

**Remember/
Together**



Walter Benjamin, "Paralipomènes et variantes sur le 'concept d'histoire'", *Écrits français* (translated from German by Françoise Delahaye-Eggers), Paris, Gallimard, 1991, pp. 454–455

It is more arduous to honour the memory of the nameless than the renowned.



Commemoration of the barbarity of war is often torn between contradictory claims: fidelity to the memories of the disappeared vs. the need for reconciliation with former enemies. How should we commemorate, while allowing ourselves gradually to open the door to forgetting?

Depending on the evolution of techniques of warfare, the redefinition of the categories of Hero and Victim, and the values particular to any given era, war memorials never cease changing and re-inventing themselves. After the First World War, every village in France erected a memorial to its soldiers fallen for the homeland: 90% of casualties in that conflict were soldiers. One century later, the ratio has been reversed: in recent conflicts, civilians — especially, women and children — are at the center of conflict and make up the vast majority of victims. The policies of “ethnic cleansing” during the wars of the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s and the Rwandan genocide in 1994 are examples.

Since the beginning of World War II, new legal terms have emerged to bear witness to this terrible reality: “genocide”, coined in 1944 by the Polish jurist Raphael Lemkin; “crimes against humanity,” one of the charges at the Nuremberg Trials in 1945–1946. Ambivalent figures have appeared like that of the “child soldier”, robot-killers manipulated by ruthless warlords, but also, profoundly, victims themselves. New heroes have also emerged, like the “Righteous”, risking their lives to save persecuted people.

Artists have taken up this memory of blood and tragedy. Often acting alone, free of any external command, they have created memorials that challenge our consciousness; or, responding to competitions for monuments, memorials and history museums, have sometimes contributed to the globalization of commemorative forms.

How should we commemorate? And for whom? Does history really carry “lessons” and, if so, do we get a failing grade when we retain little or nothing from them? Which forms, subjects and artistic grammar are best suited for memorializing crimes and mass violence? In

this exhibit, through the words of historians, philosophers and artists, we wish to show new ways towards commemoration that explore the relationship to memory and raise awareness of the vertigo of destruction, but also of the hope contained within the artistic gesture of the memorial, a bulwark against the madness of mankind.

The Remember/Together poster project is based on findings from the transdisciplinary research project “Politics of Memory and Art Practices: the Role of Art in Peace and Reconstruction Process” (PIMPA/PPR) supported by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNF) and conducted in the Master Program of the Critical Curatorial Cybermedia Research of the Institute of Art and Design — Geneva (HEAD) by a team of researchers: Pierre Hazan, Catherine Queloz, Denis Pernet, Sylvie Ramel, Yan Schubert and Mélanie Borès (2013–2015).

It builds on the exhibition Beyond The Monument held at the Geneva Contemporary Art Museum’s Le Commun exhibition space January 16-February 15, 2015 and at the international conference “Mass Violence, Memorialization and Art Practices” on 22 January 2015.

The Remember/Together poster project is part of a series of events organized by the City of Geneva and the Contemporary Art Fund of Geneva (FMAC) to accompany the inauguration of Melik Ohanian’s Streetlights of Memory in Trembley Park.

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Acknowledgements:

Cécile Boss, Irma Cilacian Gandolfi, Contemporary Art Fund of Geneva (FMAC), Sevane Haroutunian, and the authors.

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Melik Ohanian
Les Réverbères de la Mémoire
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[...] for all memorials, one must wonder what meanings are produced when the temporal domain is converted into material form, when time is transformed into space, a trope by which it is then apprehended and measured. How do memorials set the stage for time and memory? How do they impose boundaries on time, a facade to memory? What is the relation of time to place, place to memory, memory to time?

What forms of coexistence are we to imagine?

Do the contact areas of past, present or future make up spaces of violence, reconciliation and/or coexistence. What forms of violence? Who are the culprits and who the victims? What are the causes? What forms of reconciliation? And which procedures for reconciliation? Who benefits from them? How long do these procedures last? Do we take into account the past or try to forget it for the benefit of the

future? Or, do we think that the future depends on the work done on the effects or the changes of the structures of the past? What forms of coexistence should we imagine? What changes are possible? Are these procedures for change related to the needs of social justice or to forms of resistance?

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[...] it is in society that man, normally, acquires his memories, that he remembers them, and, as is said, that he recognizes and locates them. [...] It is in this sense that collective memory and social frameworks of memory exist, and it is in the degree that our individual thinking is placed within these frames and participates in this memory that it will be able to remember.

Why should we wish to force those who have forgotten, to remember, whether they have forgotten out of convenience, inclination or calculation, or have never known what matters in their history? No, we have no wish to. Memory cannot be commanded. It is trained. He who has never known, has no memory—this is true. But in this case, oblivion is not a disease. It is total closure, a disability of birth.



Walter Benjamin, "Le conteur", in *Œuvres III*
(translated from German by Maurice de
Gandillac, Rainer Rochlitz and Pierre Rusch), Paris,
Gallimard, 2000, pp. 115–116

With the World War, we saw the beginning of an evolution that has never stopped. At the time of the armistice, was it not noted that people were returning from the battlefield mute — not richer, but poorer in communicable experience?

Any historical research that reflects an ethical requirement and that engages our responsibility for the past is, undoubtedly, directly or indirectly dependent on the reflection on representation. Paul Ricoeur is the first to have emphasized this with insistence. If the historian cannot have the ambition to hold the "why" — the definitive explanation that silences victims — fiction must, according to Ricoeur, revive when still possible the memory of the survivors, to make heard a voice that comes from elsewhere. The role of fiction is a corollary of the power of horror to the extent that it alone can address events whose absolute uniqueness matters.

Pierre-Antoine Chardel, "L'éthique du témoignage. Réflexions à partir de Primo Levi et Giorgio Agamben", *Symposium: The Canadian Journal of Continental Philosophy*, 10 (2), 2006, pp. 587–610

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Who recounts the present and how is it described? The question raised is always the same: what should be included and what excluded?

On representing the missing

How is war and post-war represented today? From traditional heroes and conquerors, glorious figures mounted on horseback, there has been a shift to the Victim and the Vanquished. Today, it is their representations erected in the public space: minorities, the disappeared, the left-behind. So, how should we represent the missing and the dead? Over the past few decades, a new type of monument and memorial has developed. Counter-monuments, anti-monuments, portable monuments, poor monuments, monuments in exile, they witness through mere outline, through emptiness, displacement, annihilation, disappearance.

In May 1995, the Bebelplatz in Berlin inaugurated Micha Ullman's Bibliotek Memorial to the Nazi book burning: an underground cube-library entirely composed of empty white shelves, visible only from a glass plate placed on the ground. More recently, to commemorate the Utøya massacre, artist Jonas Dahlberg proposed to cut a 3.5 meter section across the width of the island on which Anders Breivik's victims died during his attack in July 2011. A true extension of land art dear to Dani Karavan, these gouged, sliced, mutilated sites connote vertigo as much as they do the desire to question representational codes of drama and conflict.

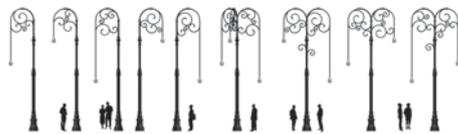
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**Project for a Geneva memorial
to the Armenian Genocide**

In 2008, the Geneva City Council accepts a motion to organize a competition for the construction of a monument to mark the collective memory of Geneva citizens and Armenians. In 2009, the City Council and the Armenian Community of Switzerland launch a competition for a monument in Geneva. A dozen international artists are invited to participate; among them, Renée Green, Alfredo Jaar and Esther Shalev-Gerz propose projects. Melik Ohanian, a French artist of Armenian origin, wins the competition unanimously with his project Streetlights of Memory, made up of nine monumental streetlights, 8-meters high, decorated with arabesques and a chrome-plated drop. Of the three sites initially chosen for the monument (Bastion Saint-Antoine, Pradier Square and Chantepoulet Square), all then under renovation or reassignment, the artists unanimously choose to set their projects in Geneva's Old Town. Saint-Antoine, indeed, offers a popular promenade overlooking the rest of the city, as well as the lake.

However, in 2015, the project has still not seen appeared. Indeed, many voices rise against the initiative. Archeological excavation begun on the Bastion further slows down erection of the monument, with the Monuments and Sites Commission completely paralyzing installation of the project in the Old Town. In the past, several monuments have been set up in Geneva without prior authorization (e.g., stones commemorating the shooting on November 9, 1932 in Geneva and the massacres of Srebrenica). The City of Geneva looks for new ways to carry out the project. In December 2014, the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs recommends that the Geneva Canton refuse the building permit filed by the City to erect Streetlights of Memory in Ariana Park. At the same time, Melik Ohanian is invited to exhibit in the Armenian Pavilion at the 56th Venice Biennale. He proposes to the Armenian Community and the City of Geneva to begin work on Streetlights of Memory and to expose the 87 dismantled elements composing it as a temporary work Streelights of Memory—a Memorial on Stand-By (2010/2015) [Les Réverbères de la Mémoire—un mémorial en attente]. Organized by Geneva exhibition commissioner Adelina von Fürstenberg, the collective exhibition of the Armenian Pavilion wins the 2015 Golden Lion of the Venice Biennale.

The same year, the City of Geneva offers Trembley Park for the installation of the monument, to be officially inaugurated in April 2018. For more information, visit www.reverberes.ch



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*Must we then simplify
to transmit? Embellish
to educate? One could
go even further and
ask: must we lie to tell
the truth?*

It is certain that exercise (in this case, the frequent effort to remember) keeps memory fresh and lively, just as a muscle is maintained by exercising it frequently. But it is also true that memory too often evoked and expressed in narrative form tends to become stereotype, fixed in a form confirmed by experience, crystallized, perfected, adorned, replacing raw memory and growing at its expense.