

Critique of JAMES E.YOUNG: The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials in History  
p. 357. 1000 words, typed, double-spaced.

What does James E. Young argue in the work and what is your position regarding this argument? Explain why you agree or disagree with him.

## **basics of memorials**

- H is remembered in many different ways; memorials depend on location, who made them, artist, the artistic climate
- reasons for creating hms are manifold; their aims differ; mixing of national, Jewish, religious, secular images
- hms are not one-sided, purpose of their creation is only part of the whole; they evolve, get new meaning;

## **examples of different types of memorials**

- Polish hms: destruction of Poland through its Jewish part, landscape of national martyrdom, breaches, shattered vessels; Israeli hms: martyrs (h) and heroes (ghetto fighters) side-by-side, immigration from SU pluralized memory of h
- EU/Israel: shape of hms determined by political, aesthetic, religious stuff; America: liberty, pluralism, immigration, enlarged American memory including the history of its immigrants and events that brought them to US

## **case of germany**

- Germany: can art redeem mass murder with beauty; memorials redeeming through instrumentalization of memory; impossible questions: shame in national memorial landscape, recite/commemorate misdeeds as part of reason for being, rules for remembering one's own barbarity, tradition for memorial "mea culpa", memorials for other genocides; victims remembering their experiences vs persecutor remembering its victims -> breach of "memorial code"; remembering mass murder committed in one's name, re-uniting on memory of crimes

## **how to deal with the holocaust in germany**

- Ger: counter-monuments self-conscious memorials to challenge themselves; distrust of memorials (Nazi misuse), distinction from the killers; didactic logic of monuments is too close to fascism -> monument against itself
- instead, artists have made these questions themselves into monuments: sinking and disappearing column, negative-form memorials, remembering things people forgot
- reduction of such memory to exhibitions of craftsmanship or cheap pathos is unimaginable -> rejection of conventional memorial art; conventional memorials seal off memory from awareness, don't embody but displace it; we forget if monuments do the memory work for us; they suspect the initial desire to memorialize is actually to forget

## **general problems with monuments**

- traditional monuments stiffness and grandeur doom it to be archaic/premodern; being stiff ignores the fact that cultural stuff changes; generally ms show triumphs and martyrs, ideals, founding myths -> sustaining illusions, but neither the monument or the meaning is everlasting; monument and its significance are constructed at a particular time, depend on political, historical, aesthetic realities of the moment
- h memory is contested as long as >1 group remembers it; memorial competition makes that clear, also exposes the questions artists face: how to remember real events in abstract, geometric forms, how to create a focal point without desecrating the memory, embody remembrance without displacing it
- e.g. AB memorial 1957: monument to crime, ugliness, murder, horror; stupendous proportions -> art must reflect that; can art express the emotions of AB

## **Art history and a perspective from art-critique**

- art-historical inquiry needed; hms public dimension ignored, either aestheticist or historical; popular appeal cannot be held against a memorial (Warsaw Ghetto), critically, public accessibility and historical referentiality make it monumental but also questionable; public appeal might be measure of aesthetic performance; how can memorial representations influence ongoing events

## **not being snobs**

- discussions of high and low art no longer dictate critical discussion; excess in popular memorial representations even if the usefulness of kitsch is debatable; don't patronize mass taste, but recognize its weight and the influence of avowedly public on public memory (whether or not it should); many hms are archaic, unfashionable; art critics need to change their approach to not oppress, but sustain these
- avowedly public art and art made for the art world is very different, and that needs to be acknowledged; hms are not visited because they're fashionable, new, cutting edge; contemp art is self- or medium reflexive, while hms are historically referential; art contemplates materiality and relation to other art pieces, while public monuments are supposed to show past events and not their own presence; hms point beyond themselves

## **new type of art critique**

- hms demand critique that goes beyond high/low art, tastefulness, vulgarity because they fuse public art, popular culture, historical memory, political consequences; don't just look at movements and forms that created it, but at how this art positions itself as basis for political and social action; how memory was shaped at the time, how m reflects past history, its role in current history

## **influence of monuments**

- not good/bad art, but consequences for the people; not just relation between people and their monuments, but also the consequences; sociology of art, even though some rejected it; social life of a work, life in societies mind; how are people moved by these memorials, but also to what end have they been moved, what are the conclusions, understanding, actions for their own life; cannot separate monument and its public life; social function is aesthetic performance
- ms life in minds might seem fixed, does not remember its own creation -> critic can put that memory back; reminds of its fragility, dependence on others for life, made by humans in human times, not a natural piece of the landscape; can be mistaken for permanence; stop icons turning into idols of remembrance
- too often monuments become unreflective of current memory, looking at their social, political, aesthetic forces is informative

## **proper art critique of memorials / memory studies in art critique**

- accordingly, for hms we should incorporate: time and place they were conceived, construction in political and historical realities, presence in public places, place in national memory, place in minds of communities, eventual destruction; not just how particular ms create and reinforce memory of h, but also how the re-influence political life
- what meanings are generated when they are created; how they emplot time and memory; impose borders on time, facade on memory; relationship of time to place, place to memory, memory to time; how does a place shape memory of a particular time, how does this memory shape our understanding of the present
- recognize role of visitors to memorials - how and what we remember at memorials depends on who we are, why we care, how we see; fundamentally interactive, dialogical part of hms; public memory and meanings don't just depend on forms and figures of ms, but on viewers responses; public memory is constructed, understanding of events depends on that construction, worldly consequences in historical understanding coming from monumens; performance lies in conflation of public and private memory; minds reflecting on the past participate in the m
- ms are invigorated by the present moment even as they condition us too; vivify memory through memory-work itself; thus they remain animate and forever incomplete; not enough to ask whether or not or how ms remember h; to what end(s) have we remembered; how do we respond to our current moment based on the remembered past; shape of memory cannot be split from actions taken because of it; memory without consequences is dead on the inside
- basically talking about the differences in critiquing conventional art and holocaust memorials (public memorials): what are the differences, a different approach is needed, etc
- arguing for a memory studies approach to art critique

- very high-and-mighty writing
- in some way I agree with him, you should take these things into account when judging monuments because they have a very specific purpose
- is it wise to not apply this to all of art critique? especially for art that may not have been meant to be public but that became public and is now basically a type of monument?
- stolpersteine and how they relate to this
- the holocaust memorial in berlin near the brandenburger tor
- holocaust memorial in vienna (Mahnmal)
- German Mahnmal (admonishing, warning, urging) vs Denkmal (memorial/monument) and the difference that it makes -> relate this to the anti-memorial thing he said
- sociology paper on manas memorial and the purpose of statues
- are memorial fascistic (didactic logic of monuments vs U. Eco's Fascism points)
- who is the author?
- previous reading about how memorials work
- Rigney text