The Avant-Garde Monument

A New Architecture of Memory

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Abstract

This article homes in on monuments designed by proponents of the historical or classic avant-gardes. After the First World War, monuments by, among others, Kurt Schwitters and Johannes Baader, Walter Gropius and Mies van der Rohe, Vladimir Tatlin and El Lissitzky, Man Ray and Salvador Dalí, began to articulate a new function for the genre of the monument: no longer was it to commemorate the past, but to memorialize the present and time to come. This new architecture of memory also led to an expansion of the genre, which in the hands of avant-gardists further came to include temporary pavilions. Paying attention to theoretical writings on the monument, among others, by László Moholy-Nagy, Siegfried Giedion and Robert Smithson, the article concludes by referencing more recent experimentation in monument design by artists such as Flavin, Oldenburg and Hirschhorn, arguing that a comprehensive history of the avant-garde monument is long overdue.

Keywords

avant-garde – monument – pavilion – politics – chrono-utopia

“The notion of a modern monument is veritably a contradiction in terms: if it is a monument it is not modern, and if it is modern, it cannot be a monument.”¹ These words from Lewis Mumford’s classic The Culture of Cities (1938) are emblematic of a widely accepted view of modern art in general, but perhaps more specifically of the classic or historical avant-gardes. As has often been

argued, especially the generically “futurist”\(^2\) or forward-looking classic avant-gardes professed a profoundly anti-monumental art. Monuments—whether they be sculptures, architectural memorials or mausoleums—arrest time and history. They commemorate past people, events or values, often in order to deny them future agency, while at the same time spatially positioning their continued, identity-forming presence in the now.\(^3\) Such semiotically coded commemorative practices\(^4\) appear to have been bête noire in the aesthetic production of the avant-gardes. Indeed, if anything the avant-gardes seem to have opposed the “traditional forms and reasons for public memorial art”, from the glorification of the past to figurative representation, prominence and durability.\(^5\) Needless to add, for many the incongruence of avant-garde and monument also applies to post-Second World War avant-garde activity. In Neo-Avantgarde and the Culture Industry (2000), Benjamin Buchloh, for instance, staunchly pitted any avant-garde practice against an engagement with memorials, stating that “[m]onuments tend to be erected in the periods of history when the utopian dimension of critical negation, the concrete destruction of false consciousness by radical thought and real political practice, are being coopted into the massive representation of an affirmation of the actually existing order of things.”\(^6\) It therefore seems no exaggeration to rephrase Mumford and to state that “if it is a monument it is not avant-garde, and if it is avant-garde, it cannot be a monument.”

On closer inspection, however, the common view that the literally conservative genre of the monument, memory-marking and memory-making as it is, sits completely at odds with the avant-gardes, requires qualification for several reasons. First, and most obviously, the classic avant-gardes did produce monu-

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ments (and/or designs thereof),\(^7\) most of which have received some attention as individual works, but not as forming an ensemble.\(^8\) Second, with these monuments the classic avant-gardes can be said to have embarked on a search for an alternative monumentality in art. I am not the first to draw attention to this. Rosalind Krauss has argued that the seeming absence of monuments in the avant-gardes’ artistic production should not be confused with a disinterest in monumentality as such. Rather, the avant-gardes explored “the negative condition of the monument [...], a domain cut off from the project of temporal and spatial representation, a vein that was rich and new and could for a while be profitably mined.”\(^9\) I wish to pursue this line of thought here, which approaches the avant-gardes not as anti- but as alter-monumental, yet which perhaps mistakenly suggests that this inevitably leads to cutting the ties with historical reality. For, third, the classic avant-gardes’ search for an alter-monumentality, if not, an alter-monument, should at least in part also be read against the backdrop of the many acts of official political iconoclasm in the public space that were characteristic of European culture as a whole at the time. Indeed, whereas Walter Gropius in 1911 already lectured about industrial buildings as being precursors of a coming new monumental style,\(^10\) and while a handful of mainly Expressionist sculptors, most notable, perhaps, Wilhelm Lehmbruck and Ernst Barlach, produced (still figurative) works that seemed intended to commemorate the “Great War” already before that war ended, most avant-garde monuments (be they Futurist, Dada, Surrealist, Purist or Constructivist) as well as the avant-gardes’ in-depth reflection on monuments, date back to the period after

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\(^7\) Drawing on Alois Riegl, who distinguished between deliberate and unintentional monuments, I will here be dealing only with the first (deliberate) type. Avant-garde works and practices that can be said to be “monumental”, either by their size or any other quality, but that were not labelled as a “monument”, are not considered. This of course does not exclude a reflection on the avant-gardes’ alter-monumentality discussed further on. See: Alois Riegl, *Der Moderne Denkmalkultus* (Wien: Braunmiller, 1903); partially translated as “The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Essence and Its Development,” in: *Historical and Philosophical Issues in the Conservation of Cultural Heritage*, trans. Karin Bruckner with Karen Williams, eds. Nicholas Stanley Price et al. (Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute, 1996), 69–83.

\(^8\) A partial yet notable exception is Jeffrey Schnapp’s “The Monument without Style (On the Hundreth Anniversary of Giuseppe Terragni’s Birth),” *Grey Room*, 18:18 (2005), 5–25. Schnapp zooms in on Rationalist and modernist International Style monuments. Part of his findings also inform the present essay.


the First World War and the very instable interregnum that followed. During this phase, necropolitical discussions about the demolition of old monuments and the erection of new ones marked almost the entire European continent. We need but recall Lenin’s call for “monumental propaganda”, which demanded that Russian cities after the 1917 Revolution would be studded with new monuments devoted to Socialism.11 With Dario Gamboni we can therefore state that this historical phase resembled a field of “conflicting memories and monumental palimpsests”,12 the effects of which would continue to haunt Cold War as well as post-socialist Europe and beyond.13 Fourth and finally, this ultimately also raises awareness of a more encompassing alter-monumental project set in motion by the classic avant-gardes yet extended into neo- and more recent avant-garde practices. For whereas it is commonly held that the monument became an impossible genre in post-Second World War art,14 it is perhaps more correctly to state, as we will see, that the formal and discursive parameters of the “monument” by the mid-century had already been transformed by the classic avant-gardes, a transformation later avant-gardists continued to build on. I hasten to add that this essay in no way claims exhaustiveness. My main aim is to suggest that a history of the avant-garde monument is long overdue.

1 From Archetype to Prototype

Let us begin with a seemingly benign observation: the structure of many monuments designed and/or built by the classic avant-gardes refer to age-old formal

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11 For more on this, see Christina Lodder, “Lenin’s Plan for Monumental Propaganda”, in Art of the Soviets: painting, sculpture, and architecture in a one party state 1917–1932, ed. by Matthew Cullerne Bown and Brandon Taylor (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 16–32.
conventions of the monument. The column and monolith, for instance, frequently recur in avant-garde monuments. Take Kurt Schwitters’ lost Merzsäule (Merz column) (fig. 1), which was probably started very early in the 1920s and later dismantled to be partly integrated in the famous Merzbau in his Hanover house.\footnote{For a more elaborate description of the work’s genesis and make-up, see Dorothea Dietrich, “The Fragment Reframed: Kurt Schwitters’s ‘Merz-Column’”, \textit{Assemblage}, 14 (1991), 82–92.} Schwitters’ little studied column, like the Große Merzsäule he installed in Hjertøya, Norway later (1937–1939), consisted of a column placed on a base.\footnote{The vertical, column shape, as Maria Stavrinaki has argued, was of capital significance to Schwitters’ entire oeuvre. See: Maria Stavrinaki, \textit{Le sujet et son milieu: huit essais sur les avant-gardes} (Geneva: MAMCO, 2017), 97–112.} A monument design meant to mark a new beginning after the First World War—or \textit{Der erste Tag} (1918–1919), as an early collage by Schwitters incorporated in it read—the structure was perhaps also in part intended as a personal memorial to his first son, Gerd, who died shortly after his birth during the war.\footnote{See Elizabeth Burns Gamard, \textit{Kurt Schwitters’ Merzbau: The Cathedral of Erotic Misery} (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Architectural Press, 2000), 110.} Nonetheless ironizing the column as the classical expression of formal perfection and beauty, Schwitters’ monument was covered with mechanically produced textual material, organic matter (a dried flower in wax, an animal horn, a twig), and a set of debris-like objects ranging from children’s toys and broken plaster casts to a small figurine of a black boy and scraps of metal. It was topped with what was presumably the death-mask of his deceased son. A further variation on the classical notion of the column is encountered in Walter Gropius’ \textit{Märzgefallenen-Denkmal} (Monument to the March Dead, 1920–1922) (fig. 2), which was erected to the memory of the workers fallen during the Kapp Putsch, and later found degenerate by the Nazis and demolished.\footnote{Further analyses of the monument can be found in Klaus-Jürgen Winkler and Herman van Bergeijk, \textit{Das Märzgefallenen-Denkmal in Weimar} (Weimar: Bauhaus Universitätsverlag, 2004) and Maria Ocón Fernández, “Politik und Abstraktion. Das Märzgefallenen-Denkmal von Walter Gropius”, in: \textit{Modell Bauhaus}, ed. Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin/Museum für Gestaltung, Stiftung Bauhaus Dessau und Klassik Stiftung Weimar (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2009), 77–80.} Recalling the architectural designs by Expressionists such as Hermann Finsterlin and Wenzel Hablik, this sculpture presented a contorted volume, a column squashed, folded and bent. In sharp contrast to the examples of Schwitters and Gropius, Giuseppe Terragni’s late Futurist or Rationalist \textit{Monumento ai caduti} (Monument to the Fallen, 1930–1933) in Como, with its large granite monolith base and its reproduction of one of Antonio Sant-Elia’s sketches of
FIGURE 1  Kurt Schwitters, *Merzsäule* (Hannover, 1923–1925). Installation, lost
IMAGE © BPK / SPRENGEL MUSEUM HANNOVER, HANS WILM HOEPFER,
GARBSEN, 1971/MICHAEL HERLING/ALINE GWOSE
a structure with reiterated columns on top, bracketed redundant ornamentation and manipulation, reducing the column and other material to their bare essentials.19

If these works in part also refer to the older stele and dolmen, other classic avant-garde monuments took to the pyramid, the cube, the cross or the sphere. Johannes Baader, as is well-known, worked as an architect designing mausoleums before turning to Dada.20 Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, the basic design for his self-aggrandizing monument, Das große Plasto-Dio-Dada-Drama: Deutschlands Größe und Untergang durch Lehrer Hagendorf oder Die phantastische Lebensgeschichte des Oberdada (The Great Plasto-Dio-Dada-Drama: Germany’s Greatness and Decline at the Hands of Schoolmaster Hagendorf, or The Fantastic Life of the Superdada, 1920), lost since its display during the First International Dada Fair in Berlin, consisted of a (spiralling) pyramid.21 Rather
different is Ludwig Mies van der Rohe’s *Revolutionsdenkmal für Karl Liebknecht und Rosa Luxemburg* (built 1926, destroyed 1935), which commemorated the murdered Communist intellectuals and revolutionaries Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht.22 (This monument too was dismantled by the Nazis, yet not before the German Communist Party, the KPD, made ample use of the site for rallies, among others with Wilhelm Pieck, later president of the GDR, speaking on behalf of the Party’s leadership in 1933.) Mies’ monument essentially consisted of a set of slabs and cubes. An earlier variation on the archetypical form of the (elongated) cube can be found in Theo van Doesburg and Jan Wils’ 1917 design for a monument in the Dutch town of Leeuwarden.23 In his never-realized design or Suprematist *Proun* (two versions developed between ca. 1920 and 1923) (fig. 5) for yet another monument devoted to Rosa Luxemburg, El Lissitzky put the sphere centre-stage, further adding triangular (pyramidal), rectangular (monolithic), and square (cubist) elements. Man Ray’s Surrealist *Monument à Sade* (1933) (fig. 3), finally, a design expanding the field of the monument into the realm of photography, turned to the age-old cross, yet another geometrical shape that for ages had figured in memorial sculpture and architecture. In the most simple operation, his monument represented an image of a woman’s bottom framed within an upside-down cross.

As illustrated by the basic structural elements of these highly diverse examples (to which I will add more in what follows), the monuments designed by the classic avant-gardes rather systematically took off with a reflection on the archetypical forms of memorial sculpture and architecture. All these works mobilize archaic precedents; they excavate and abstract from history the elementary forms and models—columns, spheres, pyramids, cubes, crosses—ridding them of 19th-century historicist conventions, and then turn to testing


their expressive potential. This self-referenced awareness of the formal language of the monument’s mnemotechnics is important to highlight, as memory and monument cannot be separated, of course. Etymologically, the term “monument” derives from the Latin verb monere (to remind or to warn), and the noun monumentum (something that reminds). The primary function of the monument, in short, is to act as a medium of remembrance, and as such, it can be considered as the carrier of “tertiary memory” par excellence, as Bernard
Stiegler defines it. It follows that the avant-gardes’ monuments, by their reflected return to the degré-zéro archetypes of the genre, could also be read as prototypes of a different culture or hermeneutics of remembrance, as prosthetic temporal objects that allow us to experience time and history differently, as forebears of new poietic templates of temporality and historicity that added to the ensidic, codified and unified, models monuments thus far had allowed for.

2 Tatlin’s Tower and the New Architecture of Memory

A good starting point for an inquiry into the temporality and historicity of the avant-gardes’ alter-monument is that most singular yet exemplary design: Vladimir Tatlin’s famous Monument to the 3rd International (1919–1920) (fig. 4), which can be counted among the first alter-monuments proper set forth by the classic avant-gardes. Tatlin’s monument in turn took to older models such as the Middle-Eastern (spiralling) tower, but of course also to that most distinctly modern monument, Gustave Eiffel’s Tower. As Nikolay Punin, who helped construct Tatlin’s design, observed, the three interior levels or halls to be built within the tower’s massive outer glass surface would take the form of a cube, a pyramid and a cylinder. Indeed, this intricate design was to become a rotating, three-level monument that would functionally memorialize the feats of the Communist International, while also housing the offices of the Comintern. As such, Tatlin’s Constructivist tower, had it been realized, would have become a moving space of labour that would have functioned as the very site for the continuation of the revolution which the edifice celebrated. In short, Tatlin’s was

24 Bernard Stiegler, in a correction of Husserl’s phenomenology, has argued that all media function as memory prostheses; they store memories, which we activate when we engage with them. Bernard Stiegler, Technics and time, i: The fault of Epimetheus, trans. R. Beardsworth & G. Collins (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).
FIGURE 4 Anonymous photograph of Vladimir Tatlin, *Pamiatnik III Internatsionala* (1920), reproduced from Nikolai Punin, *Tatlin (Protiv kubisma)* (St Petersburg: Goddarstvennoie Izdatel’stvo, 1921)

IMAGE © BRUNO VANDERMEULEN/DIGITAL LAB KU LEUVEN
a “monument to something in the future, intended to serve as the headquarters of the thing commemorated”.28

Tatlin’s monument design, which was actually one among many designs put forth by Russian artists shortly after the 1917 Revolution,29 was almost instantly hailed in Western Europe as a paradigmatic shift in the genre of the monument.30 While in 1918 Anatoly Lunacharsky, under Lenin’s command, had put Tatlin himself in charge of seeing new monuments being erected in Moscow, Tatlin’s was never built in Russia (for a variety of reasons, from the unforeseeably high costs to the technical engineering challenges it posed). This only added to the imagination in the West of Europe, among others following the publication of Konstantin Umanskij’s Neue Kunst in Russland, 1914–1919 (1920), which presented Tatlin’s design as a living machine—a view that would find echoes in Dada, Bauhaus and De Stijl circles inter alia. What attracted these artists was not only that Tatlin’s tower presented itself as a combination of architecture, painting and sculpture. Of key significance also was that in contrast to conventional monuments, which to Punin did “not correspond to the modern understanding of history”, Tatlin’s design did present a truly modern monument.31 Bruno Taut’s journal Frühlicht, for example, in 1922 described it as no less than the first monument of modern times, period.32

It is tempting to read Tatlin’s tower as a completely counternemonic monument, as a proposal for a kinetic structure that opposed commemoration altogether. A more productive and perhaps also more honest reading would have it that the tower built on the monument’s conventional function of rupturing or arresting time in the public space. Tatlin’s design thereby first of all sought to lift the historical losses and victories of the Communist cause out of ordinary time and history into a utopian no-time. For contrary to conventional monuments, second, he did so not to have people commemorate the past but the future as it had opened itself up after the Russian Revolution, and as it could still be seen as becoming inside the functional and functioning monument itself. Articulating an entirely new formal language on the basis of archetypical monumental

28 Robin Milner-Gulland, The Russians (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 226. It would lead us too far to elaborate this in full, but Lynton also suggests that Tatlin drew on the “Russian tradition of commemorating key events by building churches”, which “is itself a tradition of creating monuments with an eye to the future”. Lynton, Tatlin’s Tower, 235, note 45.
30 Lynton, Tatlin’s Tower. This paragraph relies heavily on Lynton’s synthetic study, esp. the first 5 chapters.
32 Elias (Ilya) Ehrenburg, “Ein Entwurf Tatlins”, Frühlicht, 3 (Spring 1922), 93.
structures, Tatlin’s tower indeed literally broke with the past and began anew. Or as Viktor Shklovsky had it: “The monument is made of iron, glass and revolution.” Thus rupturing temporal experience, the upward-moving construction was meant to create a sort of temporal parallax from which a rapidly changing present and an open, indeterminate, utopian future could be simultaneously experienced. Above all, then, with his monument the Russian Constructivist bended the temporality of monumental remembrance: no longer would this edifice have people remember the past; instead, it was to commemorate the present and the future, the latter understood as a future anterior, the future as it once was imagined in the now, and as it still could be imagined, even seen at work, starting today. Tatlin’s spiral monument thereby broke the back-bone of the monumental genre, twisting its torso and gaze away from the past toward the present and the future.

Most monuments discussed above at first sight seem rather different, as their functionality is less obvious and as they more clearly appear to remind us of past events: the failed November Revolution in Germany, the fallen of the “Great War”, the loss of a child, the death toll of the Kapp Putsch, and so on. Yet these monuments on closer inspection also incite a sort of temporal parallax as we hermeneutically activate them, inviting us to remember the future as it could have been and still could be, commencing here and now. Indeed, it might be argued that the avant-garde monument in its innovative formal make-up also gives shape to a “literal temporality” of its own. By starting from monumental archetypes, each of these monuments in their material and formal structure perform a movement toward the future for (or before) us. Walter Gropius’ Märzgefallenen-Denkmal, for example, with its contorted and zigzagging volume working its way upward had the fallen workers’ corpses continue their unfinished business from the grave. With its intersecting diagonal volumes emanating from the ground either like a flash of lightning or a slowly developing crystal, suggesting a form becoming rather than an entity having reached its final shape, it formally continued an irrepressible struggle into the future. Ludwig Mies van der Rohe’s Revolutionsdenkmal für Karl Liebknecht und Rosa Luxemburg in a powerful manner too evoked continued dynamic movement and change. The ground for this dynamism was the static and solidly austere, windowless, stone brick cube construction. Yet a sense of movement was evoked against this background as well by the same complex of massive blocks, which consisted of irregular bricks seemingly maneuvering freely in

and out of the supporting wall. The whole construction thus appeared still to be seeking its definitive form “within a perpetual work in progress”. Mies’s “paradox of solidity animated”\(^{35}\) was well captured in the textual inscription on his design. Allegedly Luxemburg’s last words, it read: “Ich war, ich bin, ich werde sein” (I was, I am, I will be). Perhaps the clearest and most explicit case in point is Johannes Baader’s *Plasto-Dio-Dada-Drama*. Conditioning the viewer to interpret his monument along a set itinerary that circled his construction, Baader’s monument, through a series of numbered episodes starting at the base and moving upward, showed the viewer the way toward salvation in the now. Other examples already discussed could be added here, supplemented by avant-garde mausoleums, such as Otto Freundlich’s open funeral vault for the Wissinger family, built by Max Taut at Stahnsdorf Cemetery in Berlin in 1922–1923.\(^{36}\)

A new architecture of memory thus begins to manifest itself here: arresting time and pulling us into an archetypical no-time within, or adjacent to, the present, all these monuments celebrate, if not, remember, what once was—and, for anyone in front of the monument, still is or might be—to come. They formally arrest history to open a space for commencing a new historical narrative that seems to develop toward a different, open and indeterminate future, precisely because of the frequent absence of clear narrative elements. A neologism might be called for the description of this new architecture of memory: *chrono-utopia*. For what these monuments appear after is not an affect of nostalgia, which, as Svetlana Boym reminds us, frequently resurges after revolutions and phases of instability.\(^{37}\) Nor do these monuments “warn” us about mistakes in the past, stipulating, as the German “Mahnmal” does, what our future should definitely *not* look like. Instead of unleashing an impossible desire for *belonging* to a time gone or pushing us out of a future to which we cannot belong, the classic avant-garde monument seeks to trigger a chrono-utopian desire for a potential *becoming* that does not (yet) fit existing frames of reference.

\(^{36}\) For more on this monument, see Julia Friedrich (ed.), *Otto Freundlich. Cosmic Communism* (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2017).  
Just how ephemeral the projected future of the classic avant-garde monument can be is illustrated by El Lissitzky’s already mentioned *Proun* design for a monument to Rosa Luxemburg (fig. 5). Two versions of this monument design exist: one without text, the other with the letters of Rosa Luxemburg’s name, which appear partly erased, running over the central black square and the red circle. The addition of a personal name to this Suprematist work opens up three levels of interpretation. First, we can take these letters at face value, as signaling both the flatness of the linguistic sign, and its spatiality or dimensionality. Lissitzky has the Cyrillic letters figure on a doubly composed ground consisting...
of a black square superimposed on a red circle. Importantly, this makes the work fall within a familiar scopic regime, namely that of three-dimensional, Euclidean space. We are not, in other words, looking at a projected depiction of a four-dimensional object, as is the case in many other Suprematist works. Yet the name of Rosa Luxemburg is of course not only meaningless linguistic material. This name, second, also refers to the slain heroin of the November Revolution, a Marxist intellectual whose work today is considered to be one of the most important contributions to Marxist thought in the 20th century. Moreover, the partial erasure of Luxemburg’s name too is indexical of historical reality: Luxemburg was brutally removed or erased from the planet, a red earth here, that is clouded or covered by a profoundly nihilist black square, an addition which Kasimir Malevich would have welcomed. That we can, third, take the red circle to allegorically signify the earth, and the black square as an element of total annihilation, is further corroborated by Lissitzky’s *Pro dva kvadrata* (Of Two Squares, 1922), a book he produced around this time, which recounts how a black and a red square travel to earth to create the world anew.\footnote{For more about this children's book and its broader context, see Yves-Alain Bois, “El Lissitzky: Reading Lessons”, *October*, 11 (Winter 1979), 113–128, and Françoise Lévêque (ed.), *Livres illustrés russes et soviétiques pour enfants 1917–1945* (Paris: Paris Bibliothèques, 1999).} Lissitzky’s (unfinished) design for a monument, literally, historically and allegorically, thus chimes well with other chrono-utopian monuments, as it too highlights an ongoing process of becoming. Whereto, however, is anything but clear.

Lissitzky’s designs for the Luxemburg monument indeed put us before the hermeneutical challenge of imagining how this work would have looked had it actually been realized in space. It is well-known that Lissitzky himself not always gave such issues much concern. Yet this does not mean we have nothing to go on. As we already saw, we might first of all have to imagine this work in a three-dimensional, Euclidean setting. As such, it recalls the famous *Prounen-raum* Lissitzky set up at the Great Berlin Art Exhibition in 1923, in which he materialized his efforts to have his two-dimensional designs actually protrude three-dimensional, architectural space.\footnote{See also Éva Forgács, “Definitive Space: The Many Utopias of El Lissitzky’s Proun Room”, in *Situating El Lissitzky: Vitebsk, Berlin, Moscow*, ed. by Nancy Perloff and Brian Reed (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Publications), 47–75.} Hence, either attached to a wall or a floor, this work can be read as a set of volumes in space. In addition, we are perhaps also to imagine this work, with its multilayered, centripetal and mechanical, if not, clock-like, composition, as moving, as a kinetic work of art. This is not so contrived when we consider other experiments in kinetic
art at this time, and it is further made plausible when we bring in another work Lissitzky produced almost simultaneously: his Figurinen, die Plastische Gestaltung der elektro-mechanischen Schau Sieg über die Sonne (Figurines: The Three-Dimensional Design of the Electromechanical Show Victory over the Sun, 1920–1921, published 1923), a folder with lithographs of characters from the opera Victory over the Sun, which Lissitzky presented as electromechanical puppets-cum-devices, geometrically choreographed automatons for a coming utopian machine age. The movements of these figures was suggested, much like in the monument design, by using shifting axes, multiple perspectives and directional signifiers. So we may have to imagine this monument too as a multilayered, three-dimensional set of volumes turning and shifting as well as protruding and receding into space through some electromechanical contraption. Like Naum Gabo’s Kinetic Construction (1919–1920), or, perhaps more obviously, like Tatlin’s tower, the work thus possibly introduces the fourth dimension of time as being constitutive of itself. Moving, either with or without Luxemburg’s name imprinted on it, it may thus have been intended to project the German Spartacist Revolution into the future; literally, again: it animated and moved it both in and through time. Of course, this is all speculation, because Lissitzky, as far as I am aware of, never contemplated the practical realization of his chronoutopian project.

The opacity of Lissitzky’s monument design is what at once fascinates and frustrates T.J. Clark in Farewell to an Idea. Episodes from a History of Modernism (1999). Clark in this book presented El Lissitzky’s Suprematist designs as part of a “modernism” we are still, perhaps nostalgically, attracted to, but actually have come to say goodbye to. Lissitzky’s work, “a small study in ink and gouache—the size is in inverse proportion to the ambition”—leads Clark to formulating questions that are in the end left unanswered. Central to these questions is what Clark describes as the work’s suspension of the difference between reading and seeing: “Should we think of this [...] as El Lissitzky’s Death of Marat?”; “So what [...] do the two words ROSA LUXEMBURG mean in the gouache? [...] Are these the right kinds of questions to be posing at all? What would other questions—about death, revolution, memorializing, naming, and martyrdom—be like?” Clark’s attempt to “reconstruct the content, even the tone, of [...] El Lissitzky’s utopianism” is majestic, but it is also somewhat

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40 See also Kai-Uwe Hemken, El Lissitzky: Revolution und Avantgarde (Köln: Dumont, 1990), 45–49.
42 Clark, Farewell to an Idea, 257.
strange, as the critic not once ventures into interpreting this work literally, as I have done here, that is, as a design for an actual monument.

When we do so, Lissitzky’s monument design loses nothing of its opacity and mystery, but perhaps that was also the point. Lissitzky may well have wished to challenge our imagination first and foremost, to project forms which from an idealist perspective embody a new type of consciousness “by pointing to a state or condition outside the limitations of contemporary lived experience.” This was a position also held, perhaps surprisingly, by László Moholy-Nagy. Noting how monuments’ locations are always left to “das spiel politischer parteien [sic]” and how the modern viewer appeared to have lost a meaningful bond with public sculpture, Moholy-Nagy in Von Material zu Architektur (1929) as well thought the time ripe for a new type of monument. Discussing Naum Gabo’s Proposal for a Monument in Front of an Observatory (Celluloid) (1925), he observed how a monumental sculpture could also begin to gain substance or meaning once it had been completed and put in the public space, how an object put in public could après coup also start changing people’s sensorial apprehension of space, time and history: “The analysis of such works can be implemented afterward, and the congenial grasp of creative people—along with the rich intellectual, sensorial-moral processing of the object as a whole—can transform this into a pedagogically relevant stimulus”. The relevant or meaningful stimulus was, of course, intended first and foremost for Bauhaus students, but clearly further intended was the “lost” audience, which could, to the noumenal construction, also come to attach phenomenal value.

With Polish critic Andrzej Turowski we could say that the views of Moholy-Nagy and Lissitzky’s monument designs confront us with one of two types of chrono-utopian monuments. Turowski distinguished between a “phenomenological” and a “reist” utopian tendency within the classic avant-gardes. Lis-
sitzky’s proposed monument clearly adhered to the first, phenomenological tendency. Like Malevich's Suprematism, his designs themselves can be regarded as being an aesthetic projection of a new life, a new social paradigm—albeit, as Clark emphasises, an ephemeral and opaque one. Quite different are the utopian projects of the “reists”. When Russian Constructivists like Alexander Rodchenko or the Productivists of the Institute of Artistic Culture began to design kiosks and pavilions with advanced communications technologies, furniture that could be changed to meet people's various needs or film titles that suggested an organic link between two edited film sequences, they produced things or objects, Turowski observed, that meant to change not only the relations between people, but above all the associations between people and the material world. In Turowski's view, the reist and phenomenological utopianism were to a large extent aesthetically and philosophically incongruent. Works composed along these two tendencies, materialist and idealist, in a way condition us to look at them from two different perspectives, and this regardless of the fact whether they were actually realised in space or not. Turowksi's opposition between the phenomenological and reist tendencies might be less strict in the case of avant-garde monuments, precisely because these sculptural-architectural constructions, as (utilitarian) physical objects, were always also intended to install a sensibility of potentiality in the now. Be that as it may, Turowski’s thought also makes us aware of another aspect of the avant-gardes’ chrono-utopian alter-monument. For while that monument as a rule built on certain (archetypical) elements of monumental convention, nothing dictated that the conventions of permanence and durability had to be respected as well. Indeed, a monument could just as well alter people's experience of the (future) world temporarily.

4 The Pavilion: Total and Temporary

In “Sculpture in the Expanded Field” (1979), Rosalind Krauss noted how the interwar avant-gardes, for a brief stint exploring the monument's “negative condition—a kind of silentness, or homelessness, an absolute loss of space”, led to two results.47 On the one hand, avant-garde sculpture became completely self-referential and autonomous, forever memorializing itself as an abstract and transportable material base or disfigured sign from the past—as

an illustration Krauss among others cited Constantin Brâncuși’s *Endless Column*, the earliest version of which dates back to 1918.\(^{48}\) That this is perhaps not the whole story is illustrated by the above examples of monuments, whose autotelic thrust is undeniable but not incongruent with a newly defined heteronomous function of memorializing the present and the future. On the other hand, Krauss noted how the sojourn in the monument’s “negative space” also led to an expansion of sculpture itself, as the art form increasingly opened up into its surrounding space and landscape and drew closer to architecture, a trend that would become most visible in the period after the Second World War with the rise of land art and minimalism. This second outcome of the classic avant-gardes’ exploration of an alter-monument is indisputable. The move toward, if not, into, architecture can already be seen at work in Tatlin’s tower, with which the Constructivist aimed to unite the classic trinity of architecture, sculpture and painting. Yet this expansive move is perhaps better framed more broadly, that is within the classic avant-gardes’ more encompassing search for new forms of *Gesamtkunstwerke* and for new modes of combining different art forms and innovative materials, which would eventually lead to the “post-medium condition” as Krauss diagnosed it in her later work.\(^{49}\) Indeed, several of the monuments discussed above, most notably Schwitters’, Baader’s and Ray’s, also expanded the “sculptural” field of the monument toward and into other art forms such as literature and photography; we might even speak about partially “found” monuments in the Dadaist cases, as the building blocks here appear as much willfully selected as encountered by chance. An aleatory procedure also characterizes Salvador Dalí’s totemic column, *Monument à Kant* (1936).\(^{50}\)

The avant-garde thrust for a Total Art, with its penchant for occupying the liminal zone between architecture and other art forms to forge a new type of monument, came full circle, it appears, in the final years of the Second World War, when architectural historian Siegfried Giedion, architect-planner José Luis Sert, and visual artist Fernand Léger teamed up for the manifesto, “Nine Points on Monumentality” (1943) (fig. 6).\(^{51}\) The basic argument of the

\(^{48}\) As suggested by Sidney Geist, the heteronomous facets of this work were perhaps downplayed too much by Krauss. See: Sidney Geist, “Brancusi: the ‘Endless Column’”, *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies*, 161 (1990), 70–87.


\(^{50}\) For more on Dalí’s monument, see William Jeffett, *Dalí Doubled: from Surrealism to the Self* (St Petersburg, FL: The Dali Museum, 2017), 98–99.

\(^{51}\) José Luis Sert, Fernand Léger and Sigfried Giedion, “Nine Points on Monumentality” (1943), first published in Giedion, *Architektur und Gemeinschaft* (Hamburg: Rohwohlt,
manifesto is quickly summarized: while artists and architects during the inter-war period had invested their energy in renewing the individual arts, and in devising novel interartistic models for housing and urbanism, the new task of experimental artists, once the Second World War would be over, would be to collectively develop new civic centres and monumental ensembles so that the social fabric could be restored. Arguing for a stronger bond between architecture and society, Giedion, Sert and Léger took refuge to a newly defined civic monument, because they recognised the genre’s age-old inherent social and communal function. Indeed, as Giedion argued elsewhere, “[e]very period has the impulse to create symbols in the form of monuments, which according to the Latin meaning are ‘things that remind,’ things to be transmitted to later generations. This demand for monumentality cannot, in the longer run, be sup-

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pressed. It will find an outlet at all costs.”52 What needed to be transmitted in 1943 was intersubjective hope, a shared desire for a different future, and this would, accordingly, require new symbolic architectural structures giving shape to an altered sense of the present and the future.

The architectural program proposed by Sert, Léger and Giedion had a precursor in the classic avant-gardes, though presumably these previous experiments had not entirely been what the composers of the 1943 manifesto had in mind. Designs for alternative civic centres after all were not alien to the historical avant-gardes. Apart from developing a variety of interiors of (semi-)public venues such as cafés, cinemas and dance halls (all united in the Aubette project in Strasbourg for which Sophie Täuber, Theo van Doesburg and Hans Arp collaborated53), the avant-gardes above all invested in temporary displays of new architectural civic centres, most notably in the form of pavilions. From the start these came with monumental allure. Often the result of a commission, the pavilions designed by classic avant-gardists, already before the First World War, had been inscribed in their search for a new monumentality. It is worth recalling, for instance, that Bruno Taut, before his famous Glass pavilion made for the 1914 Werkbund exhibition, had already produced a Monument des Eisens (Monument of Iron) in 1913.54 After the First World War, the avant-gardes extended this other aspect of their search for an alter-monument, articulating it with the heavily politicized circuit of international (world) exhibitions. What to think, for instance, of Konstantin Melnikov’s ground-breaking pavilion at the International Exhibition of Decorative and Industrial in Paris in the summer of 1925? The pavilion among others featured Rodchenko’s design for a Workers Club, and made the Soviets’ reist utopianism very explicit: the fabulously designed objects in Rodchenko’s Club, which in the future would be produced by (wo)men themselves, were to alter their intersubjective relations as well as their interaction with the object world.55 A place of leisure and reading, this Club or new civic centre was at once the illustration of and spatial condition for a new proletarian culture. The same international exhibition also boasted Le Corbusier’s Purist Pavilion de L’Esprit Nouveau (fig. 7), a modular apartment containing only machine-made contemporary objects. Temporarily

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52 Giedion, Architecture, You, and Me, 28.
54 For more on Taut’s pavilions, see David Nielsen, Bruno Taut’s Design Inspiration for the Glashaus (London: Routledge, 2015), 151–152.
planted in an unusual setting, the famous pavilion showcased the Plan Voisin, and as such it was a prototype of a civic centre that would attain the size of an entire Parisian quartier.

Many more such pavilions could be added, each of them presenting a synthesis of various (applied) arts, each projecting the future potential of new technologies, and each giving shape to a new type of communal life to come: the Futurist Pavilion at the Parco del Valentino during the Esposizione del Decennale della Vittoria in Turin in 1928, the much acclaimed Soviet Pavilion at the International Press Exhibition (“Pressa”) in Cologne in 1928 for which Lissitzky took refuge to “cinematic resources”,56 Walter Gropius and László Moholy-Nagy’s pavilion at the Ahag Architecture Exhibition in Berlin in 1929, Mies van der Rohe’s German Pavilion at the International Exhibition in

Barcelona in 1929, Moholy-Nagy’s (and Alexander Dorner’s) *Room of the Contemporary* (Raum der Gegenwart, Hannover, 1930), Le Corbusier’s Swiss Pavilion (1930–1931), his Temps Nouveaux pavilion at the Paris Exhibition of 1937, etcetera. Scholarship in recent decades has rightfully warned against reading such pavilions as self-enclosed spatiotemporal edifices that were not also inscribed in clear political programs and contexts. It is worth recalling that at the 1937 Paris Exhibition, Albert Speer, for instance, also presented the Deutsches Haus as a “‘temporary’ monument” to the Third Reich\(^\text{57}\) and that many of the formal innovations put forth by avant-garde pavilions, from the use of murals to montage displays, were also eagerly co-opted for propagandistic purposes.\(^\text{58}\) Salvador Dalí’s Surrealist Pavilion at the New York’s International Fair in 1939 in turn illustrates how easily the avant-garde pavilion could be programmatically subjected to Disneyfication.\(^\text{59}\) Yet regardless of how we read this highly diverse set of pavilions, to which many more could be added, we also need to interpret them as life-building extensions of the classic avant-gardes’ search for alter-monuments.\(^\text{60}\)

Indeed, while pavilions, as temporary projections of future possibilities thinkable in the now, had been part and parcel of world fairs and exhibitions since the later 19th century, their increasingly overdetermined context in the interwar period was also exactly what endowed such pavilions with monumental proportions. Presenting temporary alternative civic centres at such exhibitions, the avant-gardes thus tapped into this futural monumental thrust, bending it to their own alter-monumental needs.

Their pavilions, like other avant-garde monuments we have looked at, memorialized the present and the future (anterior). As singularities, they too formally interrupted the course of existing historical narratives and the memorial spatial structures that illustrated them. The avant-garde pavilion physically opened up a dwelling space from which an alternative future, often appealing to all the senses, could be experienced in the now.\(^\text{61}\) Perhaps more clearly

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61 The temporality of these monuments is akin to that discussed by Sanford Kwinter in *Architectural Studies*. The avant-garde pavilion thus stands as a monument of alterity, a dwelling space from which the future could be experienced in the now.\(^\text{59}\)
than the other avant-garde monuments (and/or designs thereof) discussed above, these alter-monuments also elevated everyday objects and utensils to monumental material, further emphasizing the “presentist” moment of the avant-garde “memorial”. In their very temporariness, moreover, they went on to accentuate the chrono-utopian thrust of the avant-garde monument, yielding what Hannah Arendt called “spaces of appearance”, collectively experienced modes of communal purpose that disappear when we cease our shared activity. Once there, now gone, the temporary pavilion, as a singular architectural construction momentarily sculpted in space, thus stood perfectly in line with the new architecture of memory developed in other avant-garde monuments—it can even be said to have been the logical outcome of it: a new and total architecture of memory.

5 By Way of Conclusion

It would be a mistake to assert that the monument took a central position in the project of the historical avant-gardes. Yet it would also be an error to claim that these avant-gardes did not engage with the genre. In a variety of ways their quest for an alter-monument transformed the very form, function of, and discourse around, the “monument”. After the Second World War, this transformation was not always recognized, though early avant-garde monuments frequently did take a key position in the self-understanding of modern art after 1945. The first Documenta exhibition in 1955, for instance, can in part be understood as an attempt to come to terms with the monumental iconoclasm of the Nazi-regime, and more specifically with its 1937 Entartete Kunst exhibition. As Walter Grasskamp reminds us, the Kassel Fridericianum during the first Documenta gave a central place to Expressionist Wilhelm Lehmbruck, many of whose sculptures produced during the First World War would become monuments commemorating the loss after that war. The first Documenta put on Lehmbruck’s Kniende (Kneeling Woman, 1911)—which together with Sitzender...
Jungling (Seated Youth, 1916–1917), but also with the work of Ernst Barlach—had been displayed during the Nazi’s 1937 damnation of the avant-gardes. This act can be understood as a rehabilitation of Lehmbruck’s, and, by extension, the (German) classic avant-gardes’ monumental work. (For, indeed, as we saw, the Nazi regime destroyed quite a few monuments produced by the historical avant-gardes.) Similarly, when in the 1960s Dan Graham noted that “[i]t is difficult to comprehend why so many artists seem interested in monuments”,65 Dan Flavin started composing his famous “instant-monument” series in honour of Vladimir Tatlin, or Robert Smithson published his essay “Entropy and the New Monuments” (1966), they too seemed very much aware of what had gone before. Smithson, gloomily, called on the projects of both reists (Tatlin) and phenomenologists (Malevich), to bend and further condense the turn to the present and the future: the new (1960s) monuments would first transform time into a “a place minus motion”, fully arresting action and history, and then project the entropic end that awaits all and everything.66

Further scholarly study of the classic avant-gardes’ alter-monumental experiments may well be called for, because it clearly casts a new light on these avant-gardes and recalibrates their respective relations and perceived differences. Further study could also help clarify often seemingly isolated cases and reinterpret well-studied instances that in a multifarious fashion carried the early 20th-century alter-monumental experiment toward and into 21st-century. When Fluxus artists Dick Higgins and Wolf Vostell presented their anthology Fantastic Architecture (1969), for example, the only “monuments” they allowed room for were those by Claes Oldenburg (fig. 8), whose production of designs for “impossible” civic monuments over the years would indeed become at once colossal and seemingly unique—seemingly, because what most monument designs by Oldenburg proposed was, very much in the vein of the earlier avant-gardes, a celebration of the now, of the everyday object (the gigantic typewriter eraser, the scissors, the drum set or pedal, the rear view mirror ...).67 Gordon Matta-Clark’s famous an-architectural “Non-uments”, which focused on neglected and liminal left-over spaces and places in cities, punctured by “holes

in history” that set out an alternative history of remembrance, should equally be located within this more encompassing search for an alter-monument.68 This quest is continued to this day in Thomas Hirschhorn’s temporary civic monuments, such as the Deleuze Monument (2000) and the Gramsci Monument (2013), which bring the most advanced synthesis of the avant-garde alter-monumental project.69

Monuments are time-images, vectors of exteriorized temporality and historicity. This is the lesson to be drawn from Pierre Nora, who in his famous study of lieux de mémoire criticized contemporary society for losing its capacity to experience memory “from the inside”, and instead for making memory persist

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69 See Anna Dezeuze’s excellent study, Thomas Hirschhorn: Deleuze Monument (London: After All Books, 2014) and Thomas Hirschhorn: Gramsci Monument (New York: Dia Art Foundation, 2015).
only “through its exterior scaffolding and outward signs”.70 The more we invest in monuments, the more we outwardly and spatially represent temporal experience, the poorer our actual experiences of time and history become.71 If Nora is right, then the new avant-garde architecture of memory may well present a strategy to counter this trend, which could also go some way toward qualifying today’s rampant politics of “heritage” and “conservation’. For how, indeed, do we wish to remember our future?