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Contested Memories and Acts of Counter-Commemoration as Temporary Utopian Spaces

Raffaella Baccolini

Abstract

This reflection on counter-commemoration as temporary utopian spaces stresses the importance of distinguishing between a conservative, or anti-utopian, and a progressive, or utopian, use of memory – the latter acquiring also a social and ethical dimension. Whereas commemoration advances the official version of events according to the dominant culture at a given time, thus serving the specific purposes of the political power, acts of counter-commemoration function as sites of opposition and contestation that challenge one particular vision of how a problematic past has been interpreted and memorialized and can open up temporary utopian spaces. The essay takes the form of an unusual "journey" through European contested memories: from Budapest through Paris to Bologna. Examples of acts of counter-commemoration are interspersed with some reflections about contested memories, their (more or less) appropriate acts of commemoration, and the importance and significance of symbolic objects, in an attempt to show why acts of counter-commemoration are all the more important today and provide a utopian answer to our dystopian times.

Introduction

My reflection on counter-commemoration as temporary spaces of utopian tension stresses the importance of distinguishing between a conservative, or anti-utopian, and a progressive, or utopian, use of memory – the latter acquiring also a social and ethical dimension.[1] Commemoration is played out through different means: memorials, monuments, cultural artifacts, and symbolic objects advance the "official" version of events according to the dominant culture at a given time. Since one of the functions of memory – and of memorializing in particular – is a certain kind of catharsis, I argue that we need to keep memory alive and that one of the things that makes memory relevant for utopia is that we must keep feeling uncomfortable. The way we position ourselves toward the past can take at least two possible directions: through idealization in order to reproduce a seamless, perfect picture of the past, or through desire, gaps, and pain in order to critically understand the past and change it. Historical amnesia or a sanitized version of history therefore lead us toward anti-utopia and create a false sense of the past as a better time. By leaving out "embarrassing" memories of an unjust past, official commemorations offer a sanitized version of history and thus extend injustice into the

[1] This essay is a revised version of the keynote lecture given at the international symposium, *Commemoration: Contexts and Concepts* (Cork, 3-4 September 2015). I would like to thank Rita Monticelli, Sam Whitsitt, and the audience for their generous comments.

future and foreclose the possibility for change.[2] Acts of counter-commemoration, instead, function as sites of opposition and contestation that challenge one particular vision of how a problematic past has been interpreted and memorialized and can open up temporary utopian spaces. These acts are utopian for a number of reasons: just as utopia opposes anti-utopianism, they oppose the concrete dystopian experience associated with the events memorialized; they also oppose the dystopian reality that can be created by the single narratives with which different societies remember violent events that raise condemnation rather than consent: they set up counter-narratives that simultaneously criticize and offer alternative versions of master narratives.

Spontaneous Responses to Sanitized Commemoration: Acts of Counter-Narratives

My first example is represented by the spontaneous response of Hungarian citizens to the controversial monument dedicated to all the victims of Hungary's German occupation, which was erected during the night of 20 to 21 July 2014.[3] Plans to set up the monument for the 70th anniversary of Hungary's Nazi German occupation were announced at the end of 2013. From the very start, they were heavily criticized both by opposition parties and civil society as the monument was seen as distorting Hungary's role in the Holocaust. Shortly after the 2014 parliamentary election that saw the victory, again, of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's party, work to build the monument began. By day, workers would start building a wall around the designated area. By night, a group of concerned activists would tear it down. As of 16 April 2014 – the election had taken place only 10 days before – the wall had already been torn down and

[2] Bloch's value for a utopian theory of memory lies in his recognition of the importance of memory as a repository of experience and value. In order for memory and history not to hinder progress or utopia, there has to be room for novelty in memory and history must not be cyclical. (Geoghegan, Vincent: "Remembering the Future." *Utopian Studies* 1 (2), 1990, p. 59). Memory is necessary to an understanding of oneself and of the past, but also of the present and the future alike, and acquires thus a social dimension. The division between, as I have argued, anti-utopian, or conservative, and utopian, or progressive, features of memory may also prove useful if applied to contested memories (see Baccolini, Raffaella. "'A useful knowledge of the present is rooted in the past': Memory and Historical Reconciliation in Ursula K. Le Guin's The Telling." In: Baccolini, Raffaella/Moylan, Tom (eds.): *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*. Routledge: New York 2003, pp. 113-34).

[3] "Controversial monument divides Hungarians, angers Jewish community." *EurActiv.com* 23 July 2014, retrieved 25.08.2015 from http://www.euractiv.com/sections/central-europe/controversial-monument-divides-hungarians-angers-jewish-community-303656. See also Kirchick, James: *The End of Europe: Dictators, Demagogues, and the Coming Dark Age*. Yale UP: New Haven 2017, p. 41.

reconstructed 6 times.[4] The monument, finally erected three months later, depicts Hungary in the guise of the Archangel Gabriel – and therefore an innocent victim – being attacked by a German eagle, whose one talon is tagged 1944, the year of the invasion.[5] Critics say the monument falsifies history and "tries to 'whitewash' Hungary's role in the Jewish Holocaust in Hungary," by conveniently forgetting that Miklos Horthy's Hungary was, in fact, Germany's collaborator, and putting the blame exclusively on Nazi Germany.[6]

The repeated protests, the fact that the monument had to be erected at night, and the fact that it is constantly guarded by the police suggest that the monument and what it intends to commemorate are, in fact, an attempt to rewrite history. Such an attempt is "justified" – as it always is – in the name of national pacification and reconciliation. Peter Parkanyi Raab, the Hungarian sculptor of the monument, claimed just that: the monument was intended "to serve as a reconciliation between Jewish and non-Jewish Hungarians." According to him, it is the protesters who are "consciously driving a wedge between Jewish and non-Jewish Hungarians" and in so doing "have barred the country from commemoration. This would have been the first time that Hungarians – Jewish and non-Jewish – could have jointly remembered [Hungary's Nazi occupation in 1944]."[7]

Shortly after the appearance of the controversial monument, local activists and grassroots organizations engaged in acts of counter-commemoration: besides hanging a banner that reads "forgery of history," they set up an alternative, counter-memorial across from the official one.[8] It consists of "ordinary objects": photographs, personal mementos, shoes, writings, candles, rocks, and flowers that acquire meaning in their becoming physical remnants of the past. In stark contrast to the grandiose stillness of the bronze statue, this counter-memorial is ordinary

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[4] "Days of Protest, But the "Nazi" Monument Will Stand in Budapest." *Hungarian Spectrum* 16 April 2014, retrieved 25.08.2015 from http://hungarianspectrum.org/2014/04/16/days-of-protest-but-the-nazi-monument-will-stand-in-budapest/.

[5] Nolan, Daniel: "German occupation memorial completed under cover of darkness." *The Budapest Beacon* 21 July 2014, retrieved 25.08.2015 from http://budapestbeacon.com/public-policy/german-occupation-memorial-completed-under-cover-of-darkness/10320.

[6] Ungváry in Erőss, Ágnes: "Living memorial and frozen monuments: the role of social practice in memorial sites." *Urban Development Issues*, 55, 2017, p. 25. Despite Orbán's claim that the monument is "morally precise and immaculate", it emerged that the Hebrew inscription of the monument had mistranslated the word "victims" as "sacrificial animals" (Nolan 2014).

[7] Feher, Margit: "Hungarian Sculptor Defends Monument to Victims of Nazis." *The Wall Street Journal* 1 August 2014, retrieved 25.08.2015 from http://www.wsj.com/articles/hungarian-sculptor-defends-monument-to-nazi-occupation-1406910612. It is unfortunate, to say the least, that such a reconciliation is at the expense of confusing murderers and victims.

[8] I am grateful to Susan Stanford Friedman who drew my attention to this memorial.

and yet dynamic. It has the temporary quality of utopia: it changes and grows day-by-day. It speaks to us. It is a powerful reminder that we can and must counter official history and its memorializing. Like utopia, it serves the double function of offering criticism on the one hand (of the present monument and its ideas) and a version of an alternative, yet more just history (the alterative memorial). Unlike the official monument, its common objects, which are not necessarily beautiful or precious, speak to the present of a past that should not be forgotten, rewritten, or twisted by the ideological reasons of the present. Memorials and what they commemorate, in fact, are peculiar in that they remind us of the past, but they also serve the social and political (but also aesthetic) interests of the period in which they are built.

My second example is the novel, *The Seine Was Red: Paris, October 1961*, by French Algerian writer Leïla Sebbar.[9] Writing and setting her novel in 1996, Sebbar engages in acts of counter-commemoration: one that she performs herself by filling the void and silences that official, political discourse had created until then, and one that she has her own characters perform in the pages of her story. The novel intertwines the testimonies of different people who lived

[9] Sebbar, Leïla: *The Seine Was Red: Paris, October 1961*. Trad. Mildred Mortimer. Indiana UP: Bloomington 2008. On the night of 17 October, the Algerian FLN organized a peaceful demonstration to protest against the curfew imposed by Maurice Papon, chief of the Paris police. The police attacked the peaceful protest march, arresting many and opening fire on the demonstrators (cf. Einaudi, Jean-Luc. *La bataille de Paris*. Seuil: Paris 1991). Some Algerians were shot and dumped in the river Seine at the Saint-Michel Bridge. Still others disappeared, and were found dead in the woods surrounding Paris, or were deported as prisoners to Algeria. The following day, official reports listed only two casualties among the demonstrators. Protesters continued to be tortured and killed in the following weeks, bringing the estimated number of Algerians killed to between 200 and 300 people, a figure brought to light some thirty years later by historian Jan-Luc Einaudi. The events surrounding the massacre, in fact, were kept out of the press and remained unknown for decades. Only in 1998, following the trial of Papon for Crimes against Humanity committed in 1942 and 1944, did there appear official recognition of the subject. Although the state acknowledged the massacre, no one was prosecuted for it. It took 40 years for the city of Paris to officially acknowledge it. In 2001, under the Socialist Party mayor, Bertrand Delanoë, the city unveiled a memorial plaque near the Saint-Michel Bridge. Unfortunately, the words chosen to commemorate the hundreds of deaths are disappointing and obscure memory: "In memory of the many Algerians killed during the bloody repression of the peaceful demonstration on 17 October 1961" (cf. "Paris marks Algerian protest 'massacre.'" *BBC News* 17 October 2001, retrieved 25.08.2015 from http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/world/monitoring/media_reports/1604970.stm). Because of the cover-up, the language cannot help but be vague on the number of deaths. But even worse, words fail to denounce who was responsible for those death, that is, the state and its institutions. Sebbar's novel, published in 1999, was not translated into English until 2008, by Mildred Mortimer. As recognized by her translator, Sebbar "is neither the first nor the only novelist to examine the massacre and the silence that surrounded it"; she is, however, "the first to use the historical event as the entire subject of a novel" (Mortimer, Miriam: "Introduction: Unhearthing Hidden History." In: Sebbar 2008, pp. xiv-xv).

through that night with the search for what happened on the part of three young people born after the events of 1961. Among the witnesses are Algerian demonstrators, French supporters of the Algerian cause, French policemen, Algerian collaborators, as well as other individuals linked in one way or another to those events. The three young characters – Amel, Omer, and Louis – know one another because of their mothers, who became friends by participating in the fight for Algeria's independence, but because of the previous generation's reticence about sharing their past with their children and faced with the uncertainties characterizing their times, the three feel a need to understand and feel compelled to search for traces of this hidden history. The novel then develops by alternating chapters, where we hear the voices of the different witnesses interviewed by Louis for his documentary on the massacre, and the group's "pilgrimage" through the places of events that happened on that 17th of October. In their journey, they encounter several monuments that commemorate France's glorious past, but not a single sign dedicated to those who fought for their independence and died that night. Faced with the silence both of their mothers and of official history, the remembering of these young people is accompanied by the creation of their own memorials, which Louis films and adds to his documentary, itself an act of counter-commemoration.

The first counter-memorial they create is at La Santé Prison, where they find a white marble plaque that reads "On November 11 1940 In this prison were held high school and university students who, at the call of General De Gaulle, were the first to rise up against the occupation."[10] To the right of that plaque, Omer spray-paints in red, "1954-1962 In this prison were guillotined Algerian resisters who rose up against the French occupation."[11] As Mortimer noted,

> by remaining as faithful as possible to the vocabulary and syntax of the original commemorative language, Omer establishes a parallel between both texts and both events. Superimposing their commemorative words in red paint, they pay homage to the martyrs drowned the day that the Seine turned red with Algerian martyrs' blood.[12]

Both actions are recognized as acts of resistance against foreign occupations. On their walk they pass other symbolic monuments of French history, such as the "Defense of Paris," where "Algerians assembled for the march" but nobody defended them; the "Marianne" at the Place de la République; the Crillon Hotel, on whose façade they write "On this spot Algerians were savagely beaten by Prefect Papon's police on October 17 1961"; and finally the Pont Saint

[10] Sebbar 2008, p. 14.
[11] Sebbar 2008, p. 15.
[12] Mortimer 2008, p. xxi.

Michel, where they perform their last act of counter-commemoration by writing, "On this spot Algerians fell for the independence of Algeria October 17, 1961."[13] Through appropriating the somewhat rhetorical words and syntax of commemorative language, Sebbar's characters are able to produce a series of counter-memorials that differ from traditional ones. They explain what happened *and* they denounce the responsibility of Papon's police. The group is "creative" in its memorializing, producing a film and three different "plaques," unlike the French state that has only been able to produce the same ambiguous, official plaque to be used in different places.

Sebbar's counter-commemoration shows that (counter)-memorials can come in different shapes and mediums in line with Pierre Nora's definition of "sites of memory." Louis's documentary film, the "pilgrimage" through the places of the massacre, as well as the graffiti left on the walls, are all sites of counter-memory, and they follow the qualities that Nora identified for his sites of memory: they are material, symbolic, and functional.[14] They possess a physicality, be it the film or the graffiti and, as such, they endure. They are symbolic, like the walk through the loci of the massacre, thus providing a cartography of the loss of human lives, but because of their location, i.e., next to the "official" memorials, they stand for the recovery of a hidden history. And in so doing, they fulfill their function in remembering events and ascribing responsibilities. But they also invite us to critically reflect on the past without extending injustice into the future.

Both acts of counter-commemoration, the Hungarian activists' and Sebbar's and her characters', can be read as a recovery of agency, individual and collective. At the same time, both examples show some of the problems encountered when we deal with divisive memories, that is with the construction of memory out of violent events such as, for example, conflicts, civil wars, deportations, and genocides – events that rest on the contraposition of, at least, two parties. The falsification of history, be it the self-absolution of Hungary or the cover-up of the French government, seem to be a common answer to conflicting memories, as well as a rhetorical gesture toward the ideas of pacification and reconciliation. Denial, silence, and repression are the prevailing modes which contested memory is dealt with, and which are mostly produced by the "persecutors." How can denial and repression be countered? And can reconciliation occur? Can a shared memory exist?[15]

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[13] Sebbar 2008, pp. 39, 49-50, 67, 93.
[14] Nora, Pierre: "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*." *Representations* 26, Spring 1989, p. 19.
[15] The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission is a successful example of shared memory.

Reconciliation, if this is in fact the appropriate word to use, can only occur when there is mutual acceptance that the past wrongs have taken place and, in turn, acceptance of responsibilities followed by political and legal measures – thus combining individual and collective action. [16] And yet, reconciliation between victims and persecutors seems an impossible task. Alessandro Cavalli, an Italian sociologist, speaks instead of "ricomposizione della memoria," or a "reassembling of memories," that implies that memory is made of inherently divided but linked memories.[17] These are in fact re-composed while being accepted for their differences. Therefore, instead of a shared memory we may want to start thinking of a re-assembled memory.[18]

Is there, then, an appropriate way of commemorating contested, re-assembled memories so that memory acquires a utopian social dimension? When memories are contested, how do conflicts materially and symbolically play out? In the case of violent events, to commemorate is to give voice to pain and is similar, initially, to the working-through of grief and mourning.[19] We (counter)-commemorate in order not to forget, to keep the dead alive, and possibly to transform pain in something useful – awareness and responsibility, for example, so that the deaths are not in vain. But because commemoration has been defined as the (process of) institutionalization of a memory, [20] and because social representation of the past and its memorialization are one of the preferred means used by the ruling classes to politically legitimize themselves, in the case of contested memories we often face conflicts: for example, those who want to remember the dead will clash with those who were responsible for those deaths. The conflict is often played out through language, the interpretation of the past, and of course the intended message. For example, every colonial nation has called "heroes" its own soldiers who died and "criminals" those who they died fighting against.[21] How certain contested memories have been dealt with in Italy may provide a meaningful example. Italy, not unlike Hungary and France, has denied and repressed its colonial past and its ties with Fascism, and is with difficulty trying to deal with the terrorist season that spanned from the end of the 1960s to the mid 1980s.

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[16] See Baccolini 2003.
[17] Cavalli, Alessandro: "Memoria e guerra: La ricomposizione delle memorie." In Agazzi, Elena/Fortunati, Vita (eds.): *Memoria e Saperi*. Meltemi: Rome 2007, p. 76.
[18] Cavalli 2007, p. 77.
[19] Jedlowsky, Paolo: "Il paradosso della commemorazione." In: Barazzetti, Donatella/Leccardi, Carmen (eds.): *Responsabilità e memoria*. La Nuova Italia Scientifica: Rome 1997, p. 107.
[20] Jedlowski 1997, p. 106.
[21] Jedlowski 1997, p. 107.

Dealing with Contested Memories: The Cases of the Ustica Flight and the Bologna Train Station

A case of contested memories is represented by the Ustica massacre of 27 June 1980, a case of cover-up that bears some similarities with that of the French and the Algerians. After leaving Bologna for Palermo, the Itavia flight IH 870 aircraft crashed into the Tyrrhenian Sea near the island of Ustica – about 90 miles north of Palermo. All 81 people on board were killed. The disaster led to long and numerous investigations, primarily because of falsifications of documents, perjury, and, in general, obstruction on the part of Italian Air Force and Secret Service personnel. Among the initial hypotheses for what caused the crash were: a structural malfunction of the plane, the explosion of a bomb, a collision with a foreign military airplane, or a missile. Only in 1999 did the investigation close, ruling that the incident occurred following a military interception action; the DC9 was shot down, the lives of 81 innocent citizens were destroyed by an act of war, undeclared and covered up against our nation. The perpetrators of the crime, however, remain unidentified, and the four Italian generals who were charged with high treason were found to be not guilty due to the statute of limitations and insufficient evidence. What has now emerged is that that night American, French, and Libyan military aircrafts were battling in the sky, and that sectors of the Italian State covered up what happened placing the demands of international military alliances before those of their own democratic institutions.

The Association of the Relatives of the Victims of the Ustica Massacre was founded in 1988 and has been an influential force in keeping the request for justice and truth alive. It has also been instrumental in the construction of the Museum for the Memory of Ustica, which opened in Bologna, on 27 June 2007. Because of the history of the Ustica massacre, the museum can be seen as an act of counter-commemoration.[22] When, at the end of the investigation, the recovered pieces of the plane were going to be destroyed, the Association demanded that they be preserved and entrusted to them. The wreckage of the plane was transferred to Bologna, where almost all of its external fuselage was re-assembled and placed on display in the middle of a building that used to be a tramway depot. The French artist Christian Boltanski was commissioned to produce a permanent installation. It consists of 81 pulsating lamps hanging over the plane, reproducing the rhythm of breathing; 81 black mirrors, where visitors can see

[22] And in fact, in May 2011, Carlo Maria Giovanardi, a conservative politician, contested the historical reconstruction of the Museum brochure and had it removed. The current mayor of Bologna (Virginio Merola) had it reinstated, unaltered in its version.

their image reflected and identify with the randomness and inevitability of death; and 81 loudspeakers, behind the mirrors. Significantly, no list of the victims' names is present on the Museum's premises nor on the website of the Association. Each loudspeaker presents a simple, ordinary thought, fragments of sentences corresponding to what could have been the passengers' last thoughts or words, and these fears, worries, and wishes, thus assembled, create a modern, tragic chorus (did I pack the green bathing suit?; I can't stand school anymore, the teacher is an idiot; every time I come back to Palermo I tell myself that I was right to move to Bologna; I have to remind mother to pay the bill). Finally, nine black boxes positioned near the wreckage contain the recovered objects belonging to the passengers. These are shoes, clothing, snorkels and masks, but they remain invisible to the visitors' sight, thus avoiding any possible voyeurism. They are listed, however, in a booklet entitled "List of the personal objects belonging to the passengers of flight IH 870," containing a series of intentionally small and blurry pictures of these objects. The photos are accompanied by a brief text that, through word association (literary quotes, synonyms and semantic expansion of the words composing the title), presents these objects as traces but also evidence and memory that speak to us and to our future. The text quotes in fact Jacques Derrida's idea that "the archive does not concern the past, it concerns the future" (my translation).[23] The ordinary objects contained in the boxes have acquired and will continue to acquire their specific meaning in time; they are there so that, as Daria Bonfietti, president of the Association said, "the history of the few and for the few may become history of all; because everyone must know, and everyone must understand" (my translation).[24]

Objects become interesting and precious not only as they acquire meaning in time, but also because as physical remnants of the past they become at once envoys and conjurers of that past. They are ordinary things that become extraordinary for the stories they contain and for conveying the idea that the past has material substance. Part of their power resides in the recognition that memory is imperfect, and that people forget. Objects – substituting for the absence of the victims – become a *gesture of hope*, a move toward the future, and a projection onto an external space of an inner need for a utopian horizon. In Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History," memory is associated with hope – one of the functions of utopia, according to Ernst Bloch – and has a redemptive power. In the case of violent events, objects become a bridge to the past that, without the physicality of those objects, risks disappearing.

[23] Boltanski, Christian: *Lista degli oggetti personali appartenuti ai passeggeri del volo IH 870*. Text by Beppe Sebaste. Comune di Bologna [n.d., n.p.].
[24] Bonfietti, Daria: "Introduzione." Ustica e le arti. 27 May 2006, retrieved 24.08.2015 from http://www.comune.bologna.it/iperbole/ustica/documenti/introconvegno.htm.

For Benjamin, "every image," but we could substitute for it 'every object' "of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably."[25]

One might well ask, however if once the past is fixed in a memory, in a ritual, or in symbolic objects, does it run the risk of becoming rhetorical, of losing some of its force? How can the oppositional, utopian force of a counter-commemoration renew itself once it becomes a ritual? Is temporariness a requirement of counter-commemoration? A possible answer can be found, as I hope to show, in the variety of ways in which memory is kept alive and, most of all, by engaging the new generations in social practices.

My last example concerns the various acts of commemoration of the Bologna Train Station terrorist attack of 2 August 1980, a massacre that belongs to the "stragismo" season and the "Strategy of Tension": a series of terrorist attacks, from 1969 to 1984, mostly perpetrated by extreme right-wing terrorist groups with the help and the protection of "deviated" sectors of the secret services and military hierarchies, in order to create an atmosphere of fear and distrust in Italy and "promote a turn to an authoritarian type of government."[26] From 1974 to 1984, Bologna was targeted three times, the first of which, on 4 August, when a bomb exploded on the Italicus train while inside a nearby train tunnel (San Benedetto near Bologna), causing the death of 12 people and wounding 105; on 2 August 1980, when a bomb placed in the second-class waiting room of the Bologna Train Station exploded, killing 85 and injuring 200; and on 23 December 1984, when another bomb exploded on the 904 train, again while in transit inside the same tunnel, causing the death of 17 people and wounding 267. As in the case of the Ustica massacre, most of these terrorist attacks still await complete truth and justice.[27] This fact alone could be seen as one of the elements that demands and, at the same time, renews acts of

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[25] Benjamin, Walter: "Theses on the Philosophy of History." *Illuminations*. Trans. Harry Zohn. Fontana: London 1992, p. V, 247. Thus, a society that is incapable of recollection, recognition, and remembrance is without hope for the future, as it shows no concern for the often-silenced histories of the oppressed, the marginalized, the dispossessed. As Benjamin reminds us, "it is only for the sake of those without hope that hope is given to us" (Marcuse, Herbert: *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*. Beacon Press: Boston 1966, p. 257).

[26] Cento Bull, Anna: *Italian Neofascism: The Strategy of Tension and the Politics of Nonreconciliation*. Berghan: New York 2007, p. 19. With 'stragismo' I mean the terroristic practice which uses massacres in order to destabilize a country, but because of its length, I will retain the Italian term when talking about the 15-year period in Italy that goes from 12 December 1969, with the Piazza Fontana massacre in Milan, to 23 December 1984, with the bomb on the train 904 near Bologna.

[27] The very convoluted Italian Judiciary system (which allows three alternative verdicts) has not satisfactorily brought to justice the culprits and emissaries of the Italian *stragismo*. After 50 years since the events of 1969, only a handful of people have been convicted.

counter-commemoration.

From the very start, deliberately planted false leads and misleading information have characterized the long and problematic investigation. And although in 1995 the three neo-fascists who actually executed the terrorist attack, and the members of the Masonic Lodge P2 and those of the Secret Services that diverted and obstructed investigation were convicted, once again the organizers and instigators of the massacre are still unknown. Similarly to Ustica, the Association among Relatives of the Victims of the August 2 Bologna Massacre, founded in 1981 and that served as a model for all other Associations of Relatives, has been extremely active, and to some extent more successful than others, in the request for justice. In 35 years of activity, in order to keep the memory of the massacre alive, the Association has promoted numerous initiatives, culminating each year in a silent march on the anniversary of the event. Anna Lisa Tota, who from 1999 to 2002 has studied the Association's commemorative practices, argues that the Bologna commemoration has set the standard for the "genre of commemoration."[28] She notices a transformation in the ways memory of the massacre is activated. If in the first 15 years, besides the request for truth and justice, commemoration mainly involved the working through of grief, after 1995 the Association took up the role of moral and civic testimony – from private memory to a shared, public memory.[29]

Because of the ambiguous role of the State in the Bologna massacre, the official commemoration is, in itself, a counter-commemoration. Not only is the State accused of failing to protect its citizens, it was proven to be an accomplice. The Bologna massacre commemoration, then, renovates, every year, the critical opposition to the democratic failure of the State. At the same time, through the commemoration, every year the pact between citizens and its democratic institutions needs to be renewed because of its violation.[30]

Because they articulate dissent and opposition, the objects of the 2 August's memory are contested symbols upon which the "truths" of the opposite parties are played out. One of the contested symbols is represented by one of the clocks at the train station, which stopped at 10:25 of that day, and through the years has become one of the symbols of the massacre. In the memory of Bolognese citizens, the watch stopped functioning in 1980. As a matter of fact, it did; but it was then fixed. When it broke in 1996, the Italian Railroad, in agreement with the Association, stopped the watch at 10:25. In 2001, however, on the occasion of the Bologna

[28] Tota, Anna Lisa: *La città ferita: Memoria e comunicazione pubblica della strage di Bologna, 2 agosto 1980*. Il Mulino: Bologna 2003, p. 170.
[29] Tota 2003, p. 151.
[30] Tota 2003, p. 21.

Station's remodeling and on the basis of formal complaints filed by passengers who had been confused by it, it was fixed; but then a heated controversy developed that brought the Railroad to reverse its decision.[31] The other contested item is a word: "Fascist." It appears in the commemorative plaques with the phrase, "Victims of Fascist Terrorism." Requests to remove the word have been periodically advanced on the part of national and local, conservative and right-wing political forces, on the usual pretext of a long-awaited pacification.[32]

If these contested objects have maintained through the years their oppositional force, other initiatives contribute to renovating the Bologna massacre counter-commemoration. I will mention one and will briefly illustrate another. The first one is an International Composition Competition that the Association has launched since 1995. The competition is open to young composers and the concert takes place on the night of 2 August, after the long commemoration day. With this initiative, the Association moves the memory of the massacre and its memorializing toward future generations: they believe that "through the universal language of music they can give a message of hope for the future" (my translation).[33] Such a project aims to extend and pass on the responsibility of memory, but it also attempts to educate the new generations about the desire for justice.

The last project is the "live monument" created by the photographer Sonia Lenzi. Supported by the Association, it is a public art project called, "It could have been me," and consists of 85 pictures taken in the second-class waiting room of the Bologna train station during Christmas vacation 2013/14 (21 Dec.-2 Jan.).[34] The exposition was installed in the new branch of the Bologna Train Station, where currently there is nothing commemorating the massacre. It required the active participation of adult passengers arriving to or departing from Bologna. People who agreed to participate were "assigned" a victim of the opposite gender and were handed a card containing information about that person and the massacre. A conversation about the massacre, the victim, the participant, and the artist and her project would ensue, and Lenzi took a picture during this process of symbolic identification. By asking the participants to identify with one of the victims, the project accomplished a series of objectives, among which were the re-actualization of commemoration. First, people were informed about the massacre: many did not know about it or had vague, and wrong, ideas about. Second, by underscoring the randomness of the event and by asking the participants to put themselves in somebody else's

[31] Tota 2003, pp. 94-110.
[32] See Tota 2003, pp. 110-125.
[33] Bolognesi in Tota 2003, p. 214.
[34] Lenzi, Sonia: *Avrei potuto essere io. It could have been me*. [n.p.], 2015.

shoes, the project required an affective response: it arose empathy and countered indifference toward a by now distant past. Third, it re-enacted memory and, with it, it symbolically brought the victims "up to date": by lifting them from the list of names and ages of the plaque, it made them "live again" in the bodies of those 85 accidental passengers. In this way, memory is passed on, and each participant becomes responsible for the memory of that person. In turn, visitors to the live monument should likewise engage in the process of identification and memory awareness. Thus, the memory of the massacre is made personal also for people that were not even born in 1980.

Lenzi's project represents an act of counter-commemoration in that it renews the idea of the memorial. Like the counter-memorial in Budapest, Sebbar's graffiti, the whispered fragments of the Ustica memorial, or the composition contest in Bologna, Lenzi's is not a grandiose, static monument. In particular, her public art project re-actualizes the traditional form of the "shrine" made up of the photos of people who died, a modern "lapidarium" consisting of a sequence of pictures of living people accompanied by the names and ages of both victim and participant. The monument has also been transformed in a "portable monument," a temporary space of counter-memory: a bilingual book (Italian and English), in 85 copies, containing the photographs; the presentation of the project; the "diary" of the artist during the fieldwork; the historical context; and some quotations.

Conclusion

My somewhat odd journey across countries and memories allowed me to show some of the important reasons that attest to the timely importance of acts of counter-commemoration as temporary utopian spaces. Perhaps the most obvious, and yet important reason is not to forget. On a different level, these acts are necessary to expose the political interests that official memorializing narratives and memorials serve. "A memory cast in stone […] eternalises one single narrative in a fixed aesthetic, serving specific purposes of the political power."[35] Acts of counter-commemoration instead fill silences; they force the recognition of hidden histories, denied memories, or blatant lies. Like utopia, they radically critique the master narrative while opening spaces for oppositional alternatives. Against the transmission of a singular, fixed memory, they remind us that we need multiple memories and that these must be passed on and renewed. By uncovering histories or re-enacting memories of events of random violence, they often force us to identify with the victims. In the process of identification, we empathize, and in

[35] Erőss 2017, p. 20.

so doing they help us understand not just the commemorated events, but they move us beyond, in an attempt to elicit a critical response. And as these acts of counter-commemoration ask us, we become responsible for those memories.

Acts of counter-commemoration come in many guises. Temporary monuments, graffiti, photographs, music, writing, as well as other artistic modes, they all provide a response to violence that looks to the future in the attempt to re-humanize their audiences. When they memorialize divisive memories, they become sites of contestation, where opposite groups battle on the appropriate forms and practices of commemoration. As some of the examples I have used show, I believe that memory can never start on the part of the offenders. It must be negotiated to reach, if possible, a re-assembled memory, but it can only move from the memories of the "victims" or of those who legitimately speak on their behalf. In a way, the last word on how to remember is that of the victims. And yet, this does not mean that memory is exclusive to one group; it cannot be that the sense of belonging to a violent, traumatic event is what allows one to speak and remember, as the responsibility of memory must be shared and extended if it is to live on. As a consequence, we will move beyond the strict label of "victim" toward a notion of "agents of memory."[36] Acts of counter-commemoration open up a temporary, utopian space in which participants – to borrow Ruth Levitas's words – are both brought to experience an alternative narrative and called to judgment on it.[37] Moving from being merely that of "goal and catalyst of change," the utopian function of such spaces becomes one of "criticism."[38] Finally, truth, justice, and recognition are what acts of counter-commemoration demand. But it is precisely truth, justice, and recognition that are often still missing. The request for truth, justice, and recognition is what keeps them alive and makes them necessary: it is not only one historical truth that is thus pursued, but also a problematization of memory as a re-assembling of memorializing practices that can nurture a utopian tension toward empathy and reconciliation.

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[36] I'm indebted to Rita Monticelli for this point.
[37] Levitas, Ruth: "The Imaginary Reconstitution of Society: Utopia as Method." In: Moylan, Tom/Baccolini, Raffaella (eds.): *Utopia Method Vision: The Use Value of Social Dreaming*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007, p. 56.
[38] Levitas, Ruth: *The Concept of Utopia*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010, p. 226.

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