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Varda Nisar

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“Revised Commemoration” in Public Art: What Future for the Monument?

État des lieux de la « commémoration corrigée » en art public : quel avenir pour le monument ?

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get there, Evans carefully considers two oracles that risk disrupting the democratic tone of the park. First, the degeneration of art into a meaningless spectacle for entertainment without political force, following, among others, thinker Guy Debord. Second, the predominance of the decision-making power of capital through the increasing privatization of (art in) public spaces, as demonstrated in the naming of AT&T Plaza (hosting Anish Kapoor's *Cloud Gate*) or the Jay Pritzker Pavilion (designed by Frank Gehry). The indirect resistance of the park's artworks to these oracles manifests itself in the form of public participation, affirming the dialogic basis of democratic societies, which Evans exemplifies in one core piece. Mirroring oneself "together with others" in Anish Kapoor's *Cloud Gate* (2004)—shaped like a huge, silver-surfaced bean under which viewers can walk—the spectator understands that the sculpture can function as a bridge to comprehending togetherness and multiplicity in new ways through art (173). The piece's aesthetics, in form of the spectacular silver coat, add to the artwork's socio-political force. Finally, Evans successfully identifies public art as acts of citizenship when "promot[ing] and reveal[ing] new democratic values" and qualifying as resistant to oracles, while "be[ing] aesthetically effective" (180).

The seventh chapter, "The Political Aesthetics of New York's National 9/11 Memorial," reveals the memorial's controversial implications. While Michael Arad's *Reflecting Absence* (opened in 2011)—huge twin waterfalls that pour into the depths of the two footprint basins at the original towers' location—risks becoming a pure spectacle, the accompanying 9/11 Memorial Museum lacks a critical historical contextualization of the attacks. The memorial implies a "single narrative ... of loss and mourning" (194) and faces the "oracle" of the authoritarian voice of "American

exceptionalism" that leads to notions of victimhood—US citizens "as innocent victims" (207)—and a contextless "naturalization of terrorism" (208). As a contrast to this official memorial, Evans turns to Wodiczko's unrealized *City of Refuge* (2009). It was designed as a spherical interactive 9/11 memorial in New York harbour, accessible only by ritual boat rides. By opening up alternative, agonistic narratives, notably the artist's framing of US citizens as "innocent of murder but guilty of not actively challenging policies that have caused poverty, injury, and even death at home and abroad" (198), the memorial resists the aforementioned oracles and affirms democracy. What Evans calls the "performative aesthetic of democracy" (216) is key in comprehending public art as acts of citizenship and "quasi-voices." Instead of merely representing democracy, *City of Refuge* would have worked through dialogic participation as "collective...exchanges among contesting voices," taking the plain tablet one step further, as it "performs as well as symbolizes the agonistic type of democracy" (201).

This connects well with the main concern of the last chapter, "Public Art as an Act of Citizenship," where, in addition to offering a succinct summary of his arguments, Evans stresses the constant metamorphosis of democracy, public art, and citizenship as conditioned by the dynamic interplay of voices. This interplay composes the "evental" character of both Evans's criterion and society itself (233). Recognizing the imperative for democratic citizens to see themselves as engaging in dialogue (through art), Evans rereads Michel Foucault, presenting the idea of a democracy in which everything is openly articulated, and emphasizing the ethico-political component of a democratic society that allows its members to revise their own standpoint.

Fred Evans takes on the potentially paradoxical task of elaborating

guidelines for assessing public art as acts of citizenship while, at the same time, remaining purposefully flexible and non-definitive to reflect democracy's openness, allowing a multiplicity of voices to speak throughout his analysis. In light of Evans's illustration of the artist's and scholar's responsibility to unmask society's oracles as "myths," (38) and to resist them by ensuring a pluri-vocal discourse, he aspires to encourage new voices to join the conversation to possibly modify his criterion "for the better" (234). This striking move anticipates an amplified audibility of public art's role in reinforcing democracy, based on a *unity composed of difference*. While Evans does indeed rely primarily on canonical thinkers and well-known public art, his invitation to others to revise his own work nevertheless offers a stirring potential, as expanding on this approach could stimulate the increasing incorporation of a diverse range of voices into research practice, thereby helping to generate a more multivocal academia. ¶

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Sabine Marschall, ed.
Public Memory in the Context of Transnational Migration and Displacement: Migrants and Monuments

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326 pp. 25 b/w illus.

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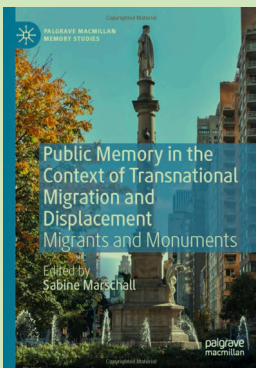
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Varda Nisar

The last decade has seen a renewed debate on monuments and their current relevance. It has come to

be typified by works such as Erika Doss's *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), and *Monument Culture: International Perspectives on the Future of Monuments in a Changing World*, edited by Laura A. Macaluso (London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2019). At the same time, the focus on biopolitics and the making of state subjects has also taken an intense turn following the European "migrant" or "refugee" crisis, as in Achille Mbembe's *Necropolitics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019). However, the role of migration and its impact on the transnational and cultural dimension of memory have been the subject of less attention. Such notions are either discussed too broadly, as is the case in *Diversity and Local Contexts: Urban Space, Borders, and Migration* (2017) by Jerome Krase and Zdeněk Uherek; or too narrowly, as is the case in Scardellato and Scarci's *A Monument for Italian-Canadian Immigrants: Regional Migration from Italy to Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1999). *Public Memory in the Context of Transnational Migration and Displacement: Migrants and Monuments* by Sabine Marschall, however, differs by presenting a diachronic approach to the study of transnational monuments. The



specificity of the subject matter (monuments) and the extended timeframe of the case studies brings forth an understanding of how

aware diasporic communities are of their positionality in host country settings and how they negotiate to establish their presence.

The discussions that Marschall brings forth in this edited volume had gradually evolved in her own body of work, as is evident in *Tourism and Memories of Home: Migrants, Displaced People, Exiles, and Diasporic Communities* (Bristol, UK: Channel View Publications, 2017). But by shifting the focus to monuments, the volume foregrounds the relationship between the physical manifestation of memory by refugees/migrants or "agents of memory" and the broader, ever-evolving transnational and cultural dimension.

The book moves forward from Loretta Baldassar's four typologies and discourses associated with migration, including "those (often muted) of the migrants themselves; those (often more powerful) of the 'mainstream host society'; those of the diaspora and those (largely unexamined) of the non-migrants, the stay-behinds" (Baldassar, 2006). But it adds a fifth category: "the identity discourses of competing migrant groups and ethnic minorities within the host country" (3). This addition effectively complicates the identity project by exploring "contestation from outside and even inside the group, as generational, gender, religious and other divisions manifest themselves" (3).

This book brings together monuments, multidirectional memory, and transnational and transcultural perspectives by focusing on the "mobility of memories" (3) at a micro level, specifically on individuals and groups within the diasporic communities. More so, the case studies (specifically Wolf's chapter on Syrian migrants in Argentina) show how these physical markers can advance the identity project of ethnic-linguistic groups—both within the host country and the home country. Because of this potential, it is critical to have a context-specific discussion that considers the precarious

position of migrants/refugees instead of homogenizing them as a group. The function of monuments, then, needs to be constantly evaluated and redefined in relation to their location, global and local dynamics, and the ever-shifting positionality that migrants and refugees experience in the host country, a task that the volume accomplishes brilliantly.

The book distinguishes between "living monuments," or functional buildings named after someone, and commemorative markers or monuments. The latter are then understood as "representational battlegrounds that rely on visual and textual modes of expression to condense complex historical narratives, endorse selected value systems and transmit partisan 'messages'" (4). It also takes into account certain ephemeral monuments within the definition of commemorative markers when the possibility of a physical object remains impossible.

It explores these physical markers through nine case studies, divided into two parts. The first part, chapters two through six, "considers the production and contestation of formal public memory markers by migrants, established diasporic groups, and ethnic minorities in host country settings or settler nations" (8). Chapters seven to ten concentrate on "first-generation 'irregular' or undocumented migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and displaced people, notably in Europe and the United States" (8). It takes into account how these groups position their own identities and evoke their transcultural and national memories by employing diverse strategies including appropriating existing monuments in the host country setting. Chapter eleven then concludes the preceding diverse assortment of case studies, methodologies, and frameworks, framing them through Michael Rothberg's theory of multidirectional memory.

The case study by Caroline "Olivia" M. Wolf on *The Monument of the Syrian Residents to the Argentine*

Nation (1810–1910) in Buenos Aires, Argentina, investigates the speeches delivered at the inaugural ceremony and the visuality of the monument. It thus provides a detailed understanding of how the monument aided in establishing Syria as a nation, one which until then existed in its members' imagination only. The emergence of a distinct Syrian identity in the diaspora was a "strategic re-crafting of the memory of migration via the monument" (52). And while the author mentions that the monument continues to occupy "a prominent, lasting position" (55), it remains to be seen whether this translates into how the diasporic community is perceived today.

Intergroup and intergenerational differences are made apparent in the second case study by Laura E. Ruberto and Joseph Sciorra, which concerns itself with Columbus statues and the demands for their removals. Some Italian Americans have seen these demands as a form of defamation, a feeling which can be better understood through Pierre Nora's framework of "*rememoration*, the act of resuscitating the past" (64), in which the individual's—or in this case, the group's—emotional stance towards their collective memory and "history" takes priority over historical accuracy. The study focuses on Manhattan's Columbus Circle and San Jose's City Hall and how the markers at these sites countered the negative connotations associated with Italian immigrants who were deemed unfit for American citizenship. But can the intergroup and intergenerational differences of opinion not be yet another way of asserting the group's identity in an ever-evolving political and social climate?

Per A. Rudling draws our attention to the potency of these monuments in a transnational and cultural network through a study of Ukrainian monuments in Canada, which became a focus of intense

scrutiny after a tweet in 2017 by the Russian Embassy in Canada. The tweet simply asserted that "there are monumets [sic] to Nazi collaborators," thereby reducing the "complex legacy of the memory culture of the post-war Ukrainian immigration to Canada to the status of "Nazi memorials." Instead, as Rudling explains, the three monuments and memorials under consideration need to be seen as part of a complex entanglement of Ukrainian migrants' memory and Canada's multiculturalism policy which, besides funding these monuments, also deferred to the community "as experts on Ukraine" (112). Furthermore, the lack of access to archives that could have provided a better historical understanding only became possible later. What is then needed is to revisit these diasporic narratives with openness towards a critical evaluation of historical facts.

The issues of "contested memorialization" (129) are highlighted in Mary M. McCarthy's case study of memorials to comfort women and how memory can aid in changing perceptions on morality. The role of an arbitrator in such disputes (in this case, the USA) can then be seen as an acknowledgment of the victimization of one group while challenging or countering the claims of the alleged perpetrator's group. This process leads towards the politicization of memory itself. The slow and gradual evolution of this politicization is traced through tracing three periods of contestation between Korean and Japanese diasporic groups, and through analyzing different monuments in each of these periods.

The chapter by Rodney Sullivan et al. on the Robert Towns Statue in Townsville, Australia, highlights "multidirectional memory in a migrant setting" (180). In this case, a dispute among diverse carriers of public memory—"white settlers, Indigenous Australians and Australian South Sea Islanders (Islanders)" (158)—came to a head in the figure of Robert Town, after whom the town

was named. However, the commemoration in the form of a sculpture unveiled in 2005 brought to the surface counter-memory of the minority groups that suffered through slavery and forced labour. The protests and demonstrations that accompanied the unveiling were thus critical in increasing "the political firepower of both [minority] groups" and their ability to center their own memories and narratives. The memory of these three different groups makes a clear case for the addition of a fifth category to Baldassar's original four typologies.

The second part of the book considers four case studies, exemplifying how irregular migrants and refugees establish commemoration and memorialization practices or how they center their own stories and narratives. Such strategies include the guided tours by refugees in Berlin, facilitated by German NGO Querstadtein; the emergence of various memorials in the Bataclan neighborhood of Paris, France following the attacks on November 13, 2015; a study on Portbou's commemorative landscape in relation to Walter Benjamin; and, lastly, the use of augmented reality to bring attention to death along the USA-Mexico border. In the absence of actual monuments for those affected by these contemporary crises, these four case studies provide a way to understand how the appropriation of existent monuments becomes a critical factor in sharing one's memories and tragedies with others. In this regard, the concept of counter-monuments—privileging subjective interpretation and critical thinking to negate "the illusion of permanence" (271) attributed to monuments—provides a crucial frame of understanding. Michal Huss's case study on tours by Syrian refugees thus showcases how the permanence of national memory itself can become a tool to "enabling trans-cultural memory" (191).

This edited volume makes a critical contribution towards

Entrepreneurs du commun
Monuments aux victimes de la liberté
Gatineau, AXENÉ07 et Galerie UQO,
2019

255 pp. illus. couleur broché
Disponible en ligne: <https://galerie.uqo.ca/api/wp-content/uploads/monuments-aux-victimes-de-la-liberte-compressed.pdf>.
ISBN 9782981692542

Paul M. Faber et Ken Lum (dir.)
Monument Lab. Creative Speculations for Philadelphia
Philadelphie, Temple University Press,
2019

336 pp. 160 illus. couleur, 82 demi-teintes
\$ 35 US (relié) ISBN 9781439916063

Laurent Vernet

Les débats sur le monument témoignent d'un intérêt renouvelé et grandissant depuis le milieu des années 2010, alors que des mouvements citoyens ont exigé, dans les rues comme sur les réseaux sociaux, le retrait d'objets commémoratifs désormais reconnus comme étant problématiques, racistes ou injurieux. Dans la foulée, des expositions ont contribué à donner de l'ampleur aux débats sur le monument et sa signification, et ce, en suscitant l'intérêt des publics. D'une part, des musées ont créé des dialogues autour de monuments historiques controversés. C'est ce qu'a fait l'American Museum of Natural History de New York, en 2019, avec l'exposition *Addressing the Statue*, qui portait sur la statue équestre du président Theodore Roosevelt qui se trouvait alors devant son bâtiment, et qui dominait des figures autochtone et afro-américaine. D'autre part, des expositions collectives ont fait des points de vue d'artistes en art actuel le cœur d'importants chantiers de réflexion. Ainsi, les ouvrages lancés en 2019 par le studio *Monument Lab* (implanté à Philadelphie) et le collectif *Entrepreneurs du*



commun (formé d'artistes, de commissaires et de chercheurs et chercheuses du Québec et de l'Ontario) ont découlé d'expositions présentées respectivement, pour l'essentiel, dans des espaces urbains et en galerie.

Si ces deux initiatives investissent le concept de monument, tout en étant nées de préoccupations singulières, les publications qui en ont été tirées partagent un certain nombre de points communs, à commencer par leur structure. En plus de comprendre des textes introductifs explicitant judicieusement les processus qui ont donné lieu aux expositions, ces livres incluent des discussions permettant d'approfondir les enjeux au cœur de la démarche: si *Entrepreneurs du commun* a misé sur la forme de l'essai, l'équipe du *Monument Lab* a surtout privilégié, pour conclure l'ouvrage, la transcription de tables rondes. C'est que l'approche du studio de Philadelphie, qui s'est penché de manière ouverte sur la question « What is an appropriate monument for the current city of Philadelphia? » a consisté à donner la parole à un grand nombre d'intervenantes, dont des citoyennes. Pour sa part, *Monuments aux victimes de la liberté* a été conçu comme réponse collective à un projet ciblé, celui du *Monument aux victimes du communisme*, promu par le groupe *Hommage à la liberté* et appuyé par le gouvernement conservateur de Stephen Harper au tournant des années 2010: le

foregrounding the migrant and refugee in the field of monument studies. It foregrounds their material culture within a transnational network and how such materiality leads to negotiating their place in a diasporic setting. However, one primary weakness of this volume is that all of the case studies remain rooted within settler-colonial nations or within the Global North. It misses out on providing a holistic understanding of the migrant experience within Global Souths.

Nonetheless, the nine case studies showcase how well migrants and refugees understand their positionality and reception within the host country setting and what strategies would be best suited to navigate them. The book allows for both a diachronic understanding of these monuments created by refugees and a synchronic view of how the figure of the refugee and migrant continues to assert its agency. The case studies add to our current knowledge of commemorative monuments and their evolving relationship to society's changing values by showcasing how—within a trans-cultural and national domain—they are the product of immense negotiation, influence, and how their meanings may well conflict with the interests of various groups. ¶

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