MEMORIALS IN THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA: MAPPING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ART AND POLITICS

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Abstract

The production of monuments has always been a political affair, particularly in periods of social and historical upheaval. One such period in Croatia was marked by the Homeland War (Croatian War of Independence) fought between 1991 and 1995. As the Republic of Croatia is a relatively young state, politics and specific historical, geographical, and social circumstances still play a considerable part in the production of monuments, more conspicuously so in comparison to other institutional frameworks in which visual phenomena are made, displayed, perceived, and interpreted. This text aims to discuss how the relationship between art and politics is reflected in the production and design of memorials in Croatia. The first step in that direction is the introduction of a broader context illustrating the scope and importance of monument-making in the country, with particular attention to how Homeland War memorials appear in public space. Secondly, the text highlights one of the most significant recent examples demonstrating the influence of politics on memorial art, in parallel with the concept of institutionalisation of memory. Finally, examples are viewed within a selected theoretical framework in an attempt to elucidate the mechanisms underlying this process.

Keywords: Homeland War; memorial sculpture; public art; politics of memory; contemporary Croatian art

Monumentomania in Croatia

Since 1991, no less than one thousand memorials dedicated to or somehow related to the Croatian War of Independence (commonly referred to as Homeland War) have been erected in the Republic of Croatia.[1] These numbers keep steadily increasing. Actually, it would seem that in the last couple of years there has even been a renewal of interest in monuments dedicated to the specified memorial context. Varying in design and size, these artefacts are made in memory of war casualties and to commemorate events and people that profoundly marked the beginning of modern Croatian history. On the other hand, during the first decade of Croatian independence, a large number of monuments erected in the previous socialist state were

1 Some sources suggest there are around 1200 such memorials. See Edvin Kanka Ćudić (ed.), *In Memoriam Republika Hrvatska (1991–1995)* [In Memoriam Republic of Croatia (1991–1995)] (UDIK, 2017).

destroyed, some partially and many of them completely.[2] This practice, perhaps most clearly illustrated in Bogdan Žižić's documentary film titled *Damnatio Memoriae*, largely ended around the early 2000s.

The obvious importance and the pronounced production of monuments in modern Croatia has been described using similar expressions that can all be subsumed under the umbrella term *monumentomania*. This phenomenon echoes the famous French *statuomania* both through the name and through its inner workings related to the role of the government as the chief authority in imagining and designing public space. The fascination and ambivalent relationship towards monuments were recognised in the case of some other countries with similar historical background as well. Piotr Sztompka (2004) stated that much of the production, and particularly the devastation of monuments, can be observed in terms of the phenomenon labelled "postcommunist hangover."[3]

Authorship and Design of Homeland War Memorials in Croatia

Generally, there are two main sources of authorship for Homeland War memorials in Croatia. One pertains to the work of amateur sculptors or autodidacts and the other one to that of professionally trained sculptors and/or architects supported by the government or its subsidiaries. The latter is usually done through commissions and public tenders. Unlike this practice, which depends on some form of institutional authority, the first monuments in modern Croatia were created at the actual sites of the commemorated events, by the family members of the deceased and by those who felt the need to document the events in the war-torn country and their consequences so that "key facts and details about war casualties would not be forgotten."[4] As Croatia gained independence, their role was gradually replaced by professionally trained artists or architects working under the conditions set or accepted by local government as the leading force in shaping public space, with mixed results. Various controversies and the criticism of design quality of monuments in Croatia are sort of a recurring theme in the national public sphere.[5]

2 Sanja Horvatinčić, *Spomenici iz razdoblja socijalizma u Hrvatskoj – prijedlog tipologije* [Memorials from the socialist era in Croatia: A typology model], (PhD diss., Sveučilište u Zadru, 2017), 1.

3 Piotr Sztompka, "The Trauma of Social Change: A Case of Postcommunist Societies," in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, ed. Jeffrey C. Alexander et al. (University of California Press, 2004), 181.

4 Sandra Križić Roban, "Diskontinuitet i/ili utočište? Spomenici Domovinskog rata u prostoru javnosti" [Discontinuity and/or refuge? Homeland War monuments in public space], in *Simbol, identitet i Domovinski rat* (Hrvatsko grboslovno i zastavoslovno društvo, 2016), 17.

5 Some of the many examples include a notable polemic between Vinko Srhoj and Ratko Petrić regarding the latter's perceived monopoly on public art in Zadar, as well as its quality. Similarly, Srhoj criticised Branko Silađin's monuments and ideas for their lack of inventiveness. Ive Šimat Banov even called for a moratorium on monument production in Croatia. All of the examples can easily be found on the Internet.

The number and the territorial coverage of Homeland War memorials reflect the change in socio-political structure in Croatia since the latest turn of the century. Almost thirty-five years into national independence, the continuous memorial production creates an impression of an ongoing, state-sponsored project. This has perhaps been most evident from the activities of the Ministry of Veterans' Affairs of the Republic of Croatia. In addition to honouring war casualties and commemorating related events, monument-making in the Republic of Croatia can be observed in terms of the (re)construction and further implementation of national (visual) identity. The latter has been perhaps most effectively achieved through inexpressive and simple architectonic forms, especially the motif of a cube. Additionally, select memorial statuary is dominated by a relatively defined visual language comprising squares or cubes, and motifs such as the checkerboard, the pre-Romanesque three-ribbon pattern known as the Croatian interlace, and the cross.[6] These motifs sometimes appear concurrently.

Most commonly, monuments dedicated to Homeland War are based on geometry, appearing as rectangular structures and various types of memorial plaques. One could argue that many of such structures, usually labelled as "abstract," would more accurately be described as "pseudo-abstract" as the point of departure for abstraction is often unclear or practically non-existent. If a structure is not referential, it does not work well as a memorial. Not every cube-like form in public space necessarily operates as a three-dimensional sign that points to a clear referent—especially when that referent is itself already a metaphor for an abstract concept (for example. the cube's almost indexical relation to the square, which functions metonymically as a single field of the Croatian checkerboard and is commonly employed as a symbol of Croatian state history and values). On the other hand, when such structures are claimed to represent emotions or something immaterial or metaphysical—as in Kazimir Malevich's use of the square—they frequently fail in their memorial function. In this context, openness to excessive interpretation becomes a weakness rather than a virtue, a problem already identified in memorial practice in this geographical context.[7] In reality, many of these structu-

6 See Sandra Križić Roban, "Vrijeme spomenika. Skulpturalni, arhitektonski, urbanistički i drugi načini obilježavanja Domovinskog rata" [The age of monuments: Sculptural, architectural, and other forms of commemorating the Homeland War], *Radovi Instituta za povijest umjetnosti* 34 (2010): 225–240, https://hrcak.srce.hr/80927 (accessed on May 20, 2026).

7 See Božo Kesić, *Monuments in Croatia since 1991* (PhD diss., University of Zadar, 2023), 49.

res are basically large-size tombstones or memorial plaques.[8] The main function of such a monument is to carry a linguistic message. While this is legitimate, it does not justify artistic value attributed to such works. Conceptually, these monuments operate similarly to readymades: pre-existing or conventionally established forms that are appropriated and recontextualised for commemorative purposes. This proposition is important in the context of this essay as the simplicity of design offers clear pragmatic advantages. This is evident in the prevalence of similarly conceived memorials, where repetition and speed in monument-making serve their social and political purpose, though there are limits to deeper symbolic or aesthetic engagement.

In recent years, memorialisation processes in the Republic of Croatia have increasingly taken the form of elaborately designed *memorial landscapes*. Those responsible for these projects face two important tasks. The first is to organise the landscape in dialogue with its existing surroundings. The second is to imbue the space with symbolic meaning, defining it in reference to a specific memory. Though less frequently than in the past, sculptors are tasked with designing a symbolic centrepiece of such an environment, albeit within a "pre-programmed" spatial framework. The absence of sculptors in these projects is noticeable because memorial objects within such framework—most often simple, geometric, minimalist (almost anti-monumental) forms, conceived primarily as architectural forms adhering mainly to the spatial logic of the site—tend to lack either the symbolic strength or the referential clarity (iconicity) required in monuments.

Simplicity should not be confused with the notion of counter-monumentality, even though the latter term sometimes encompasses anti-monumental strategies. A counter-monument does not have to be anti-monumental, and anti-monumental forms are not necessarily counter-monuments.[9] James E. Young coined the term *counter-monument* to describe artefacts arising from Germany's engagement with collective guilt (*Kollektivschuld*) over its role in the Second World War. Such memorials are dialectical and anti-monumental in form, critiquing traditional statuary while maintaining the vitality of memory through interaction with the spectators. In a broader sense, counter-monuments often oppose institutionalised, archival forms of memory. They often convey the notion of temporality and are based on aesthetics of disappearance, seeking to "distribute" memory beyond the monument into sites of remembrance and the people who visit them. According to some authors, the term counter-monument challenges the traditional form and function of memorials, and can be dialogic in nature, for example when they critically engage with existing monuments or nearby institutions.[10] The only memorial in Croatia that fully embodied the characteristics of a counter-monument was *The Wall of Pain* that was situated at Selska Street in Zagreb (Fig. 1). Its content, location, form, authorship, and participatory design gave it both anti-monumental qualities and a dialogical, didactic potential, which are fundamental requirements for counter-monumentality.

8 For example, memorials in Vrbovsko (2012), Lipik (2016), Josipdol (2018), etc.

9 Globally, subversive and anti-monumental memorial expressions emerged in the late twentieth century. These works rely not on visibility or monumental form but on strategies of invisibility, inversion, reflection, or radical minimalism (for example, Horst Hoheisel's *Aschrott Fountain* in Kassel, 1985, and other "underground" memorials, as well as Maya Lin's *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* in Washington, 1981). Sergiusz Michalski traces the roots of these practices as far back as Pablo Picasso's proposal for a memorial to his friend, the poet Guillaume Apollinaire. For the latter, see Sergiusz Michalski, *Public Monuments: Art in Political Bondage, 1870–1997* (Reaktion Books, 1998), 173.

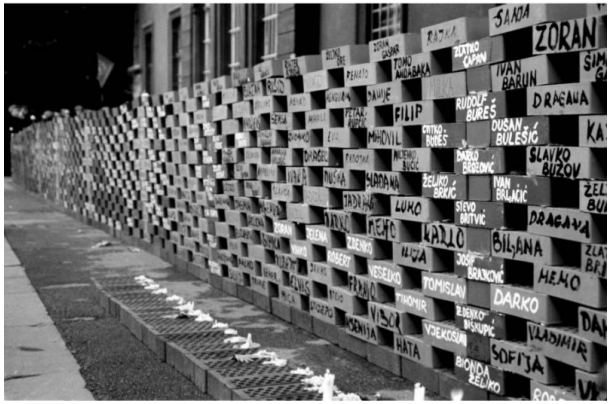


Fig. 1: *The Wall of Pain* (1993), image from *Povijest.hr*, https://povijest.hr/nadanasnjidan/zid-bo-li-simbol-stradanja-hrva-ta-u-domovinskom-ratu-1993/ (accessed January 16, 2026)

Politics at Work: An Example of Institutionalisation of Memory

This example leads us to the topic of institutionalisation of memory, a phenomenon influenced by politics and often operating as a form of intracultural appropriation—a kind of self-reproduction, an appropriation of culturally mediated memory performed "from within." This can be illustrated through perhaps the most significant example of such practice.

The *Wall of Pain* in Zagreb was one of the earliest and probably the most authentic war memorials in the Republic of Croatia. It had been cumulatively built from 1993 until its disassembly in the mid-2000s. The monument was not the work of a single author, and it was not institutionally

10 Quentin Stevens, Karen Franck, Ruth Fazakerley, "Counter-monuments: The Anti-monumental and the Dialogic," *The Journal of Architecture* 17/6 (2012): 952.



Fig. 2: *The Voice of Croatian Suffering – The Wall of Pain* (2004)



Fig. 3: *The Voice of Croatian Suffering – The Wall of Pain* (detail)

financed. Family members of the deceased or otherwise affected by the events of the Homeland War brought black and red bricks and placed them in front of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) headquarters. This was a sign of protest against the perceived inactivity of the force. Black bricks were inscribed with the names of the deceased. Red bricks comprised names of missing and imprisoned people. Over the years, the wall started to grow, reaching three hundred metres in length and containing around thirteen and a half thousand bricks. It became an important site of collective memory, immersed in a busy urban landscape, where passers-by regularly paid their respects to the victims of the war.

In 2005, the memorial was dismantled, relocated, and exhibited as a minor part of Dušan Džamonja's memorial at Mirogoj Cemetery in Zagreb, a process organised by the city administration (Fig. 2). This decision provoked significant public criticism. The Croatian News Agency (HINA) issued only a brief statement about the event, stating the danger of pieces of bricks collapsing on pedestrians as the main reason for the

Fig. 4: *Homeland Memorial* (2020)



removal of the original memorial.[11] The more recent Mirogoj monument, going by the name *The Voice of Croatian Suffering – Wall of Pain*, resembles a labyrinth built using black granite slabs. A small part of the old memorial can be seen on the base-level of the Mirogoj memorial, the rest of the bricks supposedly buried beneath it. Black and red bricks became decorative elements in the new context and were relegated to the function of a motif in an otherwise inexpressive memorial complex at Mirogoj Cemetery (Fig. 3).

Similarly, the conversion of the *Wall of Pain* into a motif in a new context is also evident in the *Homeland Memorial* (Fig. 4). It was designed by architect Nenad Fabijanić and completed in 2020. It comprises three elements: the "wall of pain" (also known as the *Wall of Light*), the "altar-mensa," and the "portal-pavilion." According to the author's concept, the visual citation of the *Wall of Pain* was not an attempt to revive the original memorial, but to symbolise humanity, hope, and optimism.[12] Public reception, however, has been mixed.[13] Some consider this part

11 HINA, October 14, 2006, Baza EVA, http://www.hina.hr, cited in Miroslav Tuđman, "Memorijalni spomenici i javno znanje" [Memorial monuments and public knowledge], in *Ivi Maroeviću baštinici u spomen* (Zavod za informacijske studije, Odsjek za informacijske znanosti, Filozofskog fakulteta Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, 2009), 27.

12 Nenad Fabijanić, http://www.nenadfabijanic.hr/hrvatski/projekti/spomenik_foto_hr.html (accessed January 15, 2026).

13 Snješka Knežević lauded the memorial with regards to its architectonic and urbanistic value. See "Vodeća povjesničarka umjetnosti recenzira Spomenik domovini koji će biti postavljen u Zagrebu" [Prominent art historian on the Homeland Memorial to be installed in Zagreb], *Telegram*, https://www.telegram.hr/kultura/vodeca-povjesnicarka-umjetnosti-recenzira-spomenik-domovini-koji-ce-biti-postavljen-u-zagrebu/ (accessed May 1, 2026). Some experts had other opinions. See Vinko Srhoj, Sanja Horvatinčić, and Boris Ljubičić, "Spomenik domovini za svakoga i nikoga" [Homeland Memorial for everyone and no-one], interview by Nevenka Šarčević, *Kontura* (2021).



Fig. 5: *Altar of the Croatian Homeland* (1994)



Fig. 6: *Homeland Memorial* – altar mensa

of the monument to be a weak imitation of the *Wall of Pain*, while others have questioned the monument's high cost, particularly given the socioeconomic strains of the COVID-19 pandemic. Several experts interviewed on the topic raised the familiar question of marginalisation of sculptors in memorial projects, arguing that the monument lacks expressive and symbolic depth, and questioning the concept of abstract memorial forms in general.[14] Others assessed the project favourably from an urbanistic perspective, viewing it as a successful spatial intervention that appropriately shapes both its immediate location and the wider urban context.[15]

14 See Srhoj, Horvatinčić, Ljubičić, "Spomenik domovini za svakoga i nikoga," and Petra Miočić Mandić, "Spomenik domovini u očima struke" [Homeland Memorial Through the Eyes of Experts], *Vijenac*, 702 (January 28, 2021).

15 See "Vodeća povjesničarka umjetnosti recenzira Spomenik domovini."



Fig. 7: *Monument to Franjo Tuđman* (2018)

The monument is dedicated to all Croatian soldiers and civilians who fell in the Homeland War. Prior to 2020, Kuzma Kovačić's *Altar of the Croatian Homeland*, built in 1994 at the Medvedgrad Fortress, had exclusively served the same purpose and was the focal point of political protocol for twenty-five years (Fig. 5). Even before, but certainly after the erection of the new memorial, the Medvedgrad memorial began to lose its relevance. The *Homeland Memorial* works both as a commemorative site and as a venue for various social and political events. Although articulated differently, one of its elements adopts an altar-like form (Fig. 6), effectively signifying the succession of the memorial at Medvedgrad.

Situated at Stjepan Radić Square, in the vicinity of the Zagreb city administration building and Vatroslav Lisinski concert hall, this large-scale architectonic monument also faces the statue of the first Croatian president Franjo Tuđman (Fig. 7), which was erected in 2018 and is located just across Vukovarska Street. The street is named after Vukovar, the city in the far eastern part of Croatia that became a symbol of war suffering and devastation. Thus, the entire urban microlocation—defined by the spatial and symbolic relationship of the two mentioned monuments and the street itself—became a sort of "homeland point," even though the conception and purpose of each individual monument probably did not depend on the others, that is, they were determined by the authors' ideas rather than by a need to function as sub-elements of a broader concept of homeland identity.

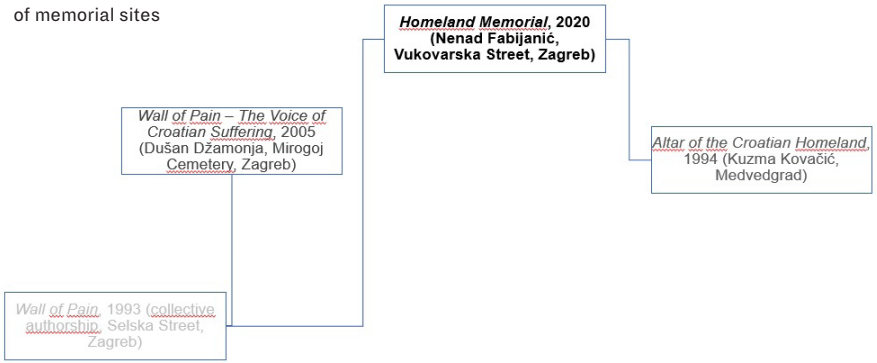
Institutionalisation of Memory: A Theoretical Perspective

According to Miroslav Tuđman's paper on memorials (2009), the fate of the *Wall of Pain* in Selska Street and the *Altar of the Croatian Homeland* at Medvedgrad is tied to the loss of place of those monuments in the hierarchy of cultural memory.[16] This is perhaps shown very simply, yet clearly in Figure 8. Their significance was reduced and essentially replaced in the process of making the select memory adherent to the continuity of current politics. Tuđman contextualises mechanisms of institutionalisation of memory by describing memorials as forms of "coded social memory."[17] They materialise implicit societal norms, collective expectations and the values endorsed by those in power. According to him, memorials operate according to social "matrices" that determine spatial arrangement, as well as the form and modes of participation, thereby shaping the rules through which memory is publicly experienced.[18] Political changes can recalibrate the function of existing memorials, as seen with the *Altar of the Croatian Homeland*, which completely lost its ceremonial role. In parallel, the *Wall of Pain* completely lost its original power and authenticity through relocation and adaptation, becoming absorbed into the currently dominant cultural narrative. Though unclear if deliberate or not, the spatial and symbolic orchestration of the *Homeland Memorial*, monument to Franjo Tuđman, and Vukovarska Street exemplifies these principles in practice. It is a curated narrative of national identity while basically deleting or marginalising prior commemorative sites, although they belong to the same historical and memorial context. In this sense, institutionalisation of memory performed as a sort of intracultural appropriation operates alongside Edward Hall's theory: memory is selected, spatially aligned, and re-sequenced to conform with current political and social norms.[19]

Institutionalisation of memory occurs in different ways. In the context of the examples mentioned, it can be examined through concepts such as *lieux de mémoire* (and the role of history) proposed by Pierre Nora or "figures of memory" (and the definition of cultural memory) introduced by Jan Assmann.[20] The proposition here is that the *Homeland Memorial* in Zagreb exemplifies both concepts, as does the Mirogoj memorial. In contrast, the Medvedgrad memorial lost the status of a *lieu de mémoire*, while the *Wall of Pain* at Selska could never be fully institutionalised due

16 Tuđman, "Memorijalni spomenici i javno znanje," 32.
17 Ibid., 17–19.
18 Ibid., 19.
19 Edward T. Hall, *The Silent Language* (Doubleday, 1959), where Hall outlines three fundamental principles of cultural organisation: the law of order, the law of selection, and the law of congruence.
20 See: Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989); Jan Assmann, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," *New German Critique* 65 (Spring–Summer 1995).

Fig. 8: A hierarchy of memorial sites



to its specific ontology. Pierre Nora introduces the notion of *lieux de mémoire* to describe how institutionally constructed or officially endorsed sites of memory replace *milieux de memoire* ("real", lived memory).[21] The distinction between *lieux de mémoire* and *milieux de mémoire* parallels that between memory and history. Memory is living, embodied, emotional, and collective; it is socially transmitted through rituals, symbols, traditions, and practices. History, by contrast, is analytical, critical, and secular, a tool employed by institutions and politics. It reconstructs what no longer exists, claims objectivity and distance, exists as a representation of the past rather than as lived experience.

Modern societies, such as the post-war Croatian society, have experienced a profound shift from lived memory to its representation. The former—socially mediated collective memory, a key term in memory studies introduced by Maurice Halbwachs in 1992[22]—is rarely exemplified by memorial structures, with the original *Wall of Pain* in Zagreb being a notable exception. Over time, such memory has gradually eroded—both metaphorically and literally. Societies increasingly rely on mediated representations of the past rather than on direct, intergenerational transmission. Monument-making in the Republic of Croatia illustrates this shift. As prominent modes of such representation, monuments do not merely contain memory neutrally; they actively frame, stage, and produce it.

Applied to the sequence of events surrounding the examples described in the previous chapter, Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire*—sites of memory—captures this transformation. These sites emerge precisely where memory can no longer operate spontaneously within social life. They are deliberately constructed, symbolic formations that function as representations of memory rather than memory itself. As compensatory mechanisms for the loss of lived continuity, *lieux de mé-*

21 Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," 7.
22 Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. Lewis A. Coser (University of Chicago Press, 1992).



Fig. 9: *Homeland Memorial – Wall of Light*

moire arise from a historical condition in which remembrance must be organised, archived, and institutionalised. Archives exist because societies no longer remember organically; monuments are erected because memory is no longer lived; commemorations occur because continuity with the past has been disrupted.

Representations of memory are selective and politically inflected. Closely tied to the construction of national identity, they privilege certain narratives while marginalising others, stabilising the past within official frameworks that serve ideological and state interests. Such representations are never neutral. Situated between memory and history, *lieux de mémoire* are institutional constructions that seek to evoke memory and affect; they present themselves as authentic while remaining fundamentally mediated and staged. This in-between condition defines the modern relationship to the past. As Nora argues,[23] history increasingly replaces memory while simultaneously attempting to imitate its experiential and emotional force (for example, the glass wall element of the *Homeland Memorial* (Fig. 9) is an imitation of the formerly built *Wall of Pain*).

The *Homeland Memorial* demonstrates the power of politics in shaping public space and collective values, as the specific commemorative need it purported to address did not really exist: there were already memorials at Mirogoj and at Medvedgrad. As noted, the new memorial merges two commemorative functions: remembrance of war casualties and a celebratory, protocolary one. The obvious advantage of the monument, acknowledged both by its critics and advocates, lies in its role in

23 Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," 8.

structuring the surrounding urban landscape and ensuring that political protocols take place within the city itself rather than at the Medvedgrad memorial, whose location is relatively remote. Following the latter, the motivation for building the new memorial also comes from the need to preserve specific memory so it would not be swept away by the ever "accelerating history," which corresponds to Nora's concept of "commemorative vigilance."[24] Although Nora privileges spontaneous over modern memory—regarding the latter as "archival memory" reliant on material traces, immediacy of recording, and visual representation—his analysis nonetheless suggests that the institutionalisation of memory has ensured that the past does not consume memory entirely, but instead leaves it suspended somewhere between life and death—"no longer part of life, but not yet of death."[25]

Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire* predates and largely corresponds to Jan Assmann's notion of "figures of memory," which are cultural and institutional embodiments of memory, material structures that refer to a specific social memory.[26] Assmann distinguishes between communicative and cultural memory, where the former stands for what Nora calls memory (memory as opposed to history).[27] Cultural memory, Assmann's expansion of Halbwachs's supra-individual, collective memory, accounts for political organisation, regulation, and public representation of memory. Assmann proposes that people produce artefacts like monuments as key sites where collective memory is transformed into visible, durable expressions of political meaning, anchoring a community's foundational narratives, values, and power relations in space. He builds on Halbwachs by highlighting the spatial and material dimensions of memory, which are central to political power. So, memory is not only temporal but also spatial. Space functions as a medium of political memory, and monuments operate as its most concentrated form. Through monuments, societies inscribe memory into the built environment, thereby shaping how history is encountered, interpreted, and legitimised in the present.

As in Nora's description of struggle between memory and history, the distinction between communicative and cultural memory becomes especially salient in political contexts. Communicative memory remains closely tied to lived experience, informal transmission, and generational limits, whereas cultural memory is institutionalised, curated, and regulated. Let us say that the *Wall of Pain* represented collective communicative memory, or *milieux de mémoire*, as it was not a typical memorial. Its destruction, and even expropriation rather than appropriation in the case of the Mirogoj memorial is obviously political. Assmann explicitly links cultural memory to institutions and to structures of power that se-

24 Ibid., 12.
25 Ibidem.
26 Assmann, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity."
27 Ibidem.

lect, preserve, and authorise particular versions of the past. But they also project its strength outwards. Cultural memory is thus objectified in relatively stable symbolic forms—monuments, memorials, museums, archives—that function as external carriers of memory. These objects do not remember in themselves; they are never neutral. Rather, they compel remembrance and frame interpretation. They are shaped from "above," aligned with dominant political interests, and are tools of governance, materialising power relations in enduring form.

Political Mediation of Memory

It is in the public—and its reception by the public—where the institutionalisation of memory becomes fully operational. The prerequisites for political outreach of artefacts such as monuments are probably akin to those described in Walter Benjamin's seminal text, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1936). Benjamin discusses how the reception and status of art changed in a modern society influenced by the advance of mass-reproduction technologies. By default, the work of art has unique presence in time and space, its aura.[28] This notion is linked to authenticity, tradition, ritual, and a specific kind of "distance," but has been weakened by modern (mechanical) means of reproduction. Its "here and now," its aura, is in danger of disappearing, as the cult value of a work gives way to exhibition value. Benjamin implies that different politics and ideologies use the work's exhibition value for their own specific purposes, each in its own way. Whereas the cult value of a work derives from its ritual use and participation, and implies a sort of sacrality, its exhibition value prioritises visibility, legibility, and some form of utilitarianism. The analogy with Nora's and Assmann's theory is clear. Cult value corresponds to *milieux de mémoire* or communicative memory, while exhibition value can be seen in terms of Nora's concept of history (*lieux de mémoire*) or Assmann's concept of cultural memory ("figures of memory"). In the case of the *Wall of Pain*, its aura was destroyed and its status completely changed through a kind of mechanical process. The inauguration of the memorial at Mirogoj means that the *Wall of Pain* was transformed from a participatory site of lived remembrance into a no-longer-existing origin of a new sign, a phenomenon Jean Baudrillard defined under the term simulacrum.[29] What followed is another aestheticised object whose social and political function was reframed in accordance with contemporary political needs. Similarly, the *Homeland Memorial* exemplifies exhibition value, even at a larger scale, as it encompasses both commemorative and protocolary function intended for mass spectatorship.

28 Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968), 220, 222.

29 Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Éditions Galilée, 1981).

Both the Medvedgrad memorial and the *Wall of Pain* at Selska Street are sites defined by loss, and this condition can also be productively analysed through the theoretical lenses of Pierre Nora and Walter Benjamin, both of whom place loss at the centre of modern memory and culture. For Nora, modernity is characterised by the loss of living, socially embedded memory, while for Benjamin it is marked by the loss of aura—the unique presence and ritual authority of the artwork. In both accounts, loss triggers processes of substitution: where lived memory disappears, archives and monuments proliferate; where aura fades, reproduction and mass mediation take its place. Memory, like art, becomes representational, mediated, and reproducible. From this perspective, *lieux de mémoire* can be understood as post-auratic substitutes for memory: they attempt to restore the authority and affect once grounded in lived experience, but do so through mediated, institutional means. Nora's *lieux de mémoire* inherit a similar form of authority through national ceremonies, commemorations, museums, and monuments. These sites simulate continuity and authenticity in a context where both have been structurally lost. They condense extended and contested histories into stable symbols, collapsing temporal depth into a timeless present that can be easily mobilised. Experience no longer unfolds slowly through lived remembrance; instead, it is orchestrated through institutional frameworks.

The loss of aura, as Benjamin suggests, enables the politicisation of cultural forms, just as the loss of living memory enables the politicisation of remembrance in Nora's account. *Lieux de mémoire* tend to support national narratives, stabilise meaning, and promote socio-political consensus. In this sense, they function as instruments of political agency: institutional attempts to manage loss by producing controlled representations of the past. Institutionalisation thus operates as compensation. Memory is no longer transmitted organically. Monuments freeze historical meaning, regulate interpretation, and position the nation-state as the primary holder and arbiter of memory.

Conclusively, analysis of chosen examples within the selected theoretical framework demonstrates that the institutionalisation of memory is not merely a process of preservation but also one of mediation, appropriation, and reproduction. Memory is actively transformed from lived, participatory experience into codified, display-oriented, and mass-consumable visual forms through political and cultural intervention. The selected examples, but also the general patterns governing monument-making in the context of Homeland War memorials, exemplify how memory can be curated and repurposed, often at the expense of original context, immediate emotional involvement, and experiential authenticity.

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