The Monument: Between Place and Fetishism

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Abstract

The monument, as a concept, has been largely debated, however, from an architectural point of view the issue raises two possible discussion paths. The first is a theoretical perspective on how the concept evolves from a historical, social and/or cultural perspective. This path is based on observations of behaviour and cultural cues, detected in different contexts or environments. The second one is an empirical path, which presupposes practical solutions for particular situations with which architects are or could be confronted. Their response is sometimes the product of a clear theoretical construct and, of course, sometimes the context requires a fresh approach, even if this means that the outcome may contradict the common theoretical expectations or that it goes one step beyond, submitting an "outrageous" proposal. The article explores the middle ground of these two paths. The first part contextualises the discussion among concepts like place, culture *or* identity, *while the second part focuses on case studies, bringing the theoretical study closer to everyday encounters of the concept of* monument.

Rezumat

Monumentul, ca şi concept, a fost dezbătut îndelung; totuşi, din punct de vedere arhitectural, această problematică poate urma două direcţii. Prima este o perspectivă teoretică asupra evoluţiei conceptului dintr-o perspectivă istorică, socială şi/sau culturală. Această direcţie se bazează pe observaţiile comportamentale şi indiciile culturale identificate în diferite contexte şi medii. A doua direcţie este una empirică, presupunând soluţii de ordin practic enunţate de arhitecţi în cazuri particulare. Astfel, soluţia dată poate fi rezultatul unui construct teoretic pur sau, în anumite cazuri, situaţia necesită o abordare nouă, chiar dacă aceasta presupune că soluţia dată poate să contrazică ipotezele teoretice sau chiar să meargă un pas mai departe, emiţând o ipoteză „scandaloasă". Articolul investighează teritoriul comun celor două direcţii. Prima parte contextualizează discuţia între concepte precum loc, cultură *sau* identitate, *în vreme ce a doua parte se concentrează pe studii de caz, care apropie demersul teoretic de ipostazele cotidiene ale conceptului de* monument.

1. From Place to Monument

It is essential that the discussion regarding the monument is contextualised within the one concerning *the place*. The concept of place has been associated with numerous interpretations and several definitions, varying from the clear-cut phenomenological interpretation of Martin Heidegger [1] or

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Christian Norberg-Schulz [2] to Doreen Massey's [3] understanding of place as a process. However, because every theory is, or needs to be, robustly anchored in the everyday, it is interesting to study which could be the possible *practical* interpretation of the concept of place, especially from an architectural point of view - from the perspective of *the creator* of space and place.

Beyond the theoretical discourse regarding the concept of *place*, its everyday use produces several deformations, simplifications or trims of the concept. Each situation is, after all, a unique way of relating oneself to their physical context, their social and cultural environment. If one were to filter the surrounding environment based on the concept of place - particularly the built one, seen as an architectural gesture - the environment would quickly define itself rather as being a space of *exclusion*, and not one of *inclusion*. Most cultures, societies, groups of individuals define themselves based on the things that set them apart, which *distinguish themselves from the others*. Thus, the space can be reduced to a sequence of successive places, which define their members based on a process of excluding the ones that do not correspond the criteria of their category. *The others* are excluded from *our place*. As an extreme, the place can reach a degree of exclusion that reaches segregation and, sometimes, even discrimination.

When *the place* is seen as an analytical instrument, designed to study to what extent the physical environment responds to the needs of representation, as well as to the daily activities of its society, *the space* stops being homogenous or equidistant towards the individual.

Space is being transformed into *a place* while, at the same time, it is being self-defined and self-restricted by the group that generated it. Tim Creswell states that a place is defined by any type of activity raging from daily movements to identitary, cultural ones. [4, p. 82]

In the context of increased mobility, which characterises contemporary space, practicing any kind of social or spatial relationship can be placed under a question mark. After all, any type of identity - be it social, cultural or spatial - can be seen as being a circumstantial or conjectural theoretical construct, the result of a certain event which took place at a certain moment, in a particular sociocultural context and at a determined geographical and historical location. The alteration of any of these factors would produce a different result, which would lead to the creation of a different identity. Thus, *practicing* a place is characterised by a higher degree of relativity than its theoretical counterpart.

If one were to analyse their daily activity and the manner in which they themselves relate to space, on a basic level, one would notice that a staggering percentage of these relationships are actually automatisms, habits and mannerisms characterising the group one belongs to - the group being any form of assembly raging from family to an entire nation. Thus, the manner in which one dresses themselves, the manner in which one talks - what one considers to be appropriate as a conversational subject or as being taboo - the manner in which one eats, the manner in which one designs and uses their furniture, the manner in which one builds a house and the type of meaning one attributes to all of these - all depend on *the customs of the group* one belongs to. Different cultures possess distinct spatial codes and specific sensorial environments. [5, p. 198] What is being considered as specific to any culture, is the fact that every group has a certain behavioural standard and a particular type of relationship towards the environment - a standard which every member of the group must comply to. Any deviation from the norms of the group implies a certain penalty, while a desirable behaviour is reinforced. Thus, two distinct categories are being established: what is considered to be "good" and what is considered to be "bad" - in other words, in compliance or not in compliance with the rigours of the group. [6, pp. 415-418; 7, pp. 63, 174; 8, pp. 28-29]

Skinner defines culture as being: "*all the variables affecting him which are arranged by other people. The social environment is in part the result of those practices of the group which generate ethical behavior and of the extension of these practices to manners and customs.*" [6, p. 419]

From this point of view, culture is a form of employing control upon the individual and, implicitly, both upon the manner in which they relate to space and upon the manner in which they *conceive* their space. Most often, the individuals end up revoking their own psychological comfort in order to keep and obey cultural norms. [9, p. 156] However, can one consider the individual as being part of a single group? In one's daily activities, one can often encounter conflictual situations in which the individuals find themselves under the pressure of two or even more cultural systems. Skinner [6, p. 419] exemplifies by describing a child belonging to an immigrant family: they must satisfy the cultural norms of the culture they belong to - the group being, in this case, the family -, as well as the ones of their adopting culture - the group being, this time, constituted of friends and acquaintances. This difference between the two types of processes defines the concepts of *enculturation* and *acculturation*. The child has to adopt, alternatively, the desired behaviour of both groups, even if there is a possibility that, in certain circumstances, a specific behaviour could be considered as being desirable by one group, while the other would not. The examples can vary from food serving customs to diverging concepts and attitudes regarding abstract notions such as ethics or religion. Such differences can be seen when two different social environments overlap, as well as within a singular culture: for example, when different agencies or institutions operate in manners which could be conflicting for the individual, as Skinner points out. Such is the case of the difference between a secular and a religious education.

However, the social environment is not constant; it undergoes a continuous process of adaptation, transformation, and refinement. A culture has its own dynamic, which varies, more or less, throughout the lifespan of an individual. Moreover, the individuals, through their behaviour, which conforms to the norms, contribute to the definition of a standard against which all future behaviours will be compared to. Thus, the emergence of a certain custom, mannerism or style, which is then repeated by others and, consequently, entertained, produces an alteration of the social environment. For example, this dynamism allows the culture - seen as a social environment - to adapt itself to the contemporary technical innovations. As a result, different habits, mannerisms and routines modify themselves very quickly. If forty years ago one would start the day by reading the newspaper or listening to the news on the radio, today one starts the day by reading emails and interacting with one's friends on social networks. [6, pp. 418-419]

Michel de Certeau [10, pp. 122-137] has a similar point of view, arguing that the everyday life is an invention. Certeau points out that there is a specific type of order in the everyday: an incredibly dynamic, heterogeneous, and adaptable order, and an institutional one. This type of institutional order is, in Certeau's opinion, just an apparent one, being permanently sabotaged, eroded, and set aside by its everyday counterpart. Certeau draws attention to the rigidity and the lack of adaptability of the institutional structures, when compared to the everyday logic and dynamic. Ciprian Mihali [11, p. 80] identifies in Certeau's texts *an everyday man*, who is the product of permanent mobility and of the lack of *place*. This man is dependent of opportunities and is bound to take advantage in order to succeed. He is *a tactician*, constantly reviewing the action methods in order to take advantage of the flaws present in the institutional structures: "*the power of the weak stands in his invisibility and in his power to deceive, to adapt himself quicker to the context [...] the tactician is a bricoleur, constantly improvising, while his space is very flexible, adaptable to a wide range of events.*" [11, pp. 80-81]

For this type of man, their *strategy* becomes a form of adaptation to the everyday. This adaptation permanently joggles between being *autoplastic* - meaning that the organism is subjected to modifications in order to conform the environment - and *alloplastic* - a type of adaptation which affects the environment in order to satisfy the needs of the individual. [12, p.36]

There are even cases in which the social environment is being changed on purpose, so that a certain behaviour is obtained. Similar to building a city based on a pre-established plan, cultures can be designed, as well. A within reach example is the case of religious texts which practically disseminate the characteristics of a desirable behaviour: an ideal personality towards which all group members aspire to. The Ten Commandments can be interpreted as being a type of (self)imposed code, according to which a behaviour is either punished or reinforced. Moreover, laws and constitutions function according to the same principle, generating, in their turn, behaviours which end up defining the nation that produced them. For example, a law like the Prohibition in the U.S.A. managed to produce an underground subculture with a specific behaviour, which would have not appeared under usual circumstances. On a smaller scale, any alternative manual or book on how to raise children, can be interpreted as being a method of manipulation of the manner in which a family functions, the norms that define it as a group, the behaviour seen as desirable towards the children and towards the spouse.

This empirical manner of perceiving the group - seen as a social environment which generates space - its inner dynamic and its relation to a specific space, create a network of connections which produce *a process* - a concept, actually, coined by Massey [3]. Skinner even uses terms such as *cultural design*, when referring to experiments that affect the social environment with the help of instruments such as social legislation, the emergence of governmental agencies and - on a larger scale - social utopias which usual aim to *re*design entire social structures. [6, p. 427]

"*A given culture is, in short, an experiment in behavior. It is a particular set of conditions under which a large number of people grow and live. These conditions generate the patterns or aspects of behavior - the cultural character [...]. The general interest level of members of the group, their motivations and emotional dispositions, their behavioral repertoires, and the extent to which they practice self-control and self-knowledge are all relevant to the strength of the group as a whole.*" [6, pp. 430-431]

Skinner's behavioural perspective can be compared to the selection process of the Theory of Evolution. Practically every interaction, connection or social relationship is being reduced to technics of *control* or of *being controlled*, while the social environment is seen as an entity in continuous transformation, constantly adapting so that it can ensure its own capacity of exercising control upon the members of the group. Even though this point of view can be considered slightly pessimistic, certain cultural and spatial manifestations seem to confirm his theory - even if only in isolated cases.

2. A Special Place • The Monument

Within this discourse, *the monument* is a distinctive case. A loose definition of the monument would be that it is a space or a place which the group decides to preserve as a memory of a certain event, lifestyle or any other characteristic which defines the core of the group from a social, historical or cultural point of view.

When talking about place and memory, Tim Cresswell [4, pp. 85-93] states that a large amount of *the sensation* of place is due to the association of a certain space to a precise historical event. These events can be relevant on a national level or only for a particular group, family or even a single individual. Thus, the place earns its role of *a mnemonic device* from a historical point of view, as well. The place can become, in certain circumstances, an anchor of memory in history. Space, be it designed or adapted to a certain type of behaviour, to a chronologically identifiable everyday, is being conserved, retaining a physical print of a long gone socio-cultural environment.

This aspect is significant for two reasons: the place preserves, just as a time capsule, the physical traces of past socio-cultural environment, while, at the same time, it keeps alive the memory of certain notable historical events which are promoted precisely by the existence of that particular place - thus the place becomes *the instrument* of promotion. The place - a certain type of place identifiable as being *a monument* - receives thus a new connotation, namely of being the substructure and trigger of memories - in this case of a social or collective memory. Moreover, Cresswell considers that one of the basic methods of establishing a memory is *the production of place*. Thus, one ends up associating a certain place to the memory of an event. Consequently, that place becomes a mnemonic device, it becomes a physical anchor of our memory. [4, p. 85]

"Monuments, museums, the preservation of particular buildings (and not others), plaques, inscriptions and the promotion of whole urban neighborhoods as 'heritage zones' are all examples of the placing of memory. The very materiality of a place means that memory is not abandoned to the vagaries of mental processes and is instead inscribed in the landscape - as public memory." [4, p. 85]

The place-monument becomes more than just the stiffening of a physical context at a certain moment on the historical axis. Cresswell argues that the place has the capacity to express *feelings*, to transpose the individual into a state of *re*living the evoked moment - *"the monument is the memory of space. [...] Within the monument, time is recounted and spatially revealed."* [11, p. 151] The place is defined by Edward Casey as being "a container of experience". [13, p. 86] In a study on the space of the monument, Mihali describes three instances of the place in which it becomes a monument [11, pp. 152-153]:

1. *the attributed place*, namely an "exemplary manifestation of a geographical, historical or cultural space" [11, p. 152]; the place is labelled as such, on one hand, because it is significant for the area it represents and, on the other, because of conventions (or because of the publicity of the place); these places being seen as landmarks (icons) as, for example, the Eiffel Tower in Paris, the Great Pyramid of Egypt, or the Great Wall of China;
2. *the generic place*, which is not a unique place, but, on the contrary, it becomes representative precisely because of its repetition and omnipresence - a place which becomes identitary or through which one is able to identify a community, a culture or a nation; for example, the channels of Venice, the Mongolian yurts, the English cottages or the villas of Tuscany;
3. *the place of condensation*, which is a pre-planed place designed by its community, so that it would reflect and *concentrate* its identity; buildings like Saint Peter's Basilica, the Versailles Castle or the Forbidden City are such examples.

The monument is a totally different place. It starts out by being *a place* created at a certain moment, by a given social and cultural context. Then, at the moment when the place is being labelled as a monument, it passes through a process of monumentification [14, pp. 115-117], thus being frozen in a particular physical instance - which could, after all, be considered as being random. From this moment on, the place enters a phase of distortion and abstraction from a conceptual point of view, while physically the place ceases to respond to sociocultural everyday activities, finally becoming useless from a functional point of view. Put differently, the future generations will see, experiment, and come in contact with the place; however, they will do all this in an isolated manner, cut off from a socially or culturally coherent context. The link, on an individual level, becomes abstract, lacking in daily connotations, and transforms itself into a metaphorical, one-way and contemplative relationship. The place-monument is stripped, little by little, of its place in the everyday, reaching a high point where the monument no longer reflects *a need*, does not identify itself anymore with any (daily) activity, thus becoming useless form a social and/or cultural point of view. Another interesting phenomenon, which is a side effect of this transformation, is the fact that *the place* means less for the individual and more for the group: *"in front of the monument [...] one is what*

one believes in, what one worships, what one commemorates, not as an inalienable individual, but as a member of a community which shares the same values." [11, p. 147]

Mihali's observation is important because, the place-monument continues to exercise its role of defining an environment, only that this time it does this for a group. It possesses a mnemonic function, which is no longer anchored in the everyday, thus, being, in this instance, *an ideological* mnemonic function. It is representative on a conceptual level, assimilating "*layers of significance which help to determine and preserve the cultural identity*". [14, p. 117] The place-monument helps in constructing a (group) identity, providing *credibility and authenticity*. Mihali even goes one step further stating that: "*the original significance of the monument does not survive the generation who built it, the next ones usually end up endowing it with their own requirements and political interests*". [11, p. 161]

Thus, the place-monument becomes a palimpsest of group identity - an assumed identity, that is, with a higher or lower degree of veridicality. In the end, the place-monument becomes an identitary resource and, why not, a rebrandable resource. The moment that the passing of time distances enough the moment in which the place was monumentified from the present, the ties of memory become fragile, thus the attributed or reattributed significances become more important than the ties to the place itself. The succession of meanings attributed to the place, grow further and further apart, resembling the distortion produced by the infinite cycle of photocopies which fade away, no longer resembling the original. The place-monument ceases to be an expression of durability, thus becoming the expression of the *will* to last.

"*The lieux we speak of, then, are mixed, hybrid, mutant, bound intimately with life and death, with time and eternity; enveloped in a Möbius strip of the collective and the individual, the sacred and the profane, the immutable and the mobile. [...] [I]t is also clear that lieux de mémoire only exist because of their capacity for metamorphosis, an endless recycling of their meaning and an unpredictable proliferation of their ramifications.*" [15, p. 19]

Pierre Nora underlines this superposition of actual textures of significance which vary from an excessive concentration of meanings attributed to the same place to the openness towards a wide range of interpretations. The physical monument ends up being entirely recycled, however, as Kázmér Kovács puts it, this is "*another post-architectural discussion*". [14, p. 117] In the end, the place-monument ends up being a true *heterotopia*.

"*[T]he idea of accumulating everything, the idea of constituting a sort of general archive, the desire to contain all times, all ages, all forms, all tastes in one place, the idea of constituting a place of all times that is itself outside time and protected from its erosion, the project of thus organizing a kind of perpetual and indefinite accumulation of time in a place that will not move - well, in fact, all of this belongs to our modernity. The museum and the library are heterotopias that are characteristic of Western culture [...]*" [16, p.182]

Through its transformation into a monument, the place superimposes over its original meaning - a meaning which is always anchored into the everyday - a new meaning - one which was monumentified -, namely *the idea* of a place. Little by little, the new significances become more and more metaphorical, thus ending up deforming the initial place-significance relationship - infinitely superimposing new theoretical places on top of the physical one. At this point, *the place* can actually be read in two distinct and parallel ways: the initial place - a place of daily activities - and the monumentified place (or rather places) - the place which hosts *a need of memory*, the desire to anchor itself in a sociocultural context, which no longer exists. The heterotopia of Michel Foucault depicts precisely this layering of significances attributed to a place.

This transformation of the concept of significance is explained by an exercise proposed by Yi-Fu Tuan, who presents ancient ritual dances. [17, p. 168] The author states that these dances, which are truly hypnotic, propel the rhythm - the place itself becomes a huge drum, which pulsates under the rhythmic movement of feet. However, today's contemporary versions of these dances lack something. They lack the horror, the agony, the anxiety, the despair, which haunt the soul of the dancer when facing hunger, death or fear. What persists today is only *the artistic experience*. The same is true in the case of the place turned into a monument: it is voided of everyday activities, what remains is just a shell. The issue raised regards *the authenticity* of the artistic gesture - or of the place.

A practical use of a heterotopia is converting the function of a building. Without being a monument, a space which undergoes a process of conversion automatically implies a layering of different spatialities. The physical matter, the building itself belongs to the original spatiality - the initial *place*. However, its spirit, whose everyday ceases to exist, is replaced - or *reconverted*. The new function creates a new *place*, a new manner of dwelling a space, a new spatiality, a different system of symbolical, metaphorical or even physical references - thus usually proposing a new type of relationship with the space, a different type of *dwelling*. The old place is kept as a new memory, as a ghost whose presence is felt through more or less metaphorical traces.

Such is the case of Merkx + Girod's Selexyz Dominicanen Bokstore, in Maastricht. [18, 19, 20] The bookstore was set inside an old Gothic church, which ceased hosting religious services as early as 1794; meanwhile, it went from hosting a military base, being confiscated by Napoleon's army, to being an archive, then a warehouse and, finally, a bicycle shelter. In 2007, its space was reconverted into a bookstore. The interior design is very sensitive towards its historical and spatial layering. The three-story-high shelves are distanced away from the Gothic stone walls, thus trying to stand on their own, permitting the space to flow freely. The traffic areas remained almost entirely the same, so that the architecture of the church can still be truly appreciated. Even the lighting was conceived so that it focuses on particular spots, thus underlining the solemnness of the shadows specific to its former religious character. The new proposal is made of a black steel structure, almost surgically implemented. Its minimalist design is in contrast with the sober Gothic spirit, yet, at the same time, it manages to highlight it. This project is a positive example, not only of saving a place, but also of reattributing a new significance which manages to save, at the same time, the memory of a past place - it is a case of superimposing, of layering significances, space, and, ultimately, places - *a heterotopia* in its truest sense.[1]

Another example of contextual layering is the attitude exhibited by architecture towards ruins - be they remains of actually old buildings or recently abandoned ones. What attitude should one exhibit towards an environment which lacks any type of function, any type of use, for that matter? The ruin is a physical trace left behind by chance and not deliberately, therefore the memory it records is a random one. In this case, the community has two options: they could decide to keep it and to subject it to a preservation process, or to demolish it, all together. However, the most interesting part of this entire process is the moment when a person or a group tries *to change the perception* upon such an object. Such efforts open a narrow architectural field, namely a niche of experimentation, of the small architectural intervention, of temporary architecture - which tries to recompose or even short-circuit the perception of a particular space.

Such an example is the project initiated by Atelier MASS and their temporary installations at the Bánffy Castle, in Bonţida, Romania (Cluj County). Although, the main building is still full of "*scars*" [21], as the architects point out, the ensemble still possesses beautiful and interesting spaces upon which their insertions try to focus. The goal of the project is to obtain a hybrid space, "*where old and new coexist and enhance each other*". [21] Put differently, Atelier MASS is trying to implement a new perspective, a new origin, which aims at rearranging the space, thus recomposing the spatiality of the ensemble into *a new perception*. The interior space of the

building was dismantled, fractured and torn through the phenomenon of decay, self-destruction, and even mutilation. The ruin of the castle, as a spatiality, is already something else, a different type of space than the castle itself. Thus, in this instance, Atelier MASS's spatial proposal is neither nostalgic, trying to recover a lost spatiality, nor purely contemplative, observing, exacerbating the process of degradation, thus fetishizing the ruin. On the contrary, the installation manages to *re*compose the space, to reattribute it with a new origin and, consequently, with a new meaning. Its interiority is no longer seen as a succession of spaces or rooms, but, by the insertion of a red textile strip, the space becomes a single whole. This alteration in perception is realised through the transformation or replacement of the reference system: the red strip, which wraps the space, becomes the new reference system. Thus, the space is to the left, to the right, above or under the strip, ceasing to be perceived as rooms or floors. Similarly, the play of lights and shadows generates lines, shapes and images which cast out the "*saddened shadows of the past*". [21] The space is *re*composed into a dynamic, playful perspective, which is designed to suggest the possibility of a future functional space. The temporary installation thus becomes a perceptual lesson of the rebirths of a space, of a spatiality and, last but not least, of *a spatial perception.*[2]

Akoaki, a research and design firm founded by Anya Sirota and Jean Louis Farges, adopted a different approach of a similar subject, their aim being that of producing "*social and surprising spaces. The projects tend to question generic types and expectations, often siding with informalist ideals.*" [22] Their projects are not architecture in the truest sense of the word; what they design are spatial installations, which are meant to encourage, to offer a new perception of a space, presenting it in an idealised manner, emphasising its potential. Akoaki do not create spaces, they imagine them. Their installations are rather seen as social action and interaction catalysts for abandoned, unused or simply suffering spaces. In other words, they are seeking to restore or at least draw attention to the memory of a place. *General Manifold* [23, 24] is such a project built on the industrial site of *the Federal Screw Works* in Chelsea, Michigan. For this project, Akoaki collaborated with Steven Christensen, thus establishing a new private practice, *Spatial Ops*. The installation, which was placed in the middle of an abandoned warehouse, is an environment in which the visitor is completely immersed. The installation literally cuts a volume of space, wrapping it in the shape of six magenta-coloured sections. The space thus obtained powerfully contrasts with the abandoned industrial space; however, it still manages to propose a surprising exercise of spatial distortion. Each section, shaped as a truncated pyramid, randomly intersects another, thus generating an inverted perspective effect. Consequently, the individual in subjected to a process of continually recalibrating their perception, of adjusting their point of reference against which all distances, dimensions and deceiving object scales are being measured. The effect of disorientation and perceptual confusion is underlined by a six-channelled soundscape consisting of industrial sounds, superimposed over readings of 18th and 19th centuries texts - texts which study the theoretical approach of ruins. This installation was designed to be seen as an alternative to how we see and understand ruins. The authors consider that nowadays there is a true fascination, a fetishism even, which is manifested towards the idea of the ruin: the consumption of images which depict the state of decay, sometimes even catalogued as *ruin porn.* [24] The space of the industrial ruin is exacerbated by the contrast produced by the placing of the installation inside the warehouse. Thus, the installation becomes an alternative perception device, transforming the manner in which the space is perceived. Spatial Ops's scenographic attitude becomes more powerful by the act of abandoning the installation inside the factory, allowing it to be destroyed at the same time with its hosting space - namely the start of the area's urban remodelling project. *General Manifold* is, in its core, a spatial product - a piece of architecture - which possesses the role of *a perceptual alteration device.*[3]

Nora also makes an interesting observation related to the condition of the memory in today's society:"*[m]odern memory is, above all, archival. It relies entirely on the materiality of the trace, the immediacy of the recording, the visibility of the image.*" [15, p. 13]

The study of the place-monument is part of the contemporary tendency of *archiving*. It is a tendency of identifying, recording, cataloguing and museificating identities, cultures, groups, individuals. History has always felt a need to anchor, exemplify or cite the memory. The place-monument preserves past social and cultural environments as physical context quotations. These spatial citations are used and *re*used; they are being reassigned meanings. Put in other words, the monument no longer speaks about *a place*, but of its *interpretation*, an interpretation which depends on the ideological necessities of the moment. Nora underlines precisely these characteristics of the modern memory, namely *the physicality of its traces and the visibility of its image*.

Consequently, it is important to have a physical anchor of the memory, however only as an image, as *a representation*, because, beyond these, the conceptual subtext is permanently rewritten. Mihali claims that our contemporary society, as a consequence of the unprecedented technical progress, is annihilated by space. It needs to be able to develop itself, to grow. Thus, in this context, building or reconfirming identities need the physical presence of certain significant place-monuments, which can be *re*assigned with meanings. Massey also emphasises the contemporary tendency towards heritage, on a local as well as on a national level. Massey states that governments and cultural elites often have the tendency to "root" national identities. However, these identities often end up being "fabricated". Thus, museums end up exhibiting these hyperbolised traditions precisely in order to confirm these identities. [3, pp. 146-156]

"[A] society like ours which is characterised by topophagie, the fury of consuming space; produces patterns of ephemeral relationships, layerings of places and dwellers which are permanently susceptible of remodelling, producing their own spatial alterity." [11, p. 189]

The contemporary place-monument reaches a new stage according to which the monumentality of the place is *invented*. Its belongingness, tradition, meaning for the collective memory and other manifestations of identity are being artificially attributed to architectural spaces or objects so that they can be - artificially - transformed into identitary places of place-monuments. Augustin Ioan observes that, today, architecture is required to have the ability to "*signal or invent an identitary 'pedigree'*". [25, p. 107]

Cresswell signals an obvious tendency in the real estate strategy of adopting a "neo-traditional" attitude. [4, pp. 93-99] It is precisely this attempt of creating *places*, of creating spaces that are different from the suburban *MacMansion*-like developments. Cresswell remarks the fact that, usually, such attempts are built around concepts like "community" and "history".

"These planners assert that, unlike their predecessors, they pay attention to the unique nature of places, to their local histories, architectures and urban and residential forms; and to traditional human-land relationships. They maintain that their towns and villages are 'good places to live', places that can 'revive public life', and return the 'bonds of authentic community' to American society." [4, p. 95]

In this context, Cresswell cynically observes that the language used by these manifestations of neo-traditionalism picks up terms associated with the phenomenological interpretation of place - namely the ones which are more abstract and can be linked to any context. References to authors like Martin Heidegger [1], Christian Norberg-Schulz [2] or Edward Relph [26] confirm an authenticity of the concept of dwelling, while anchoring it socially, culturally and even historically. The idea of *an identitary place* with an authentic past is, in this case, fabricated. Actually, the end result is an image designed to be consumed. This image is accompanied by *a process of excluding the others*, the ones who are being perceived as being a threat against the style of life promoted by the chosen image. The place ends up defining, in this context, through *exclusion*, by eliminating the ones who

do not correspond with the place. Thus, the place is no longer confined to being the result of a daily necessity, it no longer complies with certain daily activities, but, instead, *the group* is the one who is chosen to correspond to the norms according to which the place was designed in the first place. The place ceases to be the product of *inclusion*, becoming a product of *exclusion*.

3. Conclusions

The monument, as most concepts during the Postmodern era, underwent a massive conceptual transformation. The Postmodern mind is trained to put under question everything: its identity, its existence, its place or even its environment. Consequently, the concept of monument was not speared. Thus, when the core of a cultural entity was disputed - namely its identity - the monument, being the physical trace of the group's memory - therefore its identity - was also affected. The monument, alongside the concept of memory, went from being promoted as the identitary foundation of the group - a mnemonic device -, to the Postmodern deconstruction. Thus, any identity is seen as a random set of rules and cultural cues. Therefore, monuments were desacralized. Finally, they reached the point where identity, cultures and, of course, monuments are being (re)invented.

From a Postmodern point of view, the monument, as a concept, is a trap of authenticity itself. The moment a place is labelled as being a monument, its authenticity vanishes, for it is no longer an active entity in the everyday. Then, there is the question of the archival character of today's memory: the Postmodern mind likes to label, categorise, classify and place in order, so the monuments end up being labelled, relabelled with new meanings. Finally, the Postmodern mind is consumed with its quest for memory, roots, monuments, its romantic perception of ruins, which deviate, reaching the depths of fetishism, or even ruin porn.

Therefore, the conclusion cannot be a definite judgment, but an open question of how will the concept evolve in the future? The monument, the memory and, last but not least, the identity of a group will always be the core of any culture. However, the issue which remains unsolved is whether monuments, memories and identities are still defining us, as a group, as a nation, as a culture.

4. Notes

1. images of Merkx + Girod's *Selexyz Dominicanen Bokstore* can be viewed by following this link: http://architizer.com/blog/sacred-bookstore/
2. images of Atelier MASS's *spatial installations in Bonţida Castle* can be viewed by following this link: http://ateliermass.ro/filter/projects/BONTIDA-OPEN-DAYS
3. images of Spatial Ops's *General Manifold* installation can be viewed following this link: http://anyasirota.com/#generalmanifoldatfederalscrewworks

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