The Past and Possible Future of Countermonument

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Monuments are ubiquitous throughout history and civilisation, so much so that they are often ignored by cultural analysts and general public alike. As part of the landscape of our visual culture, they occupy a unique role in the symbolic communication of civic life, its history and 'official' memory, its authority and legitimacy. This has become more apparent since the 1960s and the increasing politicization of armed conflict – war being a dominant 'subject' for the civic monument. In this paper, I want to review the concept of 'countermonument', considering some key moments since its origin in contemporary Germany. I will endeavour to explain how countermonument is a significant practice for today and holds much potential for future engagements by artists in public space.

My starting the writing of this paper coincided with an unplanned visit to an exhibition at the artist-run gallery, Eastside Projects, in Birmingham. The exhibition was a retrospective of the work of Carey Young, one item of which – appropriately for this essay – was a video installation called *Momento Park* (2010). Designed by Hungarian architect, Ákos Eleod, the real Momento Park in Budapest has become the resting place for old monumental statues from Hungary's Communist period (1949-1989). It is now, with some historical irony, a cultural theme park.

The Soviet era monuments in Momento Park, for a Western European having lived through some part of the Cold War, can provoke a chain reaction of powerful, if eclectic, associations. At once vivid, distant and foreign, Soviet era monuments may connect imagery from the revolutionary Bolshevik poster with the Russian Constructivist art of the 1920s (so influential to Western contemporary art after 1960), the Stalinist era music of Shostakovich, the writings of Solzhenitsyn, and of course the novels of John Le Carré, as well as the many documentaries, films and plays that pictured communist oppression and hypocrisy. The iconic power of the Soviet monument was considerable, and its civic-political role has been perhaps unequalled since those of the late Roman Empire. Throughout history, the civic monument has had a way of inspiring both love and fear and other paradoxes of emotion. Perhaps, considering the ancient religious provenance of the monument form, love and fear as a single emotion is not so paradoxical. As an instrument of cultural terror, monuments were ubiquitous in the communist East. For, as Sergiusz Michalski points out, in the monument form aesthetics truly becomes politics – affording a variety of twentieth century demagogues a simple, universally communicable conduit of meaning.

However, here in Budapest's Momento Park, the monument has become strangely benign. In its physical form it has not changed – it is no less awesome, vivid and aggressive – a physical presence. And yet, it now seems 'silent' (as if monuments are ever not silent). Rather than destroying its communist era civic monumentry, like many of the post-Soviet states after 1989, the nation of Hungary in its Momento Park has ensured their preservation. This preservation is not to be mistaken for 'conservation': the statues have not been awarded the patronage and legitimacy conferred by public museums. The Park testifies to a different set of motives. It has become many things to many Hungarians and, of course, a visitor destination. Symbolically it is

difficult not to understand it as an explicit political decision, articulating a severe historical dilemma that has something to do with the decades of national life deformed by Soviet imperialism.

Momento Park is surely a site of lament, but is also more than that. Notwithstanding the achievements of the 1956 so-called October Revolution, Hungary's national development since the Second World War was blighted. Yet, on being liberated from the Soviet Bloc, Eastern European nations found the West and the European Union almost as equally intolerant of nationalism as they had been of communism. October 23, 1956 saw, in fact, a toppling of the great 25m high Stalin Monument in Városliget Park, a precursor to such acts of political fratricide around the liberated Soviet Bloc thirty-three years later. Momento Park, however, betrays another kind of strategy, where the nation state of Hungary overcomes the experience of 'the era of the monument' with an act of re-contextualisation. With its relocation to the Park, with its wandering stray cats and rural-like setting, the Soviet-era monument is divested of its symbolic command – the command of the historical narratives that animates a country's sense of identity. It stands divested, humiliated, and pathetic; its power has gone, but Hungary – a hesitant Hungary perhaps – is still here.

My first point in this paper follows from Carey Young's video, that there is a strong sense in which these monuments can be understood as monuments without monumentality – which suggests that 'monumentality' is not internal to the empirical object, but something the object *inhabited* in some way. Or perhaps that monumentality is a dynamic relation between the object's acts of visual rhetoric and their resonance or political command of civic space. Here, we find the monument surely divested of its monumentality. The massive statues seem vulnerable, and comical even. They are humiliated by being suspended in the gestural tropes of absolute Soviet power, tropes that now only express hyperbole and hubris. The monuments are, of course, rendered hopelessly anachronistic by a new cultural epoch, a new era of countermonumentality, whose rationale for their preservation is to condemn them to an ever-diminishing role in the ongoing reality of national cultural memory.

From this observation, we are therefore faced with a simple set of distinctions. We locate the monument: as an empirical object, in terms of physical structure (often a massive stone or bronze sculpture); (also) as an aesthetic function of space (it conducts a commanding role in civic ritual, or acts as a marker of a territoriality of civic space); and thirdly, as a genre of visual rhetoric (which of course for the Soviet Union was embedded in a historical and historicized discourse of political communication or propaganda).

Countermonuments emerged, in part, as a means by which the classic monument-form could be 'countered', the power of its cultural demagoguery addressed or confronted, its cultural function deconstructed or subject to critical assessment. Countermonument, particularly after 1989, was bound up to some degree in 'late modern' or postmodern rhetorics of 'decline' – announcing the end of the era of monumentalisation (which often heralded the onset of irrepressible liberal democracy, or at least of free market capitalism, which was understood to have some necessary relation to it). Particularly after the collapse of the Soviet Bloc, the countermonument emerged as a site of political ambivalence that was often masked by the more welcome triumphant proclamation of liberty over totalitarianism. On the site of the former Városliget Stalin Monument there is a new monument – the *Monument of the 1956 Revolution*, completed in 2006 for the 50th anniversary of the event. For Momento Park, Ákos Eleod created a plinth, atop which is placed an oversized bronze cast of a pair of Stalin's boots, the darkly comical remains of the 1956 'toppling'.

Countermonuments often occupy the original site of some monument of oppression, as if the site itself had become imbued with an aura of aesthetic power. However, the political assertiveness of countermonument also expresses a paradoxical ambivalence, for it knows it

does not possess a necessary power of command assumed by its older rival – it is, after all, morally 'superior', proclaiming a liberation from all such quasi-militarist 'command' aesthetics. For countries emerging from the Soviet Bloc, the idea of Western liberty or freedom was highly problematic, discernible in the less assertive form of the countermonument. The worries of many in 1989 – that the Soviet satellites, the GDR, as Mother Russia herself, were unprepared (as if they had a choice) for a problematic liberty – were well founded in light of the way they have all but succumbed to its worst excesses. In broad terms, countermonument announced an end to monumentalisation per se, of certain futures (and certain pasts out of which our futures are hatched). It announced that the making of monuments was no longer an option – that the conditions of 'monumentalisation' had declined. What were these 'conditions'? In broad terms, they were cultural demagogy-controlled monoculture, secured by a concept of truth that was at once metaphysical and political. Monumental societies were animated by a nationalist inverse 'political theology', where the State enforced a civic duty that in turn cultivated a sense of reverence and devotion. This 'sense' and sensibility was expressed in acts of civic worship, for the State was an absolute power, who was at once tangible yet forever out of reach.

We have, however, arrived at the terminus of the era of monumental decline – the decline of absolute authority and command aesthetics, the incontestable historical narratives and civic symbolism, along with a cultural demagogue that ensured their dissemination. We no longer experience an involuntary deference for the objects of state patronage; no longer respond with involuntary wonder and recognition at canonical art; and no longer do the visual expression of national identity, patrimony and patriarchal heritage command collective allegiance in our civic spaces.

Countermonument discourse at various times made reference to each of these aspects of culture that have 'declined', aspects that in turn became instrumental to the development of our concepts of modernity as it did our understanding of postmodernity. In concluding this paper, however, I want to consider the countermonument project of Jochen Gerz, which he refers to as 'antimonument'. Gerz would concur with the general thesis of 'decline' as outlined above. However, for Gerz, there is a sense in which the monument as an art form has been liberated – that the monument now *is merely* an art form. And though indeed our understanding (and aesthetic apprehension) of the monument form is still conditioned largely by the historical memory of various authoritarianisms – as a form of cultural production it can be reinvented. For Gerz, monuments fulfilled a function that is redeemable. We still need the visual mediation of collective memory; we need civic rituals of memorialisation; we need collective values – civic virtues animating our collective spaces.

The 'Pasts' of Countermonument

I will return to this above tripartite cultural function of a possible new monumentality after we clarify the course of the 'pasts' of countermonument. There is a lot of 'reinventing' the monument form across Europe and the US, which is not self-consciously countermonument. And the monument as a cultural practice has steadily moved from the realm of direct political patronage to a more self-conscious role as a vehicle of what some have called 'the heritage industry', which includes the making of 'landmark' sculptures. Visualizing its discursive shape (which I usually try to do as a policy studies exercise), monument-making today almost always only happens if emerging from the confluence of several overlapping spheres of public policy-making.
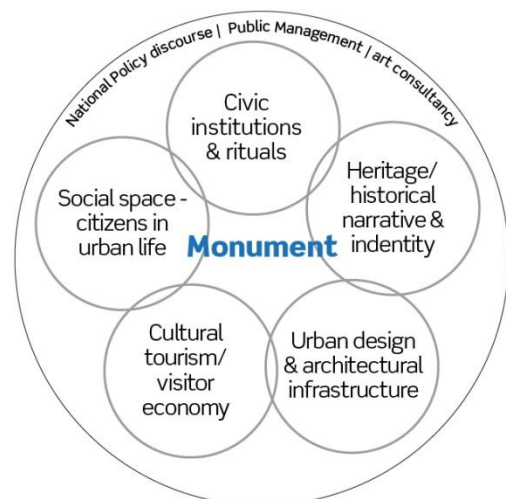
Diagram 1: *The spheres of policy discourse*

These spheres of public (mostly cultural) policy cover the five main areas of civic life. Note that around this cluster of spheroids I have cited 'national policy discourse/public management/cultural consultancy', which in the days of the Momento Park monuments would be something like 'The Party' (i.e. standing as representatives of 'the People').

I am going to plot some historical reference points, and with minimal comment, indicate some of the moments in the recent history of countermonument. And there is indeed a caveat to this trajectory – our examples emerge from, and participate in, very different discursive fields, perhaps 'urban design or civic architecture', 'civil or war memorials', 'modernist abstract sculpture', and so on. They are not equivalent. Countermonument, as art history is disinclined to suggest, is not an artistic genre or a unified realm of artistic practice.

First (i) we have the classical modernist political countermonument: Mies van der Rohe's *Monument to Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht* of 1926 – later demolished by Hitler. These two socialist activists, murdered in 1919 for their various anti-militarist-imperialist projects, are still commemorated at a memorial site for socialists in an eastern section of Berlin. In the original monument, modernist architect Mies van der Rohe has inverted the spatial verticality of the monument – earthwards not heavenward – as a philosophical gesture against the spatial orientation of the ancient traditions of religious statuary and the theological pretensions inherent in their empire-era progeny (the statuary of First and Second Empire France were exemplars for modernist sculptors of this era). The monument – with a similar inversion in using brick and not stone – proclaims its own historicity, its 'embeddedness' in, and emergence from, the material history of labour, with its political purpose or commitments displayed and transparent – not naturalised or shrouded in universal values.

My next example (ii) is the postminimalist monument: it is perhaps tangential, but worth mentioning given the international impact of the artists and art movements emerging from New York after 1966. Matta Clarke's *Conical Intersect* from 1975, created during the Beaubourg reconstruction in the 4th arrondissement (on the occasion of the Paris Biennale in 1975, and with a curious connection to Anthony McCall's 1973 'art house' film *Line Describing a Cone*) is a form of 'land art' that explored the conditions of viewing large-scale artistic intervention in urban space. Like his peers Robert Smithson and Michael Heizer, Clarke here investigates the aesthetics of monumentality – our experience of monumental form (in what was becoming one of Paris's most important civic-cultural spaces). *Conical Intersect* is not a monument as such, but a re-creation of the formal vocabulary of monumentality in a place were the historicity of inhabitation was being stripped away, and a new cultural monumentalism was emerging in the form of the area housing the new Centre Pompidou. Here Matta Clarke re-inscribes monumental form within the contexts of extreme ephemerality and urban decay. The exercise revolved around the involuntary resistance of our aesthetic responses in seeing monumental form embedded in processes of change and forces of mutation. For the monument is nothing if not transcendent of its own time and place – regardless of any subsequent role in civic commemoration, the monument is invariably once-removed from the conditions of the everyday, or in fact the everyday experience of historical temporality (that of 'belonging to' the past). Its 'authority' is somehow embedded in the symbiotic relation between the expression of transcendent values (self-sacrifice; glory to God) and trans-historical truth (such as the irrepressible 'will' of the nation state in overcoming its enemies.

My next three examples are more familiar and explicitly countermonument: in fact, countermonuments are invariably memorials – they are not merely commemorative. Commemorative monuments can be celebratory or involve the proclamation of victory or achievement: *Nelson's Column* (1843) in Trafalgar Square in London is probably the most globally famous commemorative monument. Memorials, however, are usually markers of death and sacrifice, and thus, by implication, are sites of mourning as well as remembrance. By far the greatest source of countermonument practice and critique has been the many memorials of the

Nazi Holocaust (or for Jews, the Shoah). The recent Holocaust memorial tradition in Germany – involving acute national and civic anxiety – has also played a role in American scholarship and monument-making, as pioneering writer James E. Young observed (Gordon and Goldberg, 1998). Aside from the collective memory of the complex events of the Nazi period, there is the anxiety of representation – how does one collectively acknowledge historical actions that are, in principle, unrepresentable and perhaps, in relation to those who perished, indefinable given that the erasure of identity and evidence of existence were intrinsic to the strategic planning of the Final Solution. The concept of 'unrepresentability' is also ethically problematic, generating an often intemperate public discussion on the politics of such memorials.

My third example (iii) is thus the German Holocaust monument. It has generated a unique visual rhetoric of space, absence, void, abyssal darkness and collective mourning. The largest and now most famous example is probably the *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* ('Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas', but commonly referred to as the 'Berlin Holocaust Memorial'). Designed by Peter Eisenman (architect) and Buro Happold (engineer) and inaugurated in 2005, the space is a relentless repetition of the sarcophagi form. The grey concrete slabs, whose linear arrangement is both logical and irrational compositional monotony, entrap the visitor in a cycle of endless and unarticulated viewpoints across an expanse of 19,000 square metres.

Around Europe in the last two decades (particularly with the half-centenary and further commemorations of the Second World War) many memorials have emerged in recognition of third-party cooption, collaboration (enforced or wilful) and misplaced allegiances with Nazi-Germany. Example (iv) is what I call the Anti-fascist memorial, which can acknowledge the national experience of Nazism or other fascisms, but also articulate a need for national repentance. As part of the countermonument movement, works like the Catalan Claudi Casanovas' Olot memorial, (*Memorial als Vençuts*, 2006) represent the morally void military-bureaucratic monolith of fascist systems – a system figured as impervious edifice. Dedicated to the victims of the la Guerra Civil, it comprises 15 tonnes of clay encased in a concrete shell. Without symbol or expressive articulation, it stands as a gesture of political will (i.e. a popular vow never again to allow such a political force to emerge). In countries that witnessed widespread collaboration with the forces of fascism, monuments, even countermonuments, tend to move their focal attentiveness towards more generic and abstract subjects rather than particular people (such as the army or police, or specific sections of society).

My fifth example (v) I call the *memorial of the forgotten*, which is a growing sub-genre in the countermonument tradition. It often depicts either soldiers and/or the victims of war (that is, often with no specific reference to their country or governments). Usually composed in a vernacular of anatomical naturalism, it vividly depicts those excluded from official rituals of memorialisation. My example here is Deborah Copenhaver Fellows' 1993 *Korean War Veteran's Memorial 1950-53* (Capitol grounds, Olympia, Washington State, USA). It comprises crouching bronze figures, looking ambivalent and somewhat vacant, where in front an inscription states 'The Forgotten War'. The monument is not only the bronze statue grouping, but the large physical expanse, including stone slabs, flagpoles and inscriptions of the names of veterans. Notwithstanding its size, aesthetically this is a self-effacing monument, as it disavows the arrogance of power and the monumental rhetoric by which it is customarily expressed. The monument is indeed monumental, but the physical posture of its characters self-subvert their aesthetic function. Overall, it stands as a metaphoric indictment of government and country for demeaning by forgetting the sacrifice of its citizens, albeit with an indictment that speaks to popular patriotism – that is, it does not denigrate national Government or resonate with politically subversive rhetoric.

This type of memorial often has a tripartite function: it is a mnemonic device (a reference to past events, particular aspects of a conflict, or the actions of a regiment or platoon); it marks a site as a space for public mourning or lament (that such a price was exacted); and it is juridical.

It is juridical in the sense that it is an attempt at some kind of restorative justice – rectifying a moral wrong. It acts as a political indictment of the repression or marginalisation from collective memory of certain groups or people; it can also embody polemic – anti-war, or anti-'futile' war, or more specifically, anti-military establishment or military-run junta.

It is a point worth noting perhaps – traditional monuments rarely bear reference to the 'rationale' for an historical event, unless that rationale was purely the moral right of self-defense against an indefensible invasive attack. The political rationales for the Korean and Vietnam wars were complex, changing, and of course contested. This makes 'monumentalisation' an uncertain task in these contexts, as it is not clear what the lives remembered were sacrificed for – or whether assertions such as 'they laid their lives down for their country' are historically accurate, or indeed make political sense to a grieving public. Juridical monuments have proliferated in part because of such agonizing ambiguities concerning the rationale for the death that is the occasion for the remembrance. Considering the ultimate sacrifice as the outcome of a political mistake, or fortuitous misadventure on the part of the platoon commander – or worse, a president – is always bound up in its latent meaning. Such monuments of indictment are often temporary and can be found all over the world.

One example of note is *The Pillar of Shame* monument series – starting in 1997 and created by Danish Jens Galschiot in memorial to the Chinese Tiananmen Square Massacre of 1989. Somewhat reminiscent of certain figures in Rodin's *La Porte de l'Enfer* (Gates of Hell, c.1917), the monument has been repeated, taking slightly different form. Compositionally, it is an eight-metre high needle-shaped amalgam of fifty naked bodies, melded together as if writhing in pain, many looking dead. The original vertical composition began brown and was then painted orange in April 2008 in response to a Chinese human rights awareness project called *The Colour Orange* – organized especially for the Beijing Olympic Games in August of that year (symbols can be banned in China, but not, unsurprisingly, colours).

The Pillar of Shame has travelled to Rome, Hong Kong, Mexico, and Brazil – marking different and recent massacres with different variations in the sculpture. Set up as a memorial of a severe infringement against humanity, the first version of the sculpture participated in a candlelight vigil in commemoration of the eighth anniversary of the Tiananmen Square protests on 3 June 1997. Then, often fighting police belligerence, the monument toured six university campuses. The Tiananmen Square Massacre is a forbidden subject of public debate in China, and no public acknowledgement of this monumental event is possible. *The Pillar of Shame*, moving locations under duress, articulates the exclusion of such events of political self-determination from the narratives of contemporary political memory. Other locations include sites of other massacres: for example, on the 17th April 1996 in Belém, capital of the northern state of Pará in Brazil, the military police killed 19 unarmed landless peasants protesting in a routine land occupation dispute.

Countermonument as Visual Strategy
There are two major proponents of countermonument in Europe today: Jochen Gerz (in contemporary art) and Horst Hoheisel (in architecture). In Kassel, Hoheisel constructed a self-negating fountain, where the original design is inverted, piercing the ground, like an eternal 'thorn in the flesh' of the city. The site was significant – it was the site of the destroyed Aschrott fountain, destroyed in 1939 as a 'Jews' Fountain' by Nazis, for the original construction was funded by the German-Jewish company Sigmund Aschrott. The new work, constructed after the original architectural plan – a neo-gothic pyramid fountain, constructed in 1908 – featured a visual inversion of the original. It thus makes the historical problem of its existence perspicuous by its absence. Hoheisel refers to his work as 'Negative Form' and, like a lot of Holocaust countermonuments, he uses absence, gaps, voids and vacant spaces to signify the trans-material torment of evil. To engage in the act of depiction would create an ethically problematic historical categorization which, by its very nature, would belittle or be partial in acknowledging

the event's magnitude, thus contributing to the 'erasure' of reality that is set in motion by the historical injustice that is memorialised. The inverted fountain occupies the original site, but with the water falling into its dark abyss. In Hoheisel's words, he intended to "rescue the history of this place as wound and as an open question" (quoted in Young, J. E., 1995).

The term countermonument was coined, or at least made famous by James E. Young in the 1990s, with essays like 'The Counter-Monument: Memory against Itself in Germany Today' (*Critical Inquiry*, Winter, 1992) and the outstanding book *The Texture of Memory* (Yale, 1993). The interest in the subject was compounded by a rising interest in the study of memory and the broader political-cultural dynamics of memory, such as in Andreas Huyssen's *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia*, published in 1995. Young's claims revolved around a twin series of observations; the first on what he perceived to be the basic civic and historical functions of the monument form; and the second on the role 'memory' and memorialisation play in modern societies.

On the former point Young asserted that monuments, while acting as mnemonic markers of events and personages central to historical identity and civic values, rarely represented veridical memory – rather they often engaged in an act of revisionism. On the latter point, modern societies, given their subjection to the temporal fissure of modernity, need to engage in 'memory work' or an active collective construction through recovery of historical truth. Monuments often serve to either prevent or reverse this 'memory work': 'seal[ing] memory off from awareness altogether' (1992: 272). Not only can the traditional monument erase the unacceptably sorrowful content of the actual past, it can raise the reality of historical narrative to the level of the symbolic, removing it from the realm of current ethical dilemma. The ethical obligation of collective remembrance of what actually happened is transferred from the citizen to the monument. However, for Young, returning the obligation of 'memory-work' to the citizen, is one common aim of countermonument.

Countermonument as an art strategy often operates (as we have seen with the above examples) by systematic negation or inversion of the empirical components, aesthetic form or cognitive function of the traditional monument form. Of course, in one sense there is no one generic traditional monument form against which countermonument can place itself as a foil, though 'monumentality' through the ages did indeed work powerfully by standardized visual tropes and officially endorsed historical symbolism. It gained necessary civic recognition precisely though its historically consolidated repertory of generic forms.

So, by way of summary, what generic visual dimensions of traditional monumentality have or could be inverted, subverted and thus re-configured?

(i) *Positioning*: this can work in two ways – first, by demarcating an area of ground, and second, by arranging the monument in relation to other monuments or civic structures. The demarcation could take the form of a plinth or a broader physical platform. This creates a realm of aesthetic 'habitation' for the monument, separated categorically from the everyday change of the urban pedestrian, citizen or visitor. Its function as a cipher of authority is to deny the social determination of everyday meaning, for it is impervious to individual experience or participation, placing the symbolic operations of the political beyond the means of its citizens – in fact, into a kind of neo-mythic realm.

(ii) *Location*: positioning and location are of course related; but where positioning tends to refer to the means by which a monument demarcates a space of aesthetic meaning for itself in what is otherwise (usually) a civic concourse, location is the active symbolic order of the concourse or space itself. Most locations of monument tend towards the reserved and policed spaces of the civic plaza or privileged building. The location signifies authorized representation of official endorsement and priority.

(iii) *Material*: traditionally, the use of stone such as marble was symbolic as well as practical – stone signified the universal, eternal or enduring meaning of the monument

(mediated of course through capital, as grades of stone signified grades of patronage, wealth or status). It instantiated a claim to human or cultural essence and a natural order, as well as being expressive of the gendered artistic office of the artist-genius. Stone, perhaps more than any other media, exhibited the victory of command over nature, a trope more than any other used as brute symbolism of the ascent and ascendency of the modern nation state.

(iv) *Form*: the monument form revolved around a number of principles – physical singularity, structural coherence, compositional balance and elemental harmony. Its aesthetic values – derived from geometry, as a transcendental architecture of space – were established by successive Greco-Roman inspired traditions, from the Italian then broadly European Renaissance, to the neo-classic movements in England and France in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries. These values ensured that the monument remained monolithic, imposing, imperious and overlooking. Its clarity and unity, along with its proportion and poise, articulated an assurance and confidence, of the State or patron, as well as validating its subject matter.

(v) *Rhetoric*: the monument usually inherited the techniques of visual communication developed by the heroic statuary traditions of Rome. Its historical symbolism was significant in times in which identification with the embryonic democracy of Rome generated historical-juridical legitimacy for the developing nation state along with its Empire. Rhetorically it was thus used in the West for courts of law as well as seats of government.

As a typology of monumental tactics, this above list may indicate that countermonument strategies are often quite straightforward – the term 'counter' in this sense would simply mean to combat or to apprehend in the cause of muting the power (aesthetic and thus political) of monumental signification in public space. There are two artistic rationales to this strategy: (i) the act of unmasking – revealing how traditional monumentalisation was (and still is) a strategic suppression of truth; and (ii) an ethical reform – a returning of the visual act of monumentalisation to an enlightened civic role, i.e. making monuments serve the public interest, and not the covert interests of the state.

The countermonument artist usually holds one of two views – that the monument form is historically variable, so can be used reflexively and is suitable for a democratic civic culture. Or, that the monument form is intrinsically authoritarian – that monuments are by their nature monocultural demagoguery and historically have only truly functioned in this way. If the former, the monument form is thought to be used for enlightened purposes, and this can happen by a process of visual re-orientation or reinterpretation. If the latter, then countermonument is simply an act of subversion, often didactic in its objectives, but always negative in its aesthetic consequences (i.e. it does not itself offer historical 'truth' to combat falsehood).

Across the field of countermonument research and related literature we find four categories of inquiry (see diagram). Of these, 'Memory studies' is an area increasing in interest, assessing the cultural reproduction and transmission of mnemonic-historical meaning through visual culture. Under the 'Visual objectification' category, we could include any object-based research, whether art history, architecture or arts management, where the monument is apprehended as an example of sculpture, heritage or fine art patronage. The category 'Narrative' is a subject that attracts historians or literary scholars, attending to the means by which the meaning of the monument coalesces around its historical reception, in turn articulating its historical subject. Lastly, there is the study of the 'Public sphere', which surprisingly perhaps is indeed least – although this depends on how this is defined. Essentially, this category understands the monument in terms of political aesthetics or in terms of a cultural politics of public culture.
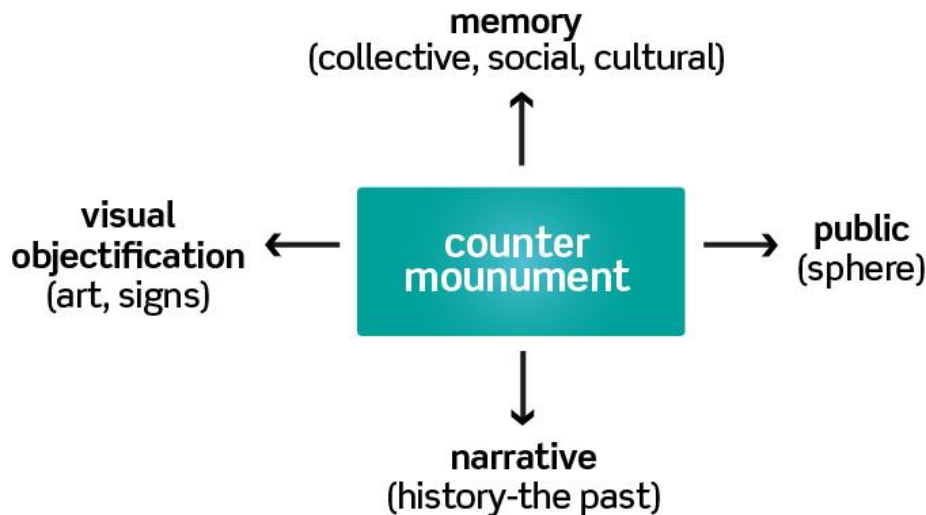
Diagram 2: *Subject areas in monument research*

There is a sense in which these four subject areas all coalesce in the art, projects and writings of Jochen Gerz.

Gerz believes in a contemporary role for monuments that moves beyond a critique or a deconstructive dismantling of monumental aesthetics/politics. His work asserts that monuments once fulfilled civic functions that are now redeemable – these functions included the need for public markers of collective memory; the need for civic rituals of memorialisation; and the need for public values that the objects of memorialisation visually articulated. However, these cultural 'needs' cannot simply be manufactured. The conditions of these things are not necessarily present, but might be distorted or need to be reconstructed. Sometimes this requires deconstructing their opposites, the inhibitors or the very distorters of collective need.

Let us redefine these 'needs' in terms of the monument form: (i) *Monumentalisation* – the need for significant visual markers in urban space; the construction of serious civic art that has the power to mediate (complex) collective memory. This requires an active intervention of some kind into the location of the monument; (ii) *Memorialisation* – the need for collective rituals of self-recognition and acknowledgement of historical emergence or becoming of the social polity. This is a significant function of civic art and will involve some conception of participation; (iii) *Valorization* – the need for public assent or assent from the social collective. This is a recognition of value and the inspiration to conviction. This usually involves publicity, or public media communication.

There is a lot that can be said about Jochen Gerz's public authorship. Here, however, I will limit my analysis to Gerz's countermonument strategy. Gerz has largely avoided using the term 'countermonument' in part as it entails inappropriate associations with a distinctive approach to historical monumentalisation – such as the work of Hoheisel. Gerz's term is 'anti-monument', a term used since his Harburg *Monument Against Fascism* (Mahnmal gegen Faschismus: Hamburg from 1986-1993; realised in collaboration with Esther Shalev-Gerz). This antimonument was a 12m high stele coated in soft lead and was erected in a section of a shopping area, with pedestrians and shoppers invited to sign their names with a steel pen into the lead (as a gesture against fascism). '…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 have disappeared 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' (*source*: Gerz Studio archive). What happened, however, was that neo-Nazi

opportunism and general offensive graffiti overtook the initial artistic intention for a successive but orderly series of rational gestures.

Antimonument
Antimonument in Gerz's work features under the category of 'public authorship' works – which he only publically used since his 1998 commission in Coventry, but which, in his recent *Catalogue Raisonné* (2011), stands for his countermonument work since the early 1990s. Gerz's earlier and probably most famous antimonument work, was *Monument Against Racism* (Saarbrücken, Germany, 1993), which used a clandestine team of students to inscribe the names of erased Jewish cemeteries in the Schlossplatz [the main square in front of the Saarbrücken Castle, the seat of the Provincial Parliament]. The inscriptions were later discovered and the work gained a related official sanction as 'The Square Of The Invisible Monument' (Platz des unsichtbaren Mahnmals).

Following this there are *The Living Monument* (Le Monument vivant: Biron, 1995-6) and *The Witnesses* (Les Temoins: Cahors, 1997-8)– both French commissions. *The Living Monument* was a project for the replacement of the monument to the war dead in the village of Biron (the Dordogne, France), erected in the 1920s in commemoration of the First World War. In an area that experienced the war crimes of 1943-44, Gerz's new 'Living Monument of Biron' featured responses of the adult population of Biron to a secret question asked by the artist. The responses spoke of the experience of the past, the value of life, freedom, and the nation state. The monument exhibited public statements, each of which generated significant public dialogue on a series of emotive issues. *The Witnesses* began by interviewing 48 female residents of Cahors in France – during the week that preceded the verdict of the trial of Maurice Papon. All the women belonged to the same generation as Papon, and Cahor was a region responsible for the deportation of Jews to German camps. During the interviews, Gerz asked them the simple question, 'What is the truth?' Their responses were transcribed and edited, then mounted with a portrait photograph of each participant on billboards around the town of Cahors.

Antimonument often stripped the artist's role of any form of expressive content, resulting in no 'work of art' to speak of. Later, antimonument works were a dynamic fulcrum in the production of a process of social dialogue, the contents of which are often scripted and published in a variety of forms – even if only a bare list of names of participants. Lists of names are common features in Public Authorship as a whole, at once semantically empty, yet active in articulating a new criteria for public inscription, or the authorship of such. Marx's famous statement in his essay, 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte' (1852), that 'The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the minds of the living', contains something of an urban truth in this and many other contexts. For antimonument reverses the suppression of historical nightmares, and not without irony, the process in itself is invariably commissioned by civic 'officialdom'. Charting Gerz's public work since the Harburg Monument, we find an increasing sense in which the 'tradition of all dead generations' are weighing more heavily on their guardians, on civic officials, motivating an increasing openness to question the narratives that have forged their civic identities.

More recent works include the following: *63 Years After* (Graz and Styria, Austria, 2008-2010) used research groups rather than a random public. The project involved groups of students, journalists, professors and so on, constructing photographic narratives of the Nazi past to be exhibited across 24 public locations. The narratives, again, pictured the hidden and suppressed dimension of everyday life under Nazi rule – articulating the particularity within which the precise form of human dilemma was often invested. Gerz's current *Square of the European Promise* (Bochum, Germany 2007-2011) bears affinities with past antimonument strategies in that the project is positioned in relation to an emotive centre of Bochum city, the 'Heroes Memorial Hall' (1931, itself in the vicinity of the church, Christuskirche). The Hall features inscribed names of dead citizens of the First World War, but also a surprising pre-Nazi list of the

'enemy states of Germany'. Gerz's project invited the citizens of the city to each make a promise to themselves as a future ethical imperative on their role in the emerging European public. To this, and in the Square, will be added a third list, the names of these living citizens.

The 'anti' in antimonument is in effect used in its original Latin sense of 'supplanting' – a re-placement, or a process of over-writing. Gerz's antimonument intervenes in a location, rehearses a certain civic requirement for memorialisation, and with public communications of various kinds constructs a social dialogue that eventually takes some kind of narrative form.

The dialogue stage usually features a panoply of emerging narratives – of a people, community, the nation and the values and beliefs that form the matrix of ideologies around which any concept of a national 'public' coalesces. Gerz's antimonument deliberately addresses what Nietzsche called 'monumental history' – the historical narrative that functions so powerfully as the cognitive frame for civic life (Nietzsche, 1985: 17). Monumental history is the heroic version of past events – schematized so as to be useful for the promotion of national or civic identity and aspirant visions of future achievement. Gerz, however, introduces a conflict within the narrative – and the conflict is simply the role of the irreducible individual – how the individual self is located in the narrative (suppressed, empowered, erased, distorted, or whatever).

Antimonument uses the monument location to generate a series of conversations, personal confessions, public statements, public debate, 'dialogue' with various authorities. This trajectory often moves from what we might call confession to political discourse – from the intimate revelation of personal experience to the institutionalized rationalized 'facts' that drive public policy-making. As an art project, it can create an odd equivalence between artist and audience in terms of generating a notional 'content' for the work (the artist becomes a 'listener' and transcriber). The invitation for participation is usually open, and the length of time and consequent cacophony of 'voices' using the monument as public media effectively dissolve the fixity or historic 'eternality' of the work's generic monumentality. To conclude then – for me, Jochen Gerz offers a way out of the literal 'negativity' and tropes of 'subversion' of the recent traditions of countermonument strategy, which we have briefly identified. And, while there is indeed a critical dimension to Gerz's work, he offers a note of optimism, invested in the power of public dialogue. The antimonument strategy that can be identified in his 'public authorship' genre of works, appeals for acknowledgement of the continued necessity for monumentalisation, memorialisation and the valorization that the civic monument form uniquely offers.

These coordinates of location, participation and publicity are the three spheres through which the process of re-writing an alternative official narrative occurs, and the way this re-writing is materialized as a physical marker and mediator of collective memory – as a fulcrum around which civic ritualization of memory-making and participation can occur, and where civic-historic significance can be articulated through modes of collective assent. They perhaps indicate that something around a future for monuments can be imagined.

Note:
1. This essay emerged from a lecture, given at the symposium *The Monument and the Changing City*, University of Central Lancashire on the 2nd March 2011 (organised by urban art consultancy *In Certain Places* (a partnership of UCLan and Preston City Council). This paper was accompanied by a slideshow of around twenty images, which for copyright reasons cannot be reproduced here.

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On Jochen Gerz:
Jochen Gerz (Born Berlin 1940) was for most of the 1960s and 1970s a conceptual artist, also known for his innovative work in performance and multi-media. He shared the German pavilion with Joseph Beuys at the Venice Biennale in 1976, but since 1984 has concentrated on installations and public art projects. He has been awarded the Roland Prize, Bremen (1990); German Art Critics' Prize, Berlin (1996); National Order of Merit, Paris (1996); Peter

Weiss Prize, Berlin (1996); National Grand Prize for the Plastic Arts, Paris (1998). Living in Paris since 1968, he recently re-located to Kerry, Republic of Ireland. See Gerz Studio website: http://www.gerz.fr/.

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