ADDRESSING AMNESIA PERFORMING TRAUMA

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monochrom

INTRA Förderung für inter- und transdisziplinäre Projekte Universität für angewandte Kunst Wien

kunstgeschichte

diː'ʌngewʌndtə

City of Vienna

Imprint

Bibliografische Information
Der Deutschen Bibliothek

Die Deutsche Bibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über http://dnb.ddb.de abrufbar.

Bibliographic Information published by Die Deutsche Bibliothek

Die Deutsche Bibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data is available in the internet at http://dnb.ddb.de.

ISBN: 978-3-902796-88-2

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This publication was supported by INTRA Förderung für inter- und transdisziplinäre Projekte Universität für Angewandte Kunst Wien, Kunstgeschichte Institut Universität für Angewandte Kunst Wien and the City of Vienna.

Performing History, Excavating Time:

Alexandra Pirici and Nicholas Galanin Deconstructing the Temporal Politics of Monuments

Eva Kernbauer

Among historical, modern and contemporary types of artworks, monuments have a singularly direct connection to time and history. Built in stone, often in precious materials, and typically on a large scale, they are erected to impress and to last, promising to surpass the passage of time. Many of the oldest known surviving architectural structures are monuments, and as many of them were built for triumphal or funerary purposes, their memorial function is indebted to a concept of history as viewed through the lens of exemplary individuals: conquerors, rulers, heroes, 'makers of history.' However, they may also serve to remember many, sometimes anonymous individuals, as attested most importantly in Europe by monuments commemorating the Shoa.[1]

While the term 'monumental' has derived from their size, the historiographical function of monuments is also inscribed in their name, as the Latin word 'monere' means 'to remind' or 'to warn.' Politically, erecting monuments to commemorate specific individuals or events is a powerful instrument to claim these (and the specific values attributed to them) as important for a community by visibly marking public space and promising a final verdict on history. The effect of monuments is temporal as well as spatial. By their scale and specific materiality they claim eternal presence and validity, and this works both ways: they seem 'always' to have been there, and to have been built to last 'forever.' This sense of permanence is, paradoxically, anti-historical: events, or persons, as well as the monuments themselves, appear as timeless, as not part of a past that must permanently, on all levels of historical engagement (academic, popular, political, artistic), be open to being questioned and discussed and, by each new generation, told anew.

It is important to note that this power play is, itself, performative, and deeply connected to the way monuments mask their own performativity:[2] Effectively proclaiming a historical closure in the form of specific narrations and interpretations, monuments move history, and politics, as it were, onto an iconic stage outside of time, present, and reality. This towering aesthetic presence, yet removal from the present is, I believe, what Robert Musil's much-quoted observation on the invisibility of monuments[3] actually describes. Also, their hyper-invisibility serves to mask the way monuments elude present space and time, spreading out and away into the past and the future. Questioning monuments and their political and aesthetic implications, reclaiming their temporal and spatial presence and, thus, their historicity, are therefore matters of urgency in democratic societies, which ideally, are based upon a constant, public discussion and renegotiation of values.

In recent years, a critique of the general practice of erecting monuments to honor individuals, and specifically those whose values and contributions to society are highly questionable, has taken up force. This has been supported by activist interventions such as (among many examples) the toppling and later removal of a statue of slave trader Edward Colston in Bristol, of White supremacist Cecil Rhodes in Capetown, and the beheading, and then demolition of a statue of Josephine de Beauharnais, who is believed to have moved her husband Napoléon Bonaparte to reinstating slavery in the French colonial empire for personal gain.[4] In Vienna, a public debate accompanied by activist interventions around a statue of former mayor Karl Lueger has been ongoing for more than a decade. Erected in 1926, at a public site formerly reserved for imperial representation, the Lueger statue was instrumental in whitewashing the memory of a politician criticized even during his own lifetime for specializing in deploying populist antisemitism to further his own career and for thriving on an autocratic understanding of power and personal pomp. But while in 2012, this led to renaming a prominent segment of Vienna's Ring boulevard from 'Dr. Karl Lueger Ring' to 'Universitätsring,' concrete measures by the city government concerning the Lueger statue on the square also bearing his name have been slow, although proposals to redesign and rename the site abound. In 2009, the winning project of an unofficial competition by Klemens Wihlidal proposed to have the statue tilted by 3,5 degrees, and therefore effectively questioned. Recently, the city government has decided to have a temporary installation by Nicole Six and Paul Petritsch installed at the site, with another competition organized in 2023/24 intended to result in a permanent artistic framing of the statue.[5] In this debate, renaming the square or removing the statue to a museum, has been mostly considered as 'erasing history,' as if statues or architecture were inherent parts of history, not part of their interpretation and representation.

Conversely, activist interventions such as transforming or toppling statues attest to an active engagement with the spatial and temporal politics of democracy, with what Elzbieta Matynia describes as 'performative democracy.'[6] Following Hannah Arendt's conception of the public, political sphere as a 'space of appearance,' Matynia foregrounds the validity and effectiveness of performativity in politics, which is conceived as a stage on which to speak, and act, explicitly citing art as an

[1] This important rupture in the history and function of monuments since the second half of the 20th century is clearly outlined in: Marita Sturken, "Monuments," in *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, vol. 3, ed. Michael Kelly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 272-76.

[2] Kaitlin M. Murphy describes this performativity similarly in: Murphy, "Fear and loathing in monuments: Rethinking the politics and practices of monumentality and monumentalization," *Memory Studies* 14, no. 6 (2021): 1143–58, accessed July 5, 2022, https://journals.sagepub.com doi/10.1177/17506980211054271.

[3] "Aside from the fact that you never know whether to refer to them as monuments or memorials, monuments do have all kinds of other characteristics. The most salient of these is a bit contradictory; namely, that monuments are so conspicuously inconspicuous. There is nothing in this world as invisible as a monument." Robert Musil, *Posthumous Papers of a Living Author* (original German title Nachlass zu Lebzeiten), trans. Peter Wortsman (Hygiene, Colorado: Eridanos Press, 1987), 61.

[4] Cf. Yifat Gutman and Jenny Wüstenberg, eds., *The Routledge Handbook on Memory Activism* (London: Routledge, 2023); see also the impressive research website Contested Histories Initiative, accessed July 5, 2022, https://contested-dhistories.org/resources/case-studies/statue-of-josephine-de-beauharnais-in-fort-de-france/.

Fig. 01: Alexandra Pirici, *If You Don't Want Us, We Want You*, Intervention in public space, Bucharest, 2011.

instrument to create moments of public exchange and agency.[7] While Matynia uses the concept to describe situations in which individuals may experience and perceive themselves as politically present and active, it is important to see that performativity connects both monuments and anti-monument activism and artistic projects engaging with monuments.[8] It is important to highlight that the statues in question function just as well as built, human-made 'spaces of appearance,' as they derive their power precisely from masking their own historicity and political contingency.

In what follows, I will examine artistic interventions that engage with the performativity of monuments by addressing their temporal politics and creating situations apt to be experienced as performative democracy. The artworks and interventions created by Alexandra Pirici and Nicholas Galanin succinctly undermine the temporal logic of monuments, challenging them both politically and aesthetically, and proposing innovative performative engagements with history. This needs some theoretical groundwork. I will, therefore, start out by arguing how performativity is inherent to history and essential to contemporary art, and how the performative and the historiographical turns in art complement and reinforce each other.

II

While the first out of these two examples (by Alexandra Pirici) can be categorized as dance or performance art, the performative turn in art comprises artistic practice on a more general level, and, potentially, the whole spectrum of artistic expression. The terms 'performance' and 'performativity' have entered cultural theory via linguistic theory and the philosophy of language,[9] but have been decisively reconceptualized to include visual and spatial 'acts', including artworks.[10] Within the arts, the performative turn has led to a shift in interest from the creation and interpretation of symbols and signs to processual aspects of artistic creation, use, and social exchange. While performance as an artistic practice highlights these developments, performativity is just as effective in artworks that use other media and formats. It reinforces relational and processual aspects of art,[11] examines the political agency of creating and disseminating images,[12] and integrates social aspects of performativity from technology, management, and self-care.[13] In this text, I will use performativity in the broader sense in the analysis of contemporary art: if viewed as 'acts' that may possibly be re-staged and repeated, artworks appear as social actions that do not just express specific intentions or formal processes. Instead, they lay the groundwork for meaning to be created 'performatively,' subject to spatial, temporal, and audience-related contexts.

On the other hand, since 2007, when Mark Godfrey explored the connections between contemporary art and history in his essay "The artist as historian,"[14] the interest in artistic historiography has grown. History offers many topics acutely relevant to art engaging with social and political issues, and it touches upon central questions of representing, imagining, and shaping reality. The importance of history as a field of artistic exploration is underscored by the growing readiness to perceive

[5] Both the temporary project and the competition for a permanent contextualization are supervised by Kunst im Öffentlichen Raum Wien (Art in Public Space Vienna), accessed July 5, 2022, https://www.koer.or.at/en/projects/lueger-temporaer/.

[6] Elzbieta Matynia, 2009 as pointed out in *Art in Times of Gray Democracy*, ed. Julia Kurz, Joanna Warsza, and Franciska Zólyom (Leipzig: Spector Books, 2014); cf. also Isabell Lorey, "Presentist democracy: reconceptualizing the present," in *The documenta 14 Reader*, ed. Quinn Latimer and Adam Szymczyk (Munich: Prestel, 2017), 159–202.

[7] Cf. "The Logics of Performative Democracy. Elzbieta Matynia in conversation with Joanna Warsza," in Kurz and Warsza, *Art in Times of Gray Democracy*, 7, 15. The importance of performativity in politics is inherent to older concepts in political theory as well, for instance, in Juergen Habermas' writing.

[8] Mechtild Widrich has coined the term "Perfomative Monuments" for these types of artistic interventions, while briefly commenting on the performativity of monuments. Cf. Widrich, *Performative Monuments: The Rematerialisation of Public Art* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), 9.

[9] Cf. J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198245537.001.0001.

[10] Cf. Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance*, trans. Saskya Iris Jain (New York: Routledge, 2008), https://doiorg/10.4324/9780203894989; Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997), https://doiorg/10.4324/9780203948682.

artworks that engage with the past, with archives, with memory, or with identity from the perspective of historiography, and to speak of a 'historiographical turn'[15] in contemporary art and curatorship, both from political and philosophical perspectives. This debate has been integrated into a critical debate on the historicity of contemporary art,[16] which radically revaluates artistic engagements with history.[17]

Examining recent developments of historical inquiry within the theoretical framework of performativity is instructive in the way history is practiced, challenged, and continually rewritten. Instead of contributing to its consolidation as a fixed set of facts, information, and knowledge, history is constantly being reworked. In their examinations of history, artistic practices exemplarily shift emphasis from representing historical knowledge towards performatively creating and staging it, thereby foregrounding aspects of materiality, mediality, temporality, and intersubjectivity.

But even if we look at history in a more conventional sense, outside artistic engagements, we will find that performativity is inherent to the concept of history all along. Historiography, or historical 'writing,' encompasses written, oral, and pictographic accounts of history.[18] As the term 'history' comprises both the narration or depiction, and the course of events, controlling the first is deeply intertwined with sovereignty over the second: writing history is making it as well.[19] This is true in respect to the often-quoted conviction that "history is written by the winners," and to the way that any form of writing, depicting, or performing history – academic, popular, or artistic – may be considered a "way of world-making."[20]

In recent decades, we are witnessing a multiplication of subjects recording, sharing, and commenting upon what they consider important events, which entails an expansion of the authorship of history in both senses of the term: writing and making. Superficially, this transformation may be interpreted as an increase in the importance of popular history at the expense of academic history. But this differentiation fails to comprehensively grasp the recent shift, especially when we consider how politics has always been more dependent on popular opinion than on academic history as a guideline, and certainly continues to do so in post-democratic regimes. As many scholars argue, history has been confronted with profound social, institutional, and technological change.[21] Historical knowledge is no longer primarily conveyed in written form and governed by national institutions such as universities, museums, and archives. Instead, a "readiness for history"[22] is attested by the ongoing creation and global proliferation of mobile, circulating (audio-)visuality: present- and presence-oriented images and voices that are constantly shared, commented on, revoked, and re-used. Consequently, institutional, technical, and political challenges expand history in terms of its actors, subjects, content, concepts, instruments, and forms of dissemination. From a system of representation, history has become one of performativity.

[11] Cf. Dorothea Hantelmann, *How to Do Things with Art: The Meaning of Art's Performativity* (Zurich: JRP Ringier, 2010); Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012); Sabeth Buchmann, Ilse Lafer, and Constanze Ruhm, eds., *Putting Rehearsals to the Test: Practices of Rehearsal in Fine Arts, Film, Theater, Theory, and Politics* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016).

[12] Cf. Eva Kernbauer, "Establishing Belief: Harun Farocki and Andrei Ujica, Videograms of a Revolution," *Grey Room*, no. 41 (2010): 72–87, https://doi.org/10.1162/GREY_a_00014; Katarzyna Ruchel-Stockmans, *Images Performing History: Photography and Representations of the Past in European Art after 1989* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2015); Eva Kernbauer, *Art, History, and Anachronic Interventions since 1990* (New York: Routledge, 2021).

[13] Cf. Sven Lütticken, "General Performance," *e-flux Journal*, no. 31 (January 2012), accessed July 5, 2022, http://www.e-flux.com/journal/general-performance/; Jon McKenzie, *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance* (London: Routledge, 2001), https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203420058.

[14] Mark Godfrey, "The Artist as Historian," *October* no. 120 (Spring 2007): 140–72, https://doi.org/10.1162/octo.2007.120.1.140.

[15] Cf. Dieter Roelstraete, "After the Historiographic Turn: Current Findings," *e-flux Journal* no. 6 (May 2009), accessed July 5, 2022, https://www.e-flux.com/journal/06/61402/after-the-historiographic-turn-current-findings/.

[16] Cf. Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art* (London: Verso, 2013); Juliane Rebentisch, "The Contemporaneity of Contemporary Art," *New German Critique 42*, no. 1/124 (February 2015): 223–37, https://doi.org/10.1215/0094033X-2753672.

Within this context, contemporary art may contribute to shaping historical narratives, and to questioning the models of representation on which these narrations are founded. This entails an inclusion of formerly marginalized histories, but also aims at a reconfiguration of history that includes a critique of artistic representation. Performing with monuments effectively highlights the performativity of history, as performativity in the arts directly answers to the inherently performative character of history as a series of events and their depiction/narration. Transforming monuments entails questioning representation as a tool of spatial and social hegemony, and helps identify its non-natural, non-necessary, contingent aspects.

Alexandra Pirici's work is an ideal entry point into artworks opening up history and historiography performatively, both on a conceptual and a directly artistic level, as her prime instruments are, indeed, performance and dance. Pirici has engaged with public monuments from early on:[23] Among her first pieces is an intervention in public space in Bucharest. Financed by the National Dance Center Bucharest, If You Don't Want Us, We Want You (2011, fig. 01) is a performative intervention at the public statue of Carol I, a classical 19th-century equestrian statue, located in the center of the Romanian capital. For several hours daily over the course of two weeks, a group of dancers, including Pirici herself, imitated the pose of horse and rider, "adding to"[24] the monument, and subverting its temporal logic. The artist followed with Soft Power – Sculptural Additions to Petersburg Monuments at the 2014 Manifesta in Saint Petersburg, which included similar interventions at the sites of monuments dedicated to Peter the Great, Catherine the Great, and the Lenin Statue at Finland Station (fig. 02).

Pirici describes these choreographies as living sculptures, thus laying the foundation for a confrontative engagement with the aesthetics of monuments, "placing human bodies and live presence in the human scale in relation to the apparent immutability of bronze or stone and these oversized representations of human subjects and also of particular historical narratives."[25] The liveness and presence of the performing human bodies are used directly to challenge the materiality and temporality of the large-scale monuments they "add to," surround, comment, and imitate. Highlighting the impact of the liveness of her choreographies conceptually leads to early performance theory which considered performance art alongside paradigms of presence and liveness, while, since, the interdependence between liveness and mediatization has been foregrounded.[26] However, the approximation of her choreographies to sculptures rather points to a challenge of the temporal politics of monuments. If Pirici's dancers perform as living sculptures, then they appear on site as small-scale, imperfect bodies clad in contemporary garb, co-habiting the space dominated and controlled by the huge equestrian statue and forcibly bringing it back to the here and now. Her choreographies do not use liveness and mobility as contrasting what may be assumed as the statue's aesthetics of permanence, but rather lend themselves to exploring and foregrounding its impermanence and mutability. Indeed, instead of hailing back to antiquity, or to the baroque era, or at least to the 19th-century historicism which it broadly stylistically evokes, the statue dedicated to Carol I is actually a replica of a

[17] Cf. Kernbauer, *Anachronic Interventions.*

[18] Cf. Daniel Woolf, *A Global History of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Daniel Woolf and Axel Schneider, eds., *The Oxford History of Historical Writing*, Volume 5, Historical Writing since 1945 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780199225996.001.0001; Michael Bentley, ed., *Companion to Historiography* (London: Routledge, 1997), https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203991459

[19] Cf. Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); Reinhart Koselleck and Wolf-Dieter Stempel, eds., *Geschichte – Ereignis und Erzählung* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1973).

[20] Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1978).

[21] Cf. Ludmilla Jordanova, *History in Practice* (London: Bloomsbury, 2000).

[22] Vivian Sobchack, ed., *The Persistence of History: Cinema, Television, and the Modern Event* (New York: Routledge, 1996), https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203700396.

[23] Cf. Mechtild Widrich on a larger selection of Pirici's early "performative monuments": Widrich, "Moving Monuments in the Age of Social Media," *Future Anterior 15*, no. 2 (Winter 2018): 133–144.

monument erected to the first Romanian king 25 years after his death in 1939, which was taken down only eight years later by the communist regime, its material re-used for a Lenin statue. In 2007, a near-reproduction (in order not to conflict with the original's authorship) was erected on its former site, with Pirici's performance of dancers taking place four years later. Therefore, in *If You Don't Want Us, We Want You*, the mounted king on the pedestal was by far the youngest participant in the choreography. Thus, the performing human bodies and the one carved in stone shared a present very much under debate at the time of the performance.

Pirici's choreographies remind us of the specific historicity of monuments, their 'liveness,' as it were, in the sense of occupying present space as much as present time, their 'here' as much as their 'now.' While monuments may superficially appear as history or heritage, Pirici's intervention allows us to view them as "impositions" on our space and time, testing how to relate to them, and live with them in our own historical present.[27]

III

Performance art remains an important instrument, particularly in zones of political conflict, whenever artistic or political expression is limited by censorship and surveillance. Especially when addressing history or collective memory as represented by national institutions and symbols, live interventions, actions, and performances are often set to explore the whole range of paradoxes lingering in the way performance art is being perceived and discussed: bodies are set against text; authenticity against ideology. However, this distinction is a superficial one, which, if examined closely, collapses in examples both of early and more recent performance art.

In many ways, Pirici's interventions in Bucharest and St. Petersburg resemble those of the Korean performance group Esprit Group, which was active in the 1970s at the time of the repressive Yushin regime. Many of the Esprit Group members were trained as sculptors, and they repeatedly engaged with national monuments and the politics of representation of the authoritarian regime. For instance, in an untitled performance in 1974, they mimicked the poses of figures depicted on a huge, stage-like bronze relief erected by the South Korean Ministry of National Defense just a few months before, in the city of Goyang near Seoul. Intended to commemorate Philippine participation in the Korean War, the monument was part of a series of commemorative statues and monuments writing, as it were, Korean history 20 years later. The public intervention by the Esprit Group was not so much intended to counter the specific historical narration proposed by the monument, but rather, to create a contrast between the breathing, living collective bodies of the performers and the inert, passive bodies depicted on the statue which represented an aesthetics of permanence as proclaimed by the authoritarian regime. "Each of our gestures must reflect an attempt to overcome meaninglessness and also serve as evidence affirming the presence of our selves." Albeit within a different artistic concept, the performance (or action, as the artists would rather have called it at the time) worked effectively to disrupt the monument's specific temporal logic, with a focus on the physical and spatial presence of the performers, which also evokes recent examples of artistic interventions engaging with monuments.

For instance, the relationship between (living, human) bodies and (lifeless, immobile) statues and pedestals is also explored in a series of public performances by US-American artist Ada Pinkston, who, in her *Landmarked Performances* series (since 2018, ongoing, fig. 03), temporarily explores the sites of 48 removed confederate monuments in the US.[29] Pinkston theatrically occupies the empty pedestals, exemplarily demonstrating that bodies are not the last resort for authenticity and expressivity

[24] Alexandra Pirici, "Sculpture, alive: materiality and mutability of form, structure and meaning," public lecture in the series "Sculpture Talk: Alexandra Pirici," Yorkshire Sculpture International, May 28, 2020, accessed July 5, 2022, https://yorkshire-sculpture.org/events/sculpture-talk-alexandra-pirici/.

[25] Pirici, "Sculpture, alive."

[26] Cf. Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Mechtild Widrich, *Performative Monuments: The Rematerialisation of Public Art* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014).

Fig. 02: Alexandra Pirici, *Soft Power* – Sculptural Additions to Petersburg Monuments, Interventions on the monuments of Peter the Great, Catherine the Great, Lenin Statue at the Finland Station, 2014.

but, in themselves, 'text,' inscribed with gender, race, and time, as has been extensively discussed in recent contributions on identity politics and how bodies perform culture, race, and gender.[30] Similarly, Vietnamese artist Ngô Thành Bắc has continually questioned the aesthetics of national monuments in Hanoi and other cities in his "headstand performances" (Trồng Cây Chuối/ Headstand, 2007/2022), recently continued for Berlin Biennale 2022.

In Europe, the post-1989 protest against and dismantling of socialist monuments should have inspired a lasting critical debate also of Western memory politics and their respective ideologies but has instead been absorbed by convictions of the obsolescence of Socialism. A deeper engagement with the historical burden and volatile nature of memory culture has only recently been set off by the European reverberations of the Black Lives Matter movement, which, with its ongoing decolonial reflection upon memory politics, has been the most important inspiration to the critique of monuments in recent years. Notably, the decolonial critique of monuments is deeply embedded into that of history and aesthetics. Decolonial thought allows for a radical and extensive reworking of concepts of history whose philosophical criteria are directly derived from Enlightenment, and it includes the contribution of art, which share the same genealogy and entanglement in colonialism and racism.[31]

Nicholas Galanin's *Shadow on the Land, an Excavation and Bush Burial* (2020, fig. 04) performs a quasi-archaeological excavation of the shadow cast by a Captain Cook statue in Sydney's Hyde Park on Cockatoo Island, and it also promises a burial of the same shadow with funerary rituals. A native Alaskan artist of Tlingit and Unangax̂ ancestry, Galanin employs specific historiographical procedures rooted in a materialist understanding of history, which connects the discipline of archaeology and the practice of bush burials. Effectively putting into use the temporality of an understanding of earth which contains history in both senses of the word (enclosing, and hiding it), the title also refers to the painting *A Bush Burial* (1890) held in the collection of the Geelong Gallery near Melbourne by Australian artist Frederick McCubbin, a painter celebrating and idolizing the colonial settler lifestyle in the late 19th and early 20th century and, in this painting, endorsing the pioneer appropriation of an indigenous burial practice.

As Galanin underlines, *Shadow on the Land, an Excavation and Bush Burial* is also intended to remind us how indigenous practices are relegated to an eternal, allochronic[32] 'tradition' and to a time before contact with modern societies was established – perpetually in the course of becoming extinct, their cultures permanently vanishing. The problematic attribution of different temporal orders to different subjects in, of and outside of history becomes evident, confronting the 'allochronic' relegation of an indigenous practice into 'non-time' with the statue's monumental claiming of 'always-time'. But instead of the statue, it is its shadow, which can only become visible at a certain moment in time, and at a certain location, that is 'buried', thus toppling the statue figuratively, into the horizontal here and now. Erected 200 years after Cook's death, it has, indeed, a multifaceted history similar to that of the statue of Carol I in Bucharest. Tracing the horizontal outlines of the shadow it casts today, and then 'removing' it, is both a simple and forceful symbolic gesture engaging with the burden of Australia's colonial past.

In Galanin's intervention, the earth both contains history and promises to give it rest – a highly paradoxical operation that does not pass judgment on which direction (burying or unearthing) is ethically, or epistemologically preferable. Accessing the earth as a site of history requires the physical engagement of

27 Pirici, "Sculpture, alive."

28 Joan Kee, "Why Performance in Authoritarian Korea?" *Tate Papers* no. 23 (Spring 2015), accessed July 5, 2022, https://www.tate.org.uk/research/tate-papers/23/why-performance-in-authoritarian-korea.

29 See the website of Ada Pinkston, accessed July 5, 2022: https://landmarked-project.com/. Thanks to Kathrin Heinrich for pointing out this project to me.

30 Cf. Coco Fusco, "Passionate Irreverence. The Cultural Politics of Identity," in *1993 Whitney Biennial Exhibition*, ed. Elisabeth Sussman et al. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1993), 74–85; Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and *Diaspora*," *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 36 (1989), 222–37; Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008).

Fig. 03: Ada Pinkston, *Landmarked Performances*, since 2018, ongoing.

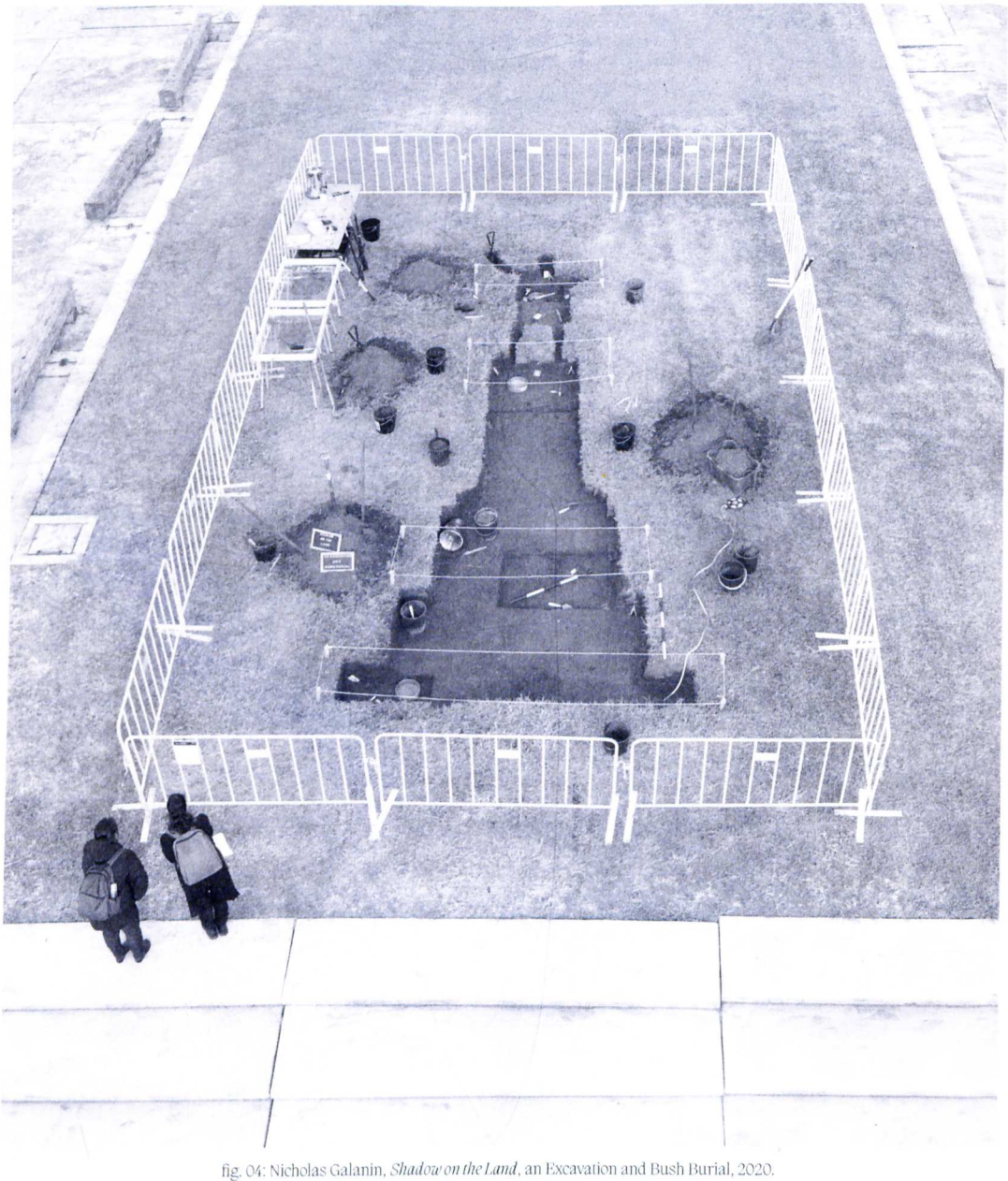

fig. 04: Nicholas Galanin, *Shadow on the Land*, an Excavation and Bush Burial, 2020.

"The Way of The Shovel,"[33] which fore-grounds an archaeological, hands-on approach to history that focuses on material aspects, physical engagement and on a certain readiness to find broken, incomplete fragments. Thus approached, history cannot be 'read', but instead only allows some enigmatic evidence of material remains to become unearthed, compiled, and assembled anew again and again, each time open to new, performative interpretations.

As diverse in their specific local situations, artistic instruments, and body of references, both Pirici's choreographies and Galanin's Shadow on the Land, an Excavation and Bush Burial disrupt the specific aesthetics of invisibility and inaccessibility claimed by the monuments they address. Both clearly foreground the temporary aspects of their interventions, but also manage to include the statues into this temporality, making them visible in the present, and debatable as to their contemporary meaning. As I have argued, a critique of how history is actively constructed, narrated, and, often, closed, must include questioning how public monuments actively construct and shape perceptions of the past. Pirici's and Galanin's projects contribute to this important historiographical as well as political process by effectively disrupting the spatial and temporal logics of the monuments they engage with.

[31] Fred Moten, *Black and Blur* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822372226; David Lloyd, *Under Representation: The Racial Regime of Aesthetics* (New York: Fordham Press, 2018); Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (London: Verso, 2019).

[32] Cf. Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology makes its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

[33] Dieter Roelstraete, ed., *The Way of the Shovel: On the Archaeological Imaginary in Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).