with names but with no explanations (Fig. 4).

Fundamental inversions also include voids instead of solids, absence instead of presence (as with the *Aschrott Fountain* and Harburg's *disappearing Monument against Fascism*), dark rather than light tones, and an emphasis on the horizontal rather than the vertical. Forms may be sunken rather than elevated (as in the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial*), shifted off-axis, or dispersed or fragmented rather than unified in a single, orderly composition at a single location. They may be multiple rather than singular. Peter Eisenman's 2005 *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* in Berlin (Fig. 5) is a field of 2711 blank concrete stelae that gradually





Figure 3. Marc Quinn, Alison Lapper Pregnant (2005), Fourth Plinth, Trafalgar Square, London (photograph: Bryan Kennedy).

Figure 4. Maya Lin,  
Vietnam Veterans  
Memorial (1982),  
Washington, USA  
(photograph:  
Q. Stevens).



sinks below street level. Such characteristics are metonymic: following Tomberger, we can characterise this as a vocabulary that commemorates weaknesses rather than strengths.<sup>23</sup> In general, anti-monumental commemorative forms are more negative and more complex than traditional ones, like the issues they represent.

Conventional monumental forms may be incorporated into the design for their ironic or jarring effects, when applied to unfamiliar themes or unconventional locations. Hoheisel's fountain is

inverted. The anti-monumentality of Quinn's Alison Lapper Pregnant, an otherwise conventional marble statue on a plinth in London's Trafalgar Square, resides in its portrayal of a little-known, seated, pregnant, disabled woman instead of a famous, standing man. In another reversal, the traditional pedestal itself can become the focus of attention, rather than an unnoticed fixture, as with Rachel Whiteread's 2001 Monument in Trafalgar Square, an inverted, resin cast of the same plinth upon which it was displayed.



Figure 5. Peter Eisenman, Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe (2005), Berlin, Germany (photograph: Q. Stevens).

Works that are patently impermanent counter the aspiration to permanence of conventional monuments and their subjects. With dynamic monuments designed to erode, or eventually to be destroyed through visitor interaction, like Harburg's Monument Against Fascism, the work's temporary, changing nature is meant to help it endure longer in memory.

Contrasting with conventional solidity, anti-monumental works may be built from materials

that are fragile, flimsy, reflective or transparent. Jan Wolkers' 1977 memorial, Never Again Auschwitz, consists of large panels of broken, mirrored glass. Lying flat on the grass of an Amsterdam park, the glass reflects only shattered images of the sky above. After Auschwitz, Wolkers argued, the heavens should never again be seen unbroken.<sup>24</sup> Materials can thus have particular symbolic connotations. Berlin's Monument to the Murdered

Jews of Europe is made of concrete, a material that has come to be associated with monumentality (impersonal, heavy, durable) yet, as a modern, industrial material, is also associated with alienation, being resistant both to Nature and to meaning.<sup>25</sup>

### Site

Traditional monuments are often prominent, highly visible, set apart from everyday space through natural topography, height or enclosure. Anti-monuments, designed to serve new purposes, rarely have such characteristics. Rather than being obvious destination sites, some anti-monuments are to be encountered by chance during everyday travels through the city. The Monument against Fascism brings weighty issues concerning Germany's past into everyday urban space in Harburg's commercial centre. Berlin's Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe is not located on an urban axis or a physically prominent site, and although surrounded by a constellation of other historic and symbolic sites, it does not gain symbolic meaning from any specific external arrangements. The field of stelae has no defined boundary. It begins completely flush with the surrounding pavement and lacks any definite front, back or focal point where people could gather for ritual commemoration. Visitors enter from any direction, even incidentally and inattentively.

Pedestrians crossing Hermann Ehlers Platz in Berlin can unexpectedly encounter Wolfgang Göschel, Joachim von Rosenberg and Hans-Norbert Burkert's 1995 Deportation Memorial. Its mirror-finish stainless steel wall lists the names of local Jewish residents deported by the Nazis. On

market days the surrounding fruit, vegetable and dry goods stalls are fully reflected in the mirrored surface; daily life and commemoration are nearly seamless as the wall becomes nearly invisible. Demnig's Stumbling Blocks are another example of integrating commemoration into everyday urban space instead of setting it apart. Not only are these brass plaques widely dispersed, but being embedded in the pavements that people walk across everyday, they may go unnoticed.<sup>26</sup> These memorials thus presume no focused, idealised viewing position.

Design and dispersion can achieve a kind of telling camouflage. What first appear to be normal public street signs in Berlin's Bavarian Quarter are actually elements of a dispersed memorial. Each provides the original text and date of a Nazi law forbidding Jews to engage in normal everyday practices, such as: 'Aryan and non-Aryan children are forbidden to play together. 1938'.<sup>27</sup> Designed by Renata Stih and Frieder Schnock, this Places of Remembrance memorial (1993) combines chilling, historically accurate language with brightly coloured, everyday images that depict particular laws. While conventional monuments are more obvious in their intent, police confiscated the first of these signs when they were installed in June, 1993, mistaking them for anti-Semitic propaganda.<sup>28</sup>

### Visitor experience

Traditional monuments are often discrete objects, demanding solemnity and deference from a viewer engaged in private introspection. Most engage primarily, if not exclusively, the sense of sight, and many are designed to be viewed from a distance.

Anti-monumental strategies typically unsettle these conventions of reception by inviting close, bodily encounter by visitors. To read the signs of the Places of Remembrance memorial, one must come close; the Stumbling Blocks require approaching even closer and bending over. Senses other than sight may be stimulated. With the Aschrott Fountain, the sound of its waters can be heard before its traces are detected in the pavement. Kathryn Gustafson and Neil Porter's Lady Diana Memorial (2004) in London's Hyde Park invites visitors inside its landscape, to sit on or jump across its ring-shaped fountain, to dip their hands, or wade, in its rushing waters. Berlin's Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe similarly invites visitors to touch its surfaces, even to run between its stelae or climb them.<sup>29</sup> Anti-monuments may also extend a general historical trend in twentieth-century memorial design by providing quiet, sheltered spaces that visitors enter for personal contemplation.<sup>30</sup>

The designer of a monument may intend to stimulate certain kinds of sensory engagement and bodily actions on the part of visitors but how people will actually respond cannot easily be predicted. A sign on Harburg's Monument against Fascism invited visitors to inscribe their names so as to trigger its lowering and eventual disappearance into the ground. The artists expected neat rows of names, and were surprised by people's scribbling and scrawling, and by the eventual appearance of swastikas.<sup>31</sup> At the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, the design features of the stelae encourage recreational and playful activities that do not usually occur at monuments.<sup>32</sup> People's responses, as revealed in their actions,

may be as anti-monumental as the artworks themselves.

### Meaning

Traditional monuments are didactic, imparting clear, unified messages through figural representation, explicit textual or graphic reference to people, places or events, allegorical figures, and archetypal symbolic forms. Anti-monumental approaches, by contrast, offer no easy answers. They remain ambiguous and resist any unified interpretation; their meanings are often dependent on visitors' historical knowledge, or supplementary information made available through signs, brochures, guides or interpretive centres. Berlin's Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe is a vivid example. No title appears anywhere on this memorial; its design is unlike that of most other memorials and, without previous knowledge, passers-by may be uncertain what this field of stelae is. Brochures, guards and a concealed underground museum all offer information that the memorial itself does not disclose. This memorial's physical openness and its openness to multiple interpretations encourage visitors to let their bodily experiences of the memorial help them make sense of it.<sup>33</sup>

Abstract forms can be useful for avoiding obvious thematic representation and for effacing or concealing overt narratives, in order to depoliticize commemoration or to open it up to multiple and potentially conflicting interpretations. The non-representational form of Lin's Vietnam Veterans Memorial prevents a single narrative from dominating. Rather than representing a single, unified subject or an obvious message about the war, her



memorial allows multiple, competing publics to share the site. Where visitors are explicitly invited to participate actively in ongoing interpretations of a commemorative site, as with Harburg's anti-monumental Monument against Fascism, their responses may be quite different from those expected. Similarly, when the meaning is ambiguous, as at the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, people's actions may not conform to what is typically expected at monuments.

### *Dialogic approaches*

*Gegendenkmal* (translated as counter-monument) is the name key German-language scholars give to a monument that is intentionally juxtaposed to another, pre-existing monument located nearby and that critically questions the values the pre-existing monument expresses. A dialogic coupling dramatises new meanings beyond those conveyed by each of the works considered individually. Such critical responses to existing monuments and what they represent are historically, representationally and spatially specific. The concept of *Gegendenkmal* emerged in the 1980s in West Germany when liberal social and artistic values began to confront a weighty, difficult legacy of Imperial and National-Socialist monuments and history, although the early investigator Peter Springer also considers earlier cases.<sup>34</sup> Following Young's use of the term 'counter-monument' to describe two anti-monumental examples in Kassel and Harburg, use of the term in English has referred chiefly to anti-monumental features, not to dialogic monuments.<sup>35</sup> In the interests of increased clarity, we

have adopted the term dialogic to refer to coupled counter-monuments.

Springer describes a 1954 memorial erected to the bombed civilians of the city of Würzburg as a counter-monument because it is in dialogic opposition to two pre-existing works nearby: a 1931 Nazi soldier's memorial and an obelisk honouring the 1870–71 German wars of unification.<sup>36</sup> Another early example is Henry Moore's 1974 figural sculpture Goslar Warrior.<sup>37</sup> Following his award of an art prize by the city of Goslar, Moore selected his sculpture, originally entitled Fallen Warrior, for permanent display there.<sup>38</sup> With a new site and a new name, this formerly autonomous work became an indictment of the city's 1926 World War I memorial, Goslar Hunter, a focus for mythologising the nationally esteemed Goslar Jäger (Hunter) Army Battalion.<sup>39</sup> The two works are linked by their related subject matter and similar placement along Goslar's defensive wall (Fig. 6). Moore's expressive rendering of a recumbent male figure, a fallen victim of war, proffers a representational and stylistic contrast to the realistic Hunter: a proud, kneeling soldier in combat.

The earliest built memorial explicitly labelled *Gegendenkmal* is Alfred Hrdlicka's 1985–6 Hamburg Memorial against War and Fascism (Fig. 7), designed as a direct counter to Richard Kuöhl's 1936 Monument to the Fallen of Infantry Regiment No. 76.<sup>40</sup> Kuöhl's monument, a massive cubic form dubbed 'the Block', with a Gothic inscription and a relief of life-size soldiers marching four abreast, had been the subject of a longstanding debate about the place of Germany's fascist past in post-war Hamburg. Rather than honouring the



Figure 6a. Henry Moore, Goslar Warrior (1973–4), Goslar, Germany (photograph: Peter Corbett).

fallen of past wars, this monument was seen to glorify war. Instead of simply removing the monument and thereby curbing public debate, Hamburg's Senate initiated a competition in 1982 to create a new monument that would directly challenge the old one, to illuminate its questionable past purposes and to reframe its status as an historical document and witness. The neologism *Gegendenkmal* first appears in this competition brief.<sup>41</sup>

The winning design, which was never built, replicates the Block's soldiers in three-dimensional form, stepping out from the monument and into its surroundings. Reminiscent of gravestones, rows of marching soldiers progressively sink into the ground to become paving slabs in the adjacent pavement.<sup>42</sup> Hrdlicka's subsequent, partly-implemented design counters the original monument with four expressively rendered figurative



Figure 6b. Hans  
Lehmann-Borges,  
Goslar Hunter Memorial  
(1926), Goslar,  
Germany (photograph:  
Trine Kornum  
Christiansen).



sculptures, arranged in a shattered swastika, graphically illustrating the suffering victims of war and political repression, both citizens and soldiers. The juxtaposition of old and new works sought to produce a new, inter-dependent ensemble that warned of the consequences of glorifying war.<sup>43</sup>

More recently, Reconciliation Place in Canberra (2002; Fig. 8) incorporates Indigenous perspectives, including experiences of marginalisation and victimisation, into Australia's national narrative, by

countering the Australian capital's key representational land axis. A raised, grass mound interrupts the view between Parliament House and the Australian War Memorial with its monument-lined avenue, and marks a new, transverse axis. Reconciliation Place's scattered, fragmentary forms, with varied media, themes and didacticism, encourage divergent routes through the site and alternative interpretations of the events, themes and people represented.<sup>44</sup> Space has been reserved for additional future artworks. Strakosch situates *Reconciliation Place* within contemporary counter-monumental practice that 'confront[s] the nation-state with its own crimes and exclusions' while troubling the nation-building agenda of conventional State memorials.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, survivors of the Stolen Generations later protested that the design of one abstract, ambiguous artwork here failed to communicate adequately the government's stealing, institutionalisation and adoptive placement of Indigenous children. Their demands led to a new memorial alongside its counterpart, one incorporating explicit representation and victims' testimonials.<sup>46</sup> The resultant pairing, Strakosch suggests, 'may mark a more genuine sharing than the earlier imposition of a unified and "open" counter-monumental form.'<sup>47</sup>

Like Reconciliation Place, Maya Lin's 1982 Vietnam Veterans Memorial is a dialogic monument because it establishes contrasting spatial, thematic and experiential relationships to Washington's existing commemorative topography. The black granite wall, in the shape of a V, constructs sightlines to the nearby Lincoln Memorial and Washington Monument. Its polished surface reflects those



Figure 7. Alfred Hrdlicka, Memorial against War and Fascism (1985–6), Hamburg, Germany (photograph: Lil' Wolf / Flickr).

monuments, as well as the visitors. Its dark form sinks into the landscape rather than rising up. It encourages intimate, introspective experience rather than distant viewing.<sup>48</sup> Through these means, it creates a dramatic contrast to the triumphal commemorations of America's earlier wars. Following its inauguration, its perceived semantic deficiencies and formal negativities led to the installation of a political and stylistic rejoinder, Hart's 1984

sculpture *The Three Servicemen*. These upright, figurative bronzes stand vigil facing the wall, in dialogic relationship with it.

In *Denkmal und Gegendenkmal*, Dinah Wijsenbeek analyses twenty-four dialogic monuments.<sup>49</sup> Most were created in Germany in the 1980s and 1990s but she also includes earlier examples and ones from other countries. She cites two that employ formal contrasts with specific previous war

Figure 8. Reconciliation Place, Canberra, Australia (2002); Artwork #4 entitled Separation in the foreground; earlier Artwork #3, also entitled Separation, immediately behind it (photograph: Q. Stevens).



monuments to critique the Vietnam War: Ed Kienholz's Portable War Memorial (1968) and Claes Oldenburg's Lipstick (Ascending) on Caterpillar Tracks (1969). She argues that, despite being traditional, representational sculptures, two temporary works for London's Fourth Plinth (Quinn's 2005 Alison Lapper Pregnant and Mark Wallinger's 1999 Ecce Homo) and Frederick Hart's The Three Servicemen (1984) at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial are all counter-monuments.<sup>50</sup> She also identifies two traditional Nazi-era monuments that counter 'inappropriate' First World War memorials.<sup>51</sup> In all

cases, the effectiveness of the dialogic relationship between 'counter' and original monument depends upon visitors' capacity to recognise and weigh artistic statement and counter-statement.<sup>52</sup>

From her art-historical perspective, Wijsenbeek criticises Young's use of the term 'counter-monument' to refer exclusively to monuments designed to oppose an event or condition (as against fascism or against forgetting). She points out that the anti-monuments Young describes do not necessarily meet the narrower definition of *Gegen-denkmal* as a direct symbolic and formal challenge

to an already existing monument.<sup>53</sup> Springer is more generous when he suggests that Young's version of the counter-monument as 'the monument against itself'<sup>54</sup> shares a commonality with the dialogic counter-monument because both imply 'a rebellion against the conventions and traditional implications of the medium, along with the expectations derived from them'.<sup>55</sup>

#### *Counter-monumental practice and research*

We have distinguished anti-monumental strategies from dialogic ones. Sometimes, however, they are used in combination. Maya Lin's design for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is both dialogic in critiquing its immediate context and anti-monumental by virtue of employing minimalist forms to resist fixed interpretation. Yet the Three Servicemen statues later added to the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial, and the statues on London's Fourth Plinth, such as Alison Lapper Pregnant, are dialogic without being anti-monumental. Indeed, they react to anti-monumentality's fundamental negativity. In each case the designer used conventional vocabulary and sites. These figurative examples demonstrate how dialogic monuments can reaffirm the affective and communicative powers of the medium 'monument', and renew interest in subjects of commemoration.<sup>56</sup> This is equally true for those dialogic monuments that distance themselves, formally and semantically, from the pre-existing monuments with which they are coupled.

The complex, potentially confusing spectrum of commemorative practices framed by various types of counter-monuments reveals the diverse functions of contemporary public memorials and the wide

range of ways that built form can remind, warn or commemorate. What all counter-monumental practices acknowledge is that 'there is a debate that must be engaged with'.<sup>57</sup> Whether countering a specific monument or the broader institution of traditional monuments and their conventional means of expression, counter-monuments seek to confront or disrupt established meanings and tropes: purpose and subject matter, duration, style and form, as well as relationships of authoritativeness, authorship and reception.

Recent critiques suggest several limitations of counter-monumental practice as well as gaps in scholarly analysis. For some scholars, the counter-monumental project is a failed one, serving only to reproduce monumentality. Noam Lupu argues that Germany's counter-monuments never escaped the confines of traditional monumental norms to produce a new discourse of representation: Hoheisel's Aschrott Fountain, for example, did not achieve the dissociation from traditional memorials that Young suggests. The inverted fountain reinforces pre-existing representations of the Holocaust as an abyss, persisting as a negative presence rather than actually disappearing and forcing the work of remembering back onto individuals.<sup>58</sup> Bold *et al.* observe that, like traditional monuments, counter-monuments often claim a unique status and significance for the identities they commemorate, a claim that 'thereby contributes to—indeed functions as one of the technologies of—the hegemonic processes of active forgetting'.<sup>59</sup>

Strakosch observes that the strategic resistance which avant-garde counter-memorials offer to traditional narratives or to interpretability can,



paradoxically, limit opportunities to hear the voices of the marginalised.<sup>60</sup> Robert Morris writes of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, 'Nothing works like the minimal sublime for performing this *aufhebung* of cancelling consciousness by raising up formal, phenomenological awe. The VVM is the most prominent national monument of/to our unconscious imperialistic sublime.'<sup>61</sup> Anti-monumental strategies such as formal inversion arose in response to specific historical situations and traumas, but they have themselves become normative, redeployed in diverse geographical and political contexts to do very different kinds of work. Thakkar suggests that this deployment can reflect a politics of consensus, rather than contestation, and close down the kind of critical space that dialogic monuments seek to open up.<sup>62</sup>

Counter-monumentality is also criticised for being conceptually flawed. The binary opposition of monuments and counter-monuments sustains simplistic assumptions, such as the frequent equation of monumentality with fascism. Such universalisations are 'at the expense of the history [a counter-monument] is supposed to remember'.<sup>63</sup> Further, the 'phenomenological approach to the conception of the counter-monument has conflated the monument with the very processes of personal memory'.<sup>64</sup> In this context, Robert Morris suggests that because the anti-monumental Vietnam Veterans Memorial has been so successful as a setting for working through private grief, it 'serves to effect closure on a national wound that should have been left open'.<sup>65</sup>

The reliance of researchers on a few key accounts of still fewer examples limits the scholarly analysis of

counter-monuments. Given the predominantly American and German scholarship, critical debate on the demise of monumental imagery as the dominant form of public memorial has been 'customarily confined to, and suspended within, an exclusively Western framework of reference'.<sup>66</sup> Analytical scope is also limited. Tomberger argues, for example, that the narrow focus of German counter-monument studies on the past events being remembered neglects other important issues, namely how well counter-monuments have served the German, male, post-war legacy of 'repressed longings for traditional forms of identity'.<sup>67</sup> Further research is needed to uncover how the designs and meanings of counter-monuments serve particular audiences and interests in the present.

This paper has drawn together a range of examples and conceptions of counter-monuments to examine and explain some of their divergences. Ample scholarship confirms that counter-monuments have rekindled interest in the subjects and techniques of commemoration,<sup>68</sup> and in spite of prominent reactionary projects like the Washington World War II Memorial (2004),<sup>69</sup> we can anticipate a continued increase in the number and range of counter-monumental examples. Tragic events keep happening, and an increasingly wide range of interest groups are emerging to make increasingly varied and conflicting claims on memory and history. Future researchers might well consider a wider range of examples of commemorative inversions and subversions under different cultural and historical circumstances. Scrutiny of the commissioning and briefing processes for public monuments

could uncover the various demands and expectations that shape critical, counter-monumental design responses. Little attention has been given to these recent commemorative projects' fit with broader, ongoing efforts to redevelop and reprogramme public space. The history of counter-monuments is far from over.

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