This article explores the relationship between art, politics, and memory. It works with Arendt’s conception of works of art as preserving the public realm as spaces of appearance. Following Lyotard, it also argues that such an interpretation of works of art is too redemptive and pardons politics for forgetting the exclusions implicit in its representative models. The article proceeds to articulate the public realm as spaces of anamnesis whereby politics is opened to exteriority or what Lyotard has referred to as the Law. As an example of a space of anamnesis the article examines one specific artwork, namely Rachel Whiteread’s Untitled Monument, which briefly occupied Trafalgar Square’s fourth plinth. The argument concerns Whiteread’s own interest in the theme of memory and how her sculpture interrupts the aestheticized politics of the spectacle and intimates a path for a politicized art that opens the subject to the immemorial.

Keywords: art; public space; communication; memory; anamnesis
One piece of recent work epitomizes such a response. Rachel Whiteread’s *Untitled Monument*, which, in 2001, was given brief tenure of the vacant fourth plinth in London’s Trafalgar Square, engaged directly with art as totality and spectacle. Her sculpture in clear resin made from a cast of the empty plinth “finished” the Square by representing the absence she was charged with overcoming. By reproducing the empty plinth and thereby reproducing the void space she made present the incompleteness of this specific memorial space and challenged its ideological power. While Trafalgar Square does not prove that the aestheticization of politics leads in one direction only, namely to war, it nevertheless demonstrates the close tie between aesthetic spectacle and warfare. As a commemoration of the Battle of Trafalgar of 1805, it is a space celebrating national heroism and is exemplary of the spirit that made Britain “Great.” Its centrepiece is the 185 ft. Nelson’s Column, guarded by the famous lions of Edwin Landseer, with statues on three of the four outer plinths in each corner of the Square. It was built between 1829 and 1841, at which time an equestrian statue of George IV was placed on the first plinth. The next two plinths were to carry statues celebrating two significant Victorian generals. Sir Charles James Napier’s statue was erected in 1855, with that of Sir Henry Havelock being put in place in 1861.¹

This connection between war and the artistic apparatus of spectacle is, of course, evident in an untold number of memorials throughout the world, and while Whiteread’s interest in the theme of memory is well documented and has received much critical attention, *Untitled Monument* nevertheless affords an opportunity for rethinking the relationship between aesthetics, memory, and political space. It is my argument that her sculpture testified to the unpresentable that haunts the spectacle, and the immemorial that disrupts ritualized memory. It is in this sense that the Square, for a short time, became a space of anamnesis, and Whiteread’s work became exemplary for the production of such spaces. To develop this concept of a space of anamnesis, and to articulate the political function of such spaces, this article explores Whiteread’s *Monument* via an address to the work of Hannah Arendt and Jean-François Lyotard for whom art, politics, and memory were inextricably bound to each other.

For Arendt, artworks have a dual function. The first element is Kantian. Here, works of art are moments of enduring and exemplary validity whereby each particular work affords a generalizable rule for practice. Human action is fleeting and temporary, and works of art have a memorial function, preserving human action from the ruin of time; all the artworks of Trafalgar Square might be understood as exemplary in this sense. Second, works of art give human plurality its objectivity, that is, they form the world of objects that mediate the relations between us.² In this regard, their contribution to politics is to preserve the public realm, or what Arendt calls “spaces of appearance,” that is, spaces of freedom in which human beings are disclosed. The Heideggerian inheritance in Arendt’s work means that we are not speaking of a discursive public sphere as such, but a space of presencing and beginnings. It is this second element that shifts the function of art away from the memorial and toward anamnesis, and it is for this reading that it is necessary to turn to Lyotard who sees in Arendt’s analysis of natality a witnessing to non-being, and to the exteriority that is crucial to political anamnesis.

However, although spaces of anamnesis are such because they testify to the unpresentable, the immemorial, and the incommunicable, that is, they testify to the limits of political representation, this is not to say that communication is alien to this conception of the political realm. On the contrary, this article proposes that the public
realm must, on one hand, consist of spaces facilitating commemoration, deliberation, agreement, and consensus, while on the other hand allowing this communicative principle to be questioned by spaces where “consensus is null and void” (Lyotard, 1997, p. 216). Although works of art are preservative, they are also charged with this dissent, and Monument, in particular, was exemplary in this regard.

Space and Memory

One of the seminal aspects of Arendt’s conception of the public realm was her retrieval of its memorial function. She argued that the very purpose of the polis was as “a kind of organized remembrance” (1958, p. 198). Its works guaranteed this space of appearance and recorded the fleeting actions of mortal men. This relation between politics and the preserving function of works, however, is more complicated. Although securing the public realm, works also practice something of an anamnesis regarding the freedom for the sake of which the public realm is to be preserved. To say that Arendt’s On Revolution is a work of political anamnesis means that it documents the loss of and failure to realise the 18th-century revolutionary spirit. What these revolutions forgot was that the culmination of the revolution saw the establishment of a republic where “no room [was] left for the exercise of precisely those qualities which had been instrumental in building it” (1990, p. 232). A new public realm was born, but it withered the space of appearance it was supposed to preserve. The delicate operation that works must perform in Arendt’s philosophy is to secure the objectivity of a space of appearance while also preserving the initiating capacity of human freedom for the sake of which the space is required. The specific issue of the conundrum at the heart of revolutionary foundation illustrates the important and difficult relation between action and work, that is, the deeds that begin something new and the institutions that are supposed to secure the space for those deeds. In her political anamnesis, Arendt remembers the initiating action that is often lost beneath the initiated institution that supposedly ends, or brings to a close, the revolution.

Here, though, a significant qualification with regard to works, in particular works of art, must be introduced. As has been mentioned, there is a tendency for the instrumental nature of works to eclipse the space of appearance and for the public realm to supplant disclosive freedom with a rule-bound functionality. For this reason, Arendt extended her analysis of works beyond overtly political works, such as constitutions, to an analysis of culture in general. Culture, Arendt argues, “indicates that art and politics, their conflicts and tensions notwithstanding, are interrelated and even mutually dependent” (1993, p. 218). This is for two reasons. First, works of art are “the worldliest of all things” (p. 209) because beauty is “the very manifestation of imperishability” (p. 218), and second, they are made “for the sole purpose of appearance” and (ought not to) have any relation to necessity or general utility.

Works of art, then, are neither consumed as commodities nor used up like products. These works, which include all the plastic and literary arts, do not preserve in the manner of laws, which combine to form a constitution. These works are much closer to the action of disclosive freedom, which the constitution with a fateful inadequacy aims to preserve. In other words, their very specific qualities link them very closely to natality, or the poesis and praxis of bringing into being that is the central category in Arendt’s analysis of the political. Great works of art do not simply record exemplary actions but are themselves exemplary. This is suggested in On Revolution, when Arendt
concludes her anamnesis of the lost treasure of the revolutions by turning to poetry, for it is the poets who keep watch over “the storehouse of memory” and only they, who “find and make the words we live by,” can “compensate for this failure or prevent it from becoming final” (1990, p. 280). Here, as the works of government have eroded the space of appearance, it is the poets who remind us of that space and afford us words of exemplary validity.

As is already clear, spaces of appearance are conditioned by the fact of human plurality; and it is this plurality that is the link between the public realm as a space of collective remembrance and the question of communication. However, it must be noted that revelatory speech in the public realm is irreducible to, if not incommensurate with, communication. In The Human Condition, Arendt explicitly distinguishes revelatory speech from communication and therefore the political from consensus formation. “It is true,” she writes, “that speech is extremely useful as a means of communication and information, but as such it could be replaced by a sign language, which then might prove to be even more useful and expedient to convey certain meanings” (1958, p. 19). This challenge is not intended to render communication illegitimate in relation to disclosive freedom. The intention here is simply to note the discrepancy or their lack of fit; and this is the main reason why Arendt’s public realm is irreducible to the notion of a public sphere in the Habermasian sense, for politics can never be reduced to the problem of communicative interaction and the pursuit of agreement. Rather, communicative interaction must always function for the sake of plurality, initiative and revelatory speech, that is, freedom. In this sense Arendt’s analysis of the political includes the collective remembrance of human initiative while also being an anamnesis of that which is yet to be initiated, that is, disclosed.

In this regard, it can be proposed that Arendt’s writings on the public realm perform a qualified anamnesis in that the analysis of spaces of appearance is also a remembering of the concealment out of which entities are given. In Lyotard’s essay “The Survivor” (1993), he recounts Arendt’s debt to Heidegger in the following way: “Rather than nothing, being gives entities, instants, objects. Since being appears in ‘objects’, it gets forgotten. Yet it gives objects, something happens” (p. 147). In this sense, Lyotard has argued that Arendt is an “involuntary witness” (p. 150) to exteriority, that is, she remembers the non-being out of which entities and events are yet to arrive. In this sense Arendt’s public realm is always turned toward that which is not (yet) public. Nevertheless, in her conceptualization of the grammar and syntax of politics in terms of the miracle of action, the forgiveness of speech and the promise realised in the work, her analysis, for Lyotard, becomes too protective, too redemptive. Despite her involuntary witnessing of exteriority, Lyotard notes in Arendt’s work a return from anamnesis to remembrance, that is, to the redeeming quality of work and action, and it is this important difference between remembering and not forgetting that needs to be explored now so that politics might not, as Lyotard sees it, be pardoned.

For Lyotard, anamnesis is remembering “something that never ceases to be forgotten” (1990, p. 3), it is the inhabiting of the mind by “the enigma of a something to which there is no response” (1993, p. 156). It is being open to abandonment and catastrophe. In Heidegger and “the jews,” his most thorough working-through of this abandonment, he begins with the claim that “the memorial is intensely selective; it requires the forgetting of that which may question the community and its legitimacy” (1990, p. 7). This is not to say that communal memory does not remember its rage and hate, on the contrary, one might say it remembers excessively, ritualistically, spectacularly, even. The monuments to our war dead are ubiquitous, but Lyotard’s point is that
these memorials edify, converting a trauma that may threaten the (communal) subject into an affirmation of its value and security.

Two excellent examples of this can be found in the work of Michael Rowlands (1999). On the subject of sublimation and sacrifice in war memorials, Rowlands offers two instances of amendments being made to the design of memorials where the original designs did not sufficiently edify the memory of the dead. On both occasions, the original designs opened memory to the disaster and abandonment. Considering, in the first instance, Australian memorials to the Anzacs, he argues that “the celebration of the Anzacs reverses the ignominious creation of Australian identity in colonial servitude as a penal colony” (p. 133). He adds that the memorials also announce the saving of the “other” and the contribution to the maintenance of Western civilization. The memorials are, or should, atone for past sins and represent the birth of a nation.

While the memorial in Canberra objectifies these ideals, the original design for the memorial in Sydney was rejected for insufficiently performing the edification required. The first design depicted a naked woman, perhaps dead, semicrucified, her arms hang lifelessly from a cross post, while beneath her lie the broken bodies of four dead soldiers. In the end this chosen design was rejected as, in Rowlands’s words, the “birth of the nation as a literal description of male death was incompatible with its idealization in martyrdom and the regenerative aspects of sacrifice” (p. 134). It was replaced by a second design of a naked male lying on a shield, supported by a column of three clothed females representing the living sacrifice of the mourners; the mother, the sister, and the wife.

Rowlands’s (1999) second example is the Vietnam memorial in Washington, which takes the form of a 500 ft. V-shape made from two walls of black granite. He describes it as antimonumental due to the fact that it refuses the passivity of the spectacle. The granite acts like a polished mirror reflecting the image of each person that visits, while the names are not recorded as having contributed to a glorious cause. The memorial, writes Rowlands, has “an individualizing motive . . . that denies the inscriptions an existence as a timeless, numinous image of the nation to which the viewers might submit themselves” (p. 141). Instead, the monument is “interrogative,” it “implies terrible questions about futility” (p. 141). As a space that questions and resists closure, the Washington memorial may be considered a space of anamnesis. At least it was for a time. At the inauguration of the memorial in 1982, complaints concerning the alienation and betrayal suggested by the design precipitated two additions to the site. The first is a figurative bronze of three soldiers standing tall in the face of war; a flagpole and a statue of a group of nurses being added shortly after. Whereas the granite bears witness to something unrepresentable, to catastrophe and the immemorial, the additional bronzes edify loss as bravery and righteous sacrifice.

This does not mean that the remembrance is converted into a pleasurable experience, it simply means that something is gleaned from the memory to lessen the pain, a pain that is potentially devastating. In Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1991), Freud adds the “economic” to the other two components (topographic and dynamic) of metapsychology to consider how consciousness “yields” pleasure rather than pain. His conclusion is that there must be a “protective shield” between consciousness and perception that diverts, or perhaps removes, that which is painful to another scene. Through the memorial, trauma is edified to limit the damage. One remembers in order to forget or, as Lyotard (1990) puts it, “One expends to minimize and control absolute expenditure, the threat of liquification (the flood), the undoing of the social bond” (p. 8). The protective shield, then, is economic in that it returns a yield.
itical in that the yield is the restoration of the community. What we might choose to call memorial politics, remembers only those differences that might further identity. It remembers antagonism to broker consensus. It remembers silence to extend communication. Memorial, redemptive politics will always exclude and render illegitimate anything that threatens the subject. Always refusing the disaster, the catastrophe, always shoring itself up against dissolution. Politics remembers in order to forget. Memorial politics expends to minimize expenditure.

In *Heidegger and “the jews”* (1990), Lyotard writes of a debt that threatens this absolute expenditure. In the opening pages of that essay he refers to this debt as a “fact,” the fact being “that one is obligated before the Law” (p. 3). This fact—that we never begin but always respond, that our spontaneity is a judgment or an action linked onto something already given, that the Other always precedes us, that there is exteriority—suggests to Lyotard that anamnesis is ethical rather than political, or that the political needs to be thought in terms of this ethical obligation. We must not forget that we do forget. Likewise, aesthetics must be a commitment to anaesthesia, that is, a questioning, if not a refusal of forms, forms which, like the public memorials, preserve a community of addressees. If we were to compare Lyotard’s aesthetics to Arendt’s, we would find the sublime where Arendt posits the beautiful. Committed to witnessing the debt, art does not seek the redemption of saying the unsayable, as an ideal politics might strive to include the unincludable; rather, it “says that it cannot say it” (p. 47). Anamnesis in art and politics does not mean making a full account of things, of forms and events; it means remaining accountable, being held responsible to that which resists.

As in Levinasian ethics, the immemorial functions here as a challenge to the pretensions of the thinking, representing subject. It is a disturbance that shifts the site of subjectivity from intentionality to responsibility and signifies the discomfort and restlessness of this situation.

But how can the immemorial come to mind if it is truly immemorial? Lyotard (1990) tells us that “these connotations are contradictory only for a philosophy of consciousness, be it phenomenological, epistemological, or politological. They are not contradictory in the framework of the hypothesis of a deep unconscious—where there are no representations, not even disguised, indirect, reworked, reshaped ones” (p. 11). Through the analogy of primary repression, and a study of its dynamics, it is possible to consider the immemorial as antecedent obligation. To return to the Freudian metapsychology introduced above, this deep unconscious is in excess of any representational procedures and yet it has an affectivity beyond the resistances of the ego, cutting into it in the immaturity of the psychic apparatus. In this sense, it might be said that it is prior to any conscious memory—and has not been forgotten, in the simple sense of a misplaced or temporarily lost experience—as it was not given to consciousness in the first place. Although Lyotard is not suggesting that immemorial obligation is some form of Freudian “instinct,” he is utilizing this theory of primary repression as an analogy for the possibility and affectivity of the unrepresentable and an origin that consciousness cannot trace.

**Spaces of Anamnesis**

In Arendt’s analysis of the political, spaces of appearance preserve speech and action in works while also bearing witness to the non-being out of which actors will
emerge and into which they will shortly disappear. As such, there is a key moment in which Arendt’s thought is turned to the enigmatic, and to that which resists. This remainder, however, is often obliterated in interpretations of Arendt’s work. Perhaps it is seen as being too metaphysical, impractical, or difficult to systematize. At the heart of the problem is the issue of alterity. The attraction of Arendt’s philosophy for many political theorists lies not in its anamnesis but in its formulation of difference and for discovering what Seyla Benhabib (1992) has called “a procedure for ascertaining intersubjective validity in the public realm” (p. 132); a reference to Arendt’s deployment of the Kantian sensus communis as the reflective objectification of human plurality. This deployment of the sensus communis, which should be treated with some skepticism given that Kant (1951) himself declares that the validity he speaks of “is not to be based on any collecting of the suffrages of others” (p. 122), is seen to be the panacea for a politics of difference where notions of the good and the just are open to reflection and are not seen to be determined in advance. However, this conception of alterity leaves no room for the anamnesis of exteriority qua exteriority. It is, therefore, not immune to totalitarianism.

In a satirical piece entitled “Marie Goes to Japan,” Lyotard (1997) paints a picture of differentiated cultural streams feeding into the informational archive he calls the “museum.” He outlines an emergent relationship between difference and system where capitalism has found a marketplace for singularities:

Their multiculturalism, minorities, singularities had no future in the culture industry a hundred years ago. Except as a Colonial Exhibit. This obligates many strategies of capture and exploitation. Finally, it becomes profitable. People get bored, they have enough of snacking always on the same images, the same ideas at the cultural fast-food outlets, they need a little something live and unexpected. (p. 11)

This is also a theme running throughout Lyotard’s earlier work, and the essays that were to contribute most directly to this critique of the informational archive can be found in The Inhuman (1991). In an essay entitled “Time Today,” an early version of the informational archive was presented as a version of Leibniz’s God who is the “absolute monad to the extent that he conserves in complete retention the totality of information constituting the world” (p. 60). Governed by the principle of performativity, that is the legitimation of every entity according to its performance as an exchangeable commodity, communication is only likely “to extend and reinforce the ‘great monad’” (p. 69):

It seems to me that the anxiety prevalent today in the philosophical and political domain about “communication”, kommunikative Handeln, “pragmatics”, transparency in the expression of opinions, etc., has practically no relation with the “classical” philosophical and politico-legal problems relative to the foundation of Gemeinschaft, Mitsein, and even Öffentlichkeit as thought by the Enlightenment.

If we are to interrogate properly this compulsion to communicate and to secure the communicability of anything at all (objects, services, values, ideas, languages, tastes) . . . we must, I think, give up the philosophy of the emancipation of humanity implied by “classical” modern metaphysics. (pp. 61-62)

Although it may be argued that Lyotard overplays the criticism of communicative politics, given the current status of communication and the articulation of difference
within the biopolitics of neoliberalism, there remains a case for arguing that a politics resistant to totalizing projects must not only articulate difference and alterity but must also bear witness to the incommunicable.⁶

For a few months Trafalgar Square, this memorial to British imperial subjectivity, was opened to the incommunicable by the re-presentation of its lacuna, that is the representation of its incompleteness. Even if Whiteread’s intention was not political, it remains, as an intervention in the space of commemoration, a politicized artwork. However, to understand this work in its full (political) complexity it is necessary to move away from the simple division between memorial and immemorial, communication and the incommunicable, and deploy something less dogmatic. In this regard, while still working within the spirit of Lyotard’s writings, which constantly turn us toward an exteriority that disturbs our realm of intelligibility and representation, I think it is helpful to borrow something akin to Bakhtin’s (1981) conception of language with its copresent centripetal and centrifugal forces to see that one need not abandon communication while bearing witness to the incommunicable.

Every utterance for Bakhtin, and this can be extended, I believe, to every action, is a play of assonance and dissonance, of unity and disunity, with the balance between centripetal and centrifugal forces operating to a different degree in each case. One might add that it is also dependent on the genre of discourse, to use Lyotard’s idiom, in which the utterance or action takes place. In this manner, we can see a range of communicative practices at work in the space of anamnesis signaled by Whiteread’s sculpture. It is possible to separate Untitled Monument into at least four generic moments which I will distinguish as the historical, the formal, the technical, and the ethical, with only the ethical being the moment of anamnesis.

In relation to the historical, and art history in particular, it is clear that Whiteread, in making a cast of the plinth, recognizes the aesthetic beauty of the plinth itself. Here she is recognizing the value of traditional forms and aesthetic codes that situates this piece of contemporary art very much within the tradition of monumental sculpture. It might be said that this is the conservative, certainly centripetal, aspect of this piece of work. The formal follows on from this, and I am using the term here to describe Whiteread’s engagement with the question of what (monumental) sculpture ought to be. In the formal genre, the very rules of artistic production are at stake. This is what Lyotard has referred to as experimentation in the aesthetic field. Here the work is critical. Although Whiteread’s work is avant-garde, in that it continually seeks a new rule for artistic production, there remains a continued engagement with the questions first raised, for example, by Bruce Nauman in 1965, when his A Cast of the Space Under My Chair addressed the ambiguous relation of presence and absence that is such a central concern to Whiteread’s engagement with space. The formal is then a mix of assonance and dissonance, continuity and discontinuity, the centripetal and centrifugal forces that are the spirit of creative experimentation.

The technical, in turn, follows on from the formal. Here Whiteread is asking questions not only about the rules of production but also about material possibilities. In producing Untitled Monument, Whiteread set up a dialogue with parties normally outside the art world. According to Bentley Chemicals (www.bentleychemicals.co.uk/casestudy_plinth.html), the company who developed the material used for the cast, “‘Monument’ by Rachel Whiteread is made from a specially developed new resin and is the result of pioneering teamwork between the artist, the fabricators and Bentley Chemicals.” The sculpture is made from 11 tons of a water-clear resin called Cristal Clear 207. Not only did a new resin need developing, so too did a method of pouring
to ensure a mold free of bubbles. In many respects, this is the most idealized form of communication. Heterogeneous parties pooling resources to further advances in their respective areas of knowledge. It is very interesting to see the demands of an avant-garde artist precipitating not only artistic but also chemical and engineering invention and two parties whose different universes may have been incommensurable finding common ground. Again, these creative activities that are centrifugal, in the sense that they are moving away from conventional methods, are also centripetal as they discover new communicative routes.

The tripartite division of the historical, the formal, and the technical demonstrates how, in this instance, what I am calling a space of anamnesis remains a space of communication. Other spaces would clearly require specific analyses of the genres of discourse from which they are formed to assess their communicative possibilities. The final moment of the ethical, however, is what defines a space as a space of anamnesis, and this quality remains constant for all such spaces. The ethical, as mentioned above, pertains to an obligation before the Law. The ethical is a turning toward an antecedent obligation, the source of which we cannot recover. It is the limit to our capacity as author and authority. The Law is the fact that the Other precedes and is heterogeneous to us; it is also the law of our forgetting. No matter how much we seek to remember this condition of being obligated before the Law, we are never adequate to it. There remains an outside. This means that if the Law directs us to anything, it directs us toward remembering that we forget, remembering that we exclude. Anamnesis faces up to this enigma, not to ward it off, not to expend to minimize expenditure, but to open thought and language to its presence, to the Thing, unforgettable yet always forgotten (Lyotard, 1991, p. 143). Whiteread’s re-presentation of absence does precisely this.

Her earlier sculpture entitled House epitomized her interrogation of the conceptual pairings of creation and destruction, presence and absence. House was a cast of the interior of a Victorian house due for demolition. It was completed in 1993. House stood as a testament to destruction. It was a reminder of that particular house and that particular street. It was a reminder of the shortage of houses, a reminder of the fragility of a house so solidly built. It was a witness to nonbeing and an anamnesis of the foreign within the domestic. House was very much a disturbance. It was testimony to the fact that we would rather forget. It was the kind of objectivity we can do without. Having been judged to be ugly, House was demolished in 1994. For these reasons, House didn’t simply remember or record another time but presented us with an image of our own transitory, finite being. It faced us with a life (time) stripped bare, signifying our limit, our vulnerability and the enigma of existence. It exposed us to the absolute expenditure that edifying memory protects us against.

In Untitled (Five Shelves), the cast of the space around five bookshelves, we are given the materialization of the empty space but also the imprint of the now absent books. Whiteread’s choice of object here is not innocent. To produce the sculpture, Whiteread has altered the usual positioning of the books. They are turned so that the edges of the pages are traced rather than the spines. While this is no doubt an aesthetic decision, it is also a conceptual one in that Whiteread wishes us to contemplate not just the books, but the pages of words presented in response to the world. These five shelves are a metonym for the exegesis with which human beings are at once enthralled and burdened. This becomes even more evident when considering her design for the Judenplatz Holocaust Memorial. Here, the same device is used, only the metonym is more pronounced. The cast of bookshelves that make up the walls of the memorial clearly refers not to books in general but to the Book and the myriad inter-
pretations it has occasioned. Again, this is not a memorial but an anamnesis that presents us with the enigma. It does not only remember the traumatic events of the Shoa but performs an anamnesis through witnessing the incomplete nature of our knowledge and the fragility of our claim to truth. More writing will always be required because something always remains. The fact that the Judenplatz design is for a building that cannot be entered only adds to this expression of limitation.

*Untitled Monument* continues these explorations of presence and absence. It deals directly with the monumental and the memorial. For this commemoration of British grandeur and enterprise, Whiteread was to contribute a sensitive yet radical gesture. Her response to the request to fill the empty plinth and temporarily “complete” the Square was to re-present the void; to restate the absence or lack that she was asked to negate. Although sensitive to the aesthetics of the Square, Whiteread refused its ideological and political power by purposefully reproducing its incompleteness. The transparent cast is in many respects an antimonument, and yet such an oppositional reading fails to address what is at stake here. *Untitled Monument* is not a snub of traditional architectural and monumental sculpture; rather, it traces its own contradiction, namely that such memorial politics can only function through forgetting. The spectacle of the Square can only work via an omission. The doubling of the empty plinth echoes this exclusion and for a brief time made visible the catastrophe. In this way, Whiteread’s work was exemplary for producing a space of anamnesis.

Trafalgar Square, as does any other commemorative public space, clearly demonstrates the link between politics and art. Art is employed to present a specific narrative history tied to the formation of a particular subjectivity, be that heroic, worthy, righteous, or strong. This is the aestheticized politics that Benjamin linked to totalitarianism and it is a politics that must be resisted. This resistance, however, is misguided if it makes art necessarily complicit, that is, if art is seen to be in some fundamental way dangerous when thought in relation to politics; that art somehow infects politics with an unreality, or automatically assists politics in the construction of an illusion. In response to this criticism, this article has sought to show precisely how art is politicized without having to espouse a specific ideology. Perhaps more than any other human activity, art has the means to challenge common sense, to question the community in which it was produced, and to turn that community to its outside. And it is this anamnesis alone that refuses any and every fundamentalism. The “collective remembrance” of works of art thus becomes the preservation of a question without response; the incommunicable amid communication. In a world threatened by the certainty and bellicosity of political actors, such an intervention must not be dismissed.

Notes

1. The fourth plinth has never had a permanent statue, despite various nominations being proposed. At present, the decision regarding the use of the plinth is overseen by the Fourth Plinth Commissioning Group, who, at the time of writing, have decided the next sculpture to occupy the plinth will be “Alison Lapper Pregnant” by Marc Quinn.

2. To be deprived of this space is to be deprived of reality. Arendt writes: “To men the reality of the world is guaranteed by the presence of others, by its appearing to all . . . and whatever lacks this appearance comes and passes away like a dream, intimately and exclusively our own but without reality” (1958, p. 199). The Heraclitus fragment referred to here reads: “The waking have one world in common; sleepers have each a private world of his own” (Wheelwright,
1959, p. 20). It is numbered 15 in the edition used here. It is numbered 89 in the Diels-Kranz edition referred to by Arendt.

3. In The Human Condition (1958), Arendt warns against a devouring consumer culture where everything is drawn into “the never-ending cycle of man’s metabolism” (p. 126), thus threatening the stability of the world.

4. According to Freud (1991),

Protection against stimuli is an almost more important function for the living organism than reception of stimuli. The protective shield is supplied with its own store of energy and must above all endeavour to preserve the special modes of transformation of energy operating in it against the effects threatened by the enormous energies at work in the external world—effects which tend towards a leveling out of them and hence towards destruction. (p. 299)

5. I do not wish to discuss Lyotard’s choice of the phrase “the jews” to stand for the dismissal of the debt. I would only say that it is apposite in that Lyotard’s discussion of the immemorial here is also a discussion of the Heidegger “affair” and therefore the persecution in which he was implicated. It is, however, awkward given the plight of the Palestinians, and this despite Lyotard’s qualification that “the Jews” does not designate the real Jews (1990, p. 3).


References


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