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Recommendation

Conference for Artistic and Architectural Research & Collective Evaluation of Design-driven Doctoral Training Programme

CA²RE+DELFT

Book of Proceedings

Recommendation

Conference for Artistic and Architectural Research & Collective Evaluation of Design-driven Doctoral Training Programme

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CA^{2}RE+ Delft RECOMMENDATION: Conference for Artistic and Architectural Research & Collective Evaluation of Design-driven Doctoral Training Programme

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Double Feature A Design-driven Inquiry into the Counter-practices of World City Monumentality

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Initial doctoral stage; practice-based research

Supervisors: Giovanni Leoni, University of Bologna; Andrea Borsari, University of Bologna; Pierpaolo Ascari, University of Bologna; Dani Schrire, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

#

monuments, world city, counter-practice

Abstract

This contribution will discuss the counter-practices of monumentality in the context of the so-called world city. As part of our ongoing practice-based research on the current role of monuments and memory-work, the study employs a design-driven approach to the inquiry of the topic at hand by presenting a fictive site-specific temporary intervention in the city of Tel Aviv as case study, called "Double Feature" (2020).

DDR statement

Design-driven research not only aims at reconfiguring the relations between research and design, theory, and practice, but it also has the potential of promoting an immediate practical relevance within multiple communities and rapidly changing contexts. Our research uses a design-driven process to explore and unfold aspects of the interaction between a critical action and the arts, in the context of spatial theory and under the current view of world cities. This inquiry draws from a fictive design action in the public space to discuss the cultural and political aspects of monumentality and memory in the city. In other word, the design-driven research acts as a recommendation for a shift in the idea of practising memory in public space. The design action understood monumentality as a pedagogical action, projecting a renovated sense of memory agency across disciplines – spatial and artistic.

Extended abstract

Since the 1980s, the discussion around monuments and memory has been at the centre of contemporary culture, an ubiquitous presence that significantly impacted the conception, perception, and use of the built environment – especially the public space – across the spatial disciplines and the arts. If, as Andreas Huyssen[1] wrote, it is true that "*today we think of the past as memory without borders rather that national history within border*" and that "*memory is understood as a mode of re-presentation and as belonging to the present*", this – he continues – suggests that "*our thinking and living temporality are undergoing a significant shift, as modernity brought about a real compression of time and space yet also expanded horizons of time and space beyond the local*".[2] From this observation, we recall the phenomenon of the global city[3] – earlier introduced by Patrick Geddes with the notion of *world city*,[4] and later elaborated by Peter Hall:[5] a transition from the city as the godly image of the world to that of many nodes structural to a network of dislocated centres of global financial power depending on flows. This phenomenon, where cities adjust their identity to that of the world city, wishing to conform their image to the global model while still retaining their local specificities, led to a problematic "anxiety of representation",[6] as the city still attempts to *projecting* authorised, dominant wholeness – a *status quo*. Accordingly, with the desacralisation and dissolution of the concept of the city as a physical, social, political, and economic whole, globalisation also brought to the fore a critical shift in understanding the carrier of memory *par excellence*, i.e., the monument, as well as in monumentality itself and how it is practiced. As is argued, the emergence of new forms of memorialisation through "weak" practices,[7] or *counter-practices*, of

monumentality seems now well suited to address the complex, fluid, and conflictual nature of the world city. Notions such as James E. Young's *counter-monument*,[8] Jochen Gerz's *anti-monument*, or Mechtild Widrich's *performative monument*[9] have already moved the discussion away from the sole monistic conception of reality as permanent and fixed, breaking historical master narratives by returning the obligation of memory-work from the monumental immovable form back to the citizen.

Drawing from these premises, the study will articulate the discussion through a critique of one typical example of a monument of the world city, the Azrieli Center in Tel Aviv. To do so, we will present a recent unrealised work called "Double Feature" (2020), which is part of our ongoing practice-based research on the current role of monuments and memory-work. The Azrieli Center is a mixed-use complex of skyscrapers built in 1999. The design of the three towers composing the Center consists of a 170 meters high extrusion of simple geometrical shapes – a circle, a triangle, and a square – cladded by a white-and-blue gridded facade. Its construction, initiated by the real estate tycoon David Azrieli – after whom it is named – drew from the expectations of the local specificities of the "little Tel Aviv" as a high-raked world city. Acting as a "world trade center" and reflecting the aggressive uprising of private urban entrepreneurialism at the dawn of the 21st century, the skyscrapers complex presents all the classic tropes of the monument-form in its founding vocabulary of positioning, location, material, form, and rhetoric.[10] Recent urban scholarship discussing the phenomena of the global city highlighted the "significance of tall building sites as a nexus of power made visible."[11] Indeed, we can argue about their role as monuments in that, by acting as "vertical storytellers",[12] "they most eloquently narrate the chronicle of the built form as well as the social, economic, and political trajectories of cities",[13] while also telling us about the "power relations between those who rule and decide and those who are subordinated, excluded, and marginalized",[14] which are condensed in their material and aesthetical features.

Evidence of this can be found in the very early planning of the Center. The story of its controversial genesis extended over almost ten years of disputes between developer David Azrieli and architect Eli Atti, who originally designed the complex as Shalom Center. However, it is especially the competitive rhetoric used in its design statements, which "emphasizes the irrational quest for height and fame",[15] that signaled the clear will of its initiators to create and establish a permanent "marker"[16] of Tel Aviv's future – that of the city as global. Moreover, since its early construction the Center stark visibility has often been used to project statements and images, as well as advertisements, onto its facades during commemoration of national events. Today, the three towers seem to have entered the collective memory, representing one of the most iconic symbols of the city skyline – a *world city monument*.

As a counter-practice of monumentality, our design-driven fictive action "Double Feature" articulates as follows. First, we discursively analyze the monumental features of the Azrieli Center through the coordinates of visibility, aesthetics, and use. Although their verticality would seem to imply a condition of distance, inaccessibility, and apparent exclusion from the

Figure 1: Top view of the full-scale representation of the Azrieli Center façade on Rothschild boulevard [Credits: the Authors]

city's life at the street level, the towers' presence cast an eloquent visual narrative of the city's desired future: its "entry into the upper echelons of the global economy."[17]

Working with the notion of projection, we then extract the literal representation of the towers' gridded pattern. By metaphorically countering the symbolic act of raising the monument with its direct opposite, that of its fall, the typical façade of the Azrieli Center is flattened, rendered ephemeral, and horizontally projected. This specific action draws its reasoning from notable examples of practice of counter-monumentality, such as the work of artists Krzysztof Wodiczko and Shimon Attie, among many. In this sense, artistic interventionism in the urban space operated through ephemerality, offers us a way to move from an affirmative practice of monumentality – that of dominant permanence, clarity, and unity – to an interpretive and thus political one, aimed at questioning the power of monumental signification in public space.

Accordingly, this ephemeral representation is finally performed into a new encounter at the street level by being spray-painted full-scale on the ground surface of one of Tel Aviv most lively public spaces: the Rothschild boulevard. [1] Despite being a dominant protagonist in the city narrative and everyday life, on a spatial and social level the street is perhaps the best expression of counter-monumentality, because of its restless transient nature that tends to erase monumental hierarchical

Figure 2: Imaginary scene of the intervention during its daily use [Credits: the Authors]

orders. The act of *walking on a monument* [2] brings a critical action through direct bodily understanding while still being playful, allowing people to walk, sit and cycle on it until it eventually disappears. [3] The temporality of this encounter promotes a materialized conscious process of rewriting alternative official narratives by introducing a conflict – i.e., the projection of multiple narratives on top of each other – dissolving the fixity of memory-work and monumental histories.

To conclude, on the one hand, the planning and construction of the Azrieli Center was an act of pre-enactment[18] of Tel Aviv as a world city; on the other hand, through our fictive intervention, our design-driven study was aimed at pre-enacting a different approach to monumentality. In other words, a recommendation for a shift in the idea of practicing memory in public space. This would understand monumentality as *a pedagogical action*: broadening its significance by projecting a renovated sense of agency of memory, especially across disciplines – spatial and artistic.

Figure 3: Top view of the intervention showing its gradual disappearance over time [Credits: the Authors]

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13 Ibid., p. 1090.

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