The Aesthetics and Publics of Testimony

Participation and Agency in Architectural Memorializations of the 1993 Solingen Arson Attack

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Abstract

Physical environments and their images feature increasingly prominently today in efforts to contend publicly with political violence, making aesthetics ever-significant to discourses and practices of testimony. Critics have shown that the publicness of the platforms and practices used in these efforts is marked by disparate levels and types of participation and agency. Relatively underexplored, however, is how those disadvantaged by this disparity navigate it and what role aesthetics may play therein. I explore these questions through fieldwork on architectural memorializations of the 1993 Solingen arson attack where a family with Turkish background were targeted at home in their sleep. I argue that the arson attack has featured in these memorializations not simply as the subject of testimony but also as a force structuring its aesthetics.

Keywords: activism, citizenship, Germany, memorials, monuments, racism, violence

Introduction

It is May 2013, the twentieth anniversary of a neo-Nazi arson attack on immigrants that took place in the North Rhein-Westphalian city of Solingen. I am in a modest-sized public space in Frankfurt that its mayor named after one of the Solingen victims as result of a successful campaign by memory activists. I am here with two of the activists – themselves of immigrant origin – who recap to me their onerous commemorative endeavours over the past two decades. They point to a sheet-metal life-size statue that is the focal point of this space and speak of it as the best 'witness' to these ordeals. The activists say they built and put this statue in place soon after the square was named in remembrance of the Solingen victim, considering it necessary as a commemorative finishing touch. The authorities almost immediately took

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it down, but the activists built a new one and put it up again. Since then, this contestation has cyclically repeated itself. But the authorities recently shifted to an avowedly conciliatory tack, bringing to the activists a design project authored by an immigrant designer – whose native country is the same as theirs – and asking them what they think. The move has failed to appease the activists. 'Why should we settle for choosing from what we are given?' ask the activists rhetorically. 'We have already designed one ourselves, which will always be our favourite; it is better than any other design, even if they hire the world's best designer.'

The activists' reference to the statue as a 'witness' resonates with recent literature on political violence, where what may be termed an aesthetic turn is observable in the growing interest in material objects and spaces (or images of these) as agents of testimony. In a recent publication, I argued that this aesthetically focused literature tended to limit testimony's function to the production of knowledge about violence as a specific moment in time and a particular point in place. Doing so, I suggested, risks overlooking the spatiotemporally larger-scale impact that violence has on its victims, survivors and their heirs: the deprivation of socio-political subjectivity and historicity (Çaylı 2020). Awareness of this deprivation obliges any mobilization of testimony to prioritize not simply producing knowledge of what happened but also giving the victims, survivors and their heirs agency to historicize this knowledge in the ways they see fit so that they may regain socio-political subjectivity. Below, I follow this broad argument but also adopt a specific focus on the principle of publicness and its conduit, participation, both of which feature prominently in mobilizations of testimony as an aesthetic practice. Scholars who have discussed images' and environments' potential to animate the political work done *publicly* to contend with violence acknowledge that the publicness at work here is marked by disparate levels and types of participation and agency (Azoulay 2010; Keysar 2019; Kurgan 2017; Sliwinski 2009; Staal 2016; Weizman 2014). But relatively underexplored is how those disadvantaged by this disparity navigate it, and what role materiality, spatiality and visuality may play therein.

This article explores these questions through my fieldwork on architectural memorializations of the 1993 Solingen arson attack. I begin by detailing the prominent role that publicness and participation have played in these memorializations and the various tensions and contestations characterizing it. Then, as foreshadowed above through the activists' emphasis that there may never be a better monument than their own, I explore how these tensions and contestations have impacted and been impacted by the question of socio-political agency, and have done so materially and spatially. I show how these impacts have transformed violence from being merely a topic for testimony to operating as the aesthetic structure that governs testimony's production, reception and interpretation and that survivors, victims and their socio-political heirs invariably experience as an extension of the violence. I argue that the arson attack and its related histories have featured in memorials dedicated to the Solingen victims not only as the subject of testimony but also as a force structuring its aesthetics.[1] Unlocking the progressive potential of the aesthetic politics of testimony, then, requires confronting and challenging the ways violence

structures the material, spatial and visual means employed in testifying to the past rather than simply enhancing the palpability of the truths produced through such testimony.

The aesthetics and publics of testimony

In an oft-cited article on the aesthetics of testimony, Sharon Sliwinski (2009) focuses on the 1755 Lisbon earthquake. If testifying to suffering was central to the expansion of human rights, this centrality, she argues, was constituted visually rather than just discursively. Sliwinski posits the visual repertoire that evolved around the earthquake as a counterpoint to what relevant scholarship has considered the originary moment of human rights discourse: the 1789 French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. A focus on visuality, she suggests, helps avoid scholarship's tendency to assume that human rights are inalienable and attained solely by birth. Such a focus enables Sliwinski to argue that human rights are *granted* by certain individuals to others, and that their being granted hinges upon *seeing* (i.e. witnessing) the latter's suffering and/or vulnerability and judging it as a calamity that may befall any human being (including the witness) but is deserved by none. She then draws a parallel between Lisbon and the Holocaust, suggesting that images of the earthquake stunned the world ahead of the 1789 French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen just as did photographs emerging from liberated Nazi camps prior to the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Writing around the same time as Sliwinski, Ariella Azoulay (2010) discusses the relationship between citizenship and witnessing violence – or what she calls 'regime-made disaster' – through photography. For her, this relationship is not reducible to certain ideals of citizenship being upheld through photography that documents and helps condemn violence. Instead, argues Azoulay, citizenship must be understood as an experience that feeds into and derives from processes through which images of violence and their meanings are publicly produced, circulated and used. This renders the political import of witnessing violence photographically more than simply an outcome of the photographic expert's work, whether that entails the photographer or the photography critic. Its political import also has to do with and indeed requires the participation of audiences that encounter photographs – or what Azoulay terms photography's citizenry.

Sliwinski and Azoulay pioneered what in the 2010s became a prominent methodology, both scholarly and otherwise, of contending with rights violations. The methodology may be termed the stuff of an 'aesthetic' turn, as it relies heavily on eliciting testimony – mainly visually – from and through the materialities and spatialities involved in or shaped by violence (Keysar 2019; Kurgan 2017; Staal 2016; Weizman 2014). Critical of the post-Holocaust paradigm of testimony and its premise that knowledge of past violence is by definition subjective and never wholly attainable, this aesthetically focused methodology has been invaluable in reclaiming the possibility of producing a universally resonant, collectively experienceable and publicly defendable truth about violent histories (Çaylı 2020). This

reclamation of universality, collectivity and publicness – evident in Sliwinski and Azoulay's emphases on citizenship as a relational, intersubjective and participatory process, if also a highly tense and contested one – is, more broadly, observable in recent architectural memorialization literature, too (Haskins 2015; Stevens and Franck 2016).[2] But, as a number of critics have warned (Ewalt 2011; Feldman 2015; Herscher 2014; for a similar point made about aesthetics at large, see Saldanha 2012), the notion that aesthetically focused testimony is particularly potent for the participatory production of public truths and progressive politics risks equating aesthesis (e.g. looking, seeing, touching, hearing, etc.) with action. It overlooks not only the unequal power relations that in fact condition aesthetic experience and the sorts of politics it may animate, but also the political work of organizing and mobilizing that must be continually undertaken in order for knowledge and experience to engender progressive social change.

This emphasis on political work and unequal power relations resonates not only with critical responses to the aesthetic turn in testimony but, more fundamentally than the latter, also with how witnessing and bearing witness have been theorized over the past two decades. Consider the work of Kelly Oliver, who has conceptualized testimony as entailing not only witnessing but also bearing witness. In bearing witness, argues Oliver, subjectivity is a much less temporally and spatially delineable phenomenon than that of subject position; if 'witnessing' concerns experiencing an event at a specific time and place and communicating this experience to others, 'bearing witness' concerns 'that which cannot be seen' (Oliver 2001: 16). While witnessing orientates one's 'subject position' in space and time, bearing witness constitutes 'subjectivity' – or one's sense of agency and 'response-ability' – by continually encouraging one's 'encounter with otherness' (ibid.: 17) – or one's quest to address others and receive their response (ibid.: 85–106). Michael Rothberg's recent work on how certain types of testimony produce 'implicated subjects' also attends to what Oliver speaks of as witnessing and bearing witness (Rothberg 2019). He understands testimony as constituted by and constitutive of contested social relations and the political work they require. If what is at stake in testimony is not simply how violence took place as a spatiotemporally delineable event or who was responsible for it but also whose socio-political agency it impaired and how this impairment might be overturned through sustained political work, then the question I explore is the following. How, if at all, might a heightened interest in the aesthetics of testimony benefit this political work? Specifically, how might it serve those disadvantaged by the various disparities that derive from past violence and that continue to permeate the production of public truths through material, spatial and visual testimony?

Memorializing Solingen

The Solingen arson attack of 29 May 1993 was part of a series of violent racist attacks that shook Germany in the late 1980s and early 1990s, at a time when reunification reinvigorated the patriotism and nationalism that had been suppressed after World

War II and the political mainstream's response to economic downturn involved embracing anti-immigrant sentiments (Kaufman [1998] 2005: 126–127; Mushaben 2010: 161–162). The latter was evidenced by the parliament's regressive revision of constitutional law granting political asylum seekers the right to refugee status in Germany (Hainsworth 1993: 28). Indeed, the Solingen attack took place only three days after this legislative change; four young neo-Nazi men set fire to a house hosting a large family with Turkish background and killed two women and three girls. While Solingen was but one episode of racist violence that targeted those with migrant backgrounds in proto- and post-reunification Germany, the commemorative endeavours it has attracted have overshadowed those associated with the other contemporaneous attacks.[3] My 2013 fieldwork in Solingen on these endeavours coincided not only with the arson attack's twentieth anniversary but also the wake of a new, late-2000s wave of racist murders by the NSU (National Socialist Underground).[4]

Germany hosts the world's largest population of people with a background of migration from Turkey (Sökefeld 2008). By the time of the Solingen attack, this migration had already completed its first generational cycle, meaning there was already a generation of migrants who had received their primary and secondary education in Germany and had thus become familiarized with the perils of Nazism as part of the curriculum (Özyürek 2018).[5] However, the same period saw a rise in racism and xenophobia, which became increasingly mainstream as reunification boosted nationalism (Ellinas 2010: 107; Perinelli 2009: 156). Such was the context in which Chancellor Helmut Kohl dismissed other politicians' commemorative visits to such sites as the Solingen house and to the aggrieved families as '*Beileidstourismus*' (condolence tourism; Fass 2010: 73). The politicians Kohl dismissed included the social-democrat Johannes Rau, the then Minister-President of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia where Solingen is located. Rau visited Solingen the morning after the arson and continued to participate in several of the ceremonies held on anniversaries in the following years. But vis-à-vis xenophobia's and racism's rising prominence across mainstream media and among state authorities, Rau's visit to the Solingen site, and a number of other grassroots initiatives such as the *Lichterkette* (chain of people with candles; literally: lightchain), initially went little way towards stopping the feelings of alienation shared by many of Germany's residents with migration backgrounds.

The site of the arson, Untere Wernerstraße 81, was where the victims were first commemorated. The still-smoking carcass at this address was where protesters and mourners converged in their thousands as they flocked into Solingen upon hearing about the blaze. The local press said this rendered the house a '*Mahnmal*' (monument, memorial) dominating the cityscape (Stock 1993). The *Mahnmal* reference was more than just a metaphor; it had significant material underpinnings. Organizations across the social and political spectrum hung their banners and posters on the wreckage. Individuals graffitied their reactions in both German and Turkish on the boarded-up windows. 'Born here, burnt here' (*Hier geboren, hier verbrannt*) read one banner, providing a bitter summary of the life stories of the

three children killed in the arson and drawing attention to the problems of the then-still-valid term *Ausländer* (foreigner). Others reclaimed their 'foreigner-ness', as they hung Turkey's flag and called out, in Turkish, to its seat of government: 'Ankara is sleeping [while] Nazis are striking' (*Ankara uyuyor Naziler vuruyor*). If these 'guerrilla memorializations' turned the house into a *Mahnmal*, the outcome was not a clear-cut interpretation of the atrocity (Rice 2010). Rather, the site had begun to function as an inadvertent forum where individuals and communities with discrepant senses of belonging negotiated their own versions of what happened: a xenophobic attack that struck Germany's citizens in their home versus a homicide of Turks in a foreign land.

The authorities cleared the site of these commemorative interventions within days. Photographs from the funerary ceremony held on 4 June outside the house, after which the deceased were flown to Turkey where they were buried, show the building's façade rid of any items except the flags of Germany, Turkey, North Rhine-Westphalia and Solingen. Chief mayor Gerd Kaimer argued that the site had to be 'prevented from becoming a *Mahnmal*' because Solingers did not want to be associated with Nazism; he gave the damage suffered by the city's three hundred exporter companies' business as evidence of the perils of such an association (Tüllmann 1993). The prevention Kaimer advocated soon turned out to involve much more than simply the removal of posters, banners and graffiti. The house targeted in the attack would be demolished, too; this was what the aggrieved Genç family wanted, said Kaimer, as they demanded a new one built in its stead (ibid.; SOS-Rassismus 2001: 20). Meanwhile, sceptics speculated that the carcass had been deliberately weakened by the firefighters and the forensic investigation had been impaired; the chemical dioxin used in extinguishing the fire was rumoured to have been much larger than necessary (*Solinger Morgenpost* 1993). Eventually, the house was pulled down only a couple of months after the attack but without any work on a replacement, as the Genç family were now reported to disfavour any construction activity at their former address (Fischer 1993; Kastner 1993; Kempner 1993).

An official representative of the City of Solingen explained to me that 'it was pretty soon agreed' that it would be best to 'keep this just as a moderate site, like a park':

> There are five trees symbolizing the five women who were killed. It was decided that this was not a good place for a big monument or anything. Why? First, to leave it as a personal place for the family; and second, if you look at the location, it is not a place for any kind of gatherings for big groups or anything; it is too small and very steep.

In fact, the trees were planted not by the authorities but by the Genç family themselves, using part of the donations they received following the arson (Meurer 2003; SOS-Rassismus 2001: 17). Another related initiative took place four months after the attack in an area nearby, known as the Bärenloch. Located only a few hundred metres from the Gençs' house, this was the infamous field where the neo-Nazis

that carried out the attack met up and trained, and was reported as such by the family to the police, albeit in vain (SOS-Rassismus 2001: 12, 17). An NGO-led three-week-long project brought together eighteen youths from eleven countries who transformed the Bärenloch into an amphitheatre for youth events (ibid.: 21), and so the authorities' role in this initiative was not significant either.

Contrary to the authorities' wish to retain the 'moderateness' of the site of the blaze, it has remained a commemorative focal point. In May 2013, the site was the destination of two memorial marches. One of these was held on the Sunday before the atrocity's anniversary by a group of anti-fascist and radical leftist organizations. The other march took place on the eve of the anniversary and was convened by the City of Solingen together with the Turkish-state-run organization DİTİB (the Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs).[6] Although the scope of these events and their organizers' profiles were radically different, they both converged at Untere Wernerstraße 81 where the green space with the five trees planted in memory of the victims is railed off from the street. Flowers were laid here at what is the only artefact on site that refers explicitly to the atrocity: a knee-level concrete cube clad in natural stone, atop which an embedded plaque lists the date of the attack, the names of the deceased and their birthdates, remembering them (in German and Turkish) as 'victims of racism who died during the arson here' (Figure 1).[7] Despite their 'modesty', the cube and the plaque have not escaped frequent vandalization by whitewashing and defacement. From a day after the attack when a swastika was found engraved near the site (SOS-Rassismus 2001: 12), to the atrocity's twentieth

Figure 1: The site of the Solingen arson attack (all photographs by the author, 2013).

anniversary when unknown assailants uprooted one of the memorial trees overnight, the site has a long and ongoing history of vandalism. This history, coupled with commemorations held at the site, epitomizes the undeniable memorial significance of Untere Wernerstraße 81, and thus complicates the authorities' urge for moderacy.

A full-blown memorial exists elsewhere in Solingen: The Monument to the Arson Attack of 29 May 1993 (*Das Mahnmal des Brandanschlags vom 29. Mai 1993*). Built in time for the first anniversary, this monument was placed in front of a school building located seven kilometres from the city's central square. The location was chosen by the local authorities who wanted 'to refrain from jeopardising social peace' that they argued placing a monument at the site of the blaze would have caused (Wyputta 2008). Since its inauguration, the monument has hosted the official ninety-minute-long ceremony co-organized annually by the City of Solingen and DİTİB, where Turkey is represented on a ministerial level and where a series of speeches by the Turkish ambassador, Solingen's mayor, a priest and an imam, and prayers by students and teachers from the local DİTİB-run religious school are delivered. The monument's conceptual design was by Heinz Siering, who runs a metal workshop that provides unemployed youth with vocational training, and was drafted by local art teacher Sabine Mertens. The monument consists of two life-size steel cut-out human figures ripping apart a swastika. The figures are surrounded by a pile of rings made of aluminium, except for five copper ones that each represent a victim (Figure 2). The pile of aluminium rings is intended to grow continuously.

Figure 2: The Monument to the Arson Attack of 29 May 1993, Solingen.

A plaque adjacent to the monument invites people to adopt a ring and have their names inscribed on it, either personally at Siering's workshop or in return for five euros.[8] In Siering's words:

> We should live together, like welded ring by ring. International names, Jewish names – they've got the number from Auschwitz. You see a lot of different names from the whole world. … The idea was that it has to grow – ring by ring, year by year. only then the race will be over.

Indeed, there is an initiative dedicated specifically to growing the ring pile that is led, independently of both the local authorities and the monument's designer, by a Turkish-German resident of Bochum in her early fifties. But more than quarter of a century after the monument's inauguration, the initiative has failed to accomplish the participatory ideal central to it; despite its modest size, the monument has yet to be covered beyond the waist-level of its human figures.

These commemorative initiatives have failed to convince Solingen activists who have demanded a memorial intervention closer to the site of the attack, if not at Untere Wernerstraße 81 itself. Among them is a group of left-leaning activists who founded the platform *Solinger Appell* (Appeal by the People of Solingen) in the attack's wake. Aiming to circumvent local authorities' argument that 'the family do not want a memorial at the site of their former house', the platform's members proposed that a junction near Untere Wernerstraße be renamed after the Gençs in time for the tenth anniversary (Meurer 2006). A member of the city's 'immigrants' parliament' responded in February 2003 by submitting an official motion to honour this request (Gaida 2005). The motion was debated in the City Hall and accepted, albeit with an amendment; the street would be named not after the family but after their native village in Turkey, 'Mercimek'. Despite being approved in 2005, the decision was not implemented until 2012. Moreover, contrary to the initial motion, what has been named as Mercimek is not a street but a square separated by a kilometre and a half from the site of the arson, if still located centrally, near the City Hall (Meier 2012). Another deviation was that the square was not so much renamed as simply named from scratch; an entirely new address was created out of the forecourt of a social centre for migrants, which was then terraced into a few rows of wooden-panelled seating alongside patches of hard and soft landscaping (Figure 3).[9]

One of my visits to Mercimek-Platz was with a long-time Solinger Appell activist, a Turkish-German man in his late fifties. He commented that a much more significant part of town should have been named in memory of the victims:

> They say it is difficult to rename an existing address. But they recently renamed the address of the City Hall as Rathausplatz! Why not rename that after the victims? That is what we wanted. This tiny corner is no good. It is as if they say, 'Here you go immigrants, this is your community centre, and, in front of it, your tiny square'.

Figure 3: Mercimek-Platz, Solingen.

Just as the activist was saying these words, a passer-by in his mid-forties interrupted our conversation. Having heard us speak Turkish, the passer-by raised his fist in a seeming act of solidarity and called out, '*Ich liebe die Türkei*!' (I love Turkey!). After a brief awkward moment, 'See these Germans?' the activist remarked:

> Decades have passed and still *Ich liebe die Türkei*! What have we got to do with *Türkei*! Even when they think they are showing support, what they actually do is othering.

If these exchanges and remarks indicated the ways in which Mercimek-Platz essentializes identities and ghettoizes memory, they also rendered it a powerful crystallizer of present-day issues around belonging and citizenship.

Mercimek-Platz has drawn criticism for its name as well as its location. Consider the following conversation I had with two leading Solinger Appell activists in their sixties. According to one of them, although the initial grassroots demand was to name a street after the aggrieved family, the local authorities

> … did not want 'Genç' because it has the 'ç' in it. It looks foreign, and they are afraid of it. Even in Bonn, they recently named a place after a victim, but without the 'ç'.[10] Mercimek does not look so foreign. … On the fifteenth anniversary, we declared Untere Wernerstraße as Hatice Genç Straße. And the family really liked it. But the city council said they're against this and they don't want any stigma.

The other activist followed by showing an article he had brought along, which he wrote back when the renaming debate was underway. He pointed to a part of the article that read:

> It is said that the City of Solingen will work through its own history by renaming this public space Mercimek. But why is it not named after one of the victims? Is it true that the City is scared of Nazi vandalism and stepping back because of that? We must consider an option similar to what they have done in Frankfurt where they renamed a square as Hülya-Platz. (Gaida 2004)

The exemplary case of Hülya-Platz referenced in the article, which for the activists puts their city to shame due to its appellative remembrance of a victim rather than a town in Turkey, is located in Frankfurt am Main's Bockenheim district and named after the nine-year-old Solingen victim Hülya Genç. Upon hearing this praise, I decided to include Frankfurt in my fieldwork. What I encountered there was no less laden with contestation and tension than the commemorative endeavours in Solingen, but also involved aesthetics in more direct ways than the latter due particularly to a monument that complements the commemorative effort of naming the square after a victim.

From acceptive to agentive participation

In Frankfurt, I interviewed City Council member Turgut Yüksel who hails from Turkey and who prepared the motion for the square to be renamed after Hülya Genç. I met with Vedat and Kamil (pseudonyms), two veteran members of the Türkisches Volkshaus Frankfurt e.V (Turkish People's House), the left-leaning community centre established in 1965 by people with backgrounds in Turkey. Both Vedat and Kamil have lived in Germany since the 1980s and were part of the initiative behind the monument now located in the Hülya-Platz. Alongside interviewing Vedat and Kamil, I also visited the square with them.

Similarly to its counterpart in Solingen, Hülya-Platz was created anew. The idea was proposed by City Council member Yüksel only ten days after the Solingen atrocity, and implemented in time for its sixth anniversary (Behrend 2009). According to the Volkshaus activists, the choice of location was deliberate. Bockenheim, the neighbourhood that hosts the monument, is known for its multiculturalism, and the space now called Hülya-Platz was a popular Frankfurt venue for anti-fascist gatherings. For the activists, the naming of the square and the placing of the monument therein were direct outcomes of those gatherings. Both they and council member Yüksel recalled the difficulties involved in naming the site after Hülya Genç. Yüksel recalled the backlash from a number of residents in the area, who asked, 'Why would you want to do it here? We are neither Nazis nor against foreigners!' The activists recounted the various instances of neo-Nazi vandalism that targeted the monument over the years. But more contentious and unexpected than these difficulties, according to Kamil and Vedat, were obstacles the activists experienced when

they contacted the local authorities to legalize the monument. Understanding these obstacles requires background information on the monument and Hülya-Platz.

Rather than a town square per se, Hülya-Platz is a triangular-planned park encompassing an area of about four hundred square metres. It is enclosed on all three sides by, respectively, a street, a cul-de-sac with two buildings, and a three-metre-tall lot-line wall (Figure 4). The monument is placed near the square's street end. Known to locals as 'Kleine (Little) Hammering Man', this is a life-size human figure that is a (both appellative and morphological) tribute to the renowned artist Jonathan Borofsky's series of mechanized steel statues (Schneckenburger et al. 1998: 573–574). In fact, a twenty-one-metre-tall version of the latter, commissioned in 1990, stands only a couple of kilometres away from Hülya-Platz, outside the Frankfurt Trade Fair Grounds (Figure 5).

Unlike its gargantuan counterpart, the Kleine Hammering Man is static, and instead of being only a proletarian symbol, it is also an anti-fascist one, involving a human figure battering a crooked swastika. During my fieldwork, the figure looked rather run-down due to its having been made of plywood, and the crooked swastika was altogether absent. Vedat explained that the latter had initially been made of iron but was then removed as it gradually grew rusty and became a safety hazard. The first conflicts between the activists and authorities were triggered by the monument's material shortcomings. The authorities saw the rustiness as requiring the removal of the entire monument. The activists objected by saying it would suffice to replace just the crooked swastika. The authorities then flagged the monument's

Figure 4: Hülya-Platz, Frankfurt.

Figure 5: The Hammering Man (Jonathan Borofsky, 1990), Frankfurt.

kineticness as a safety hazard. The activists responded by proposing to convert it into a static monument. The authorities this time flagged the swastika, saying it is illegal in Germany. The activists clarified that theirs is not a swastika proper but rather a crooked one and that recent legal precedents have permitted the display of such anti-swastika symbols as theirs. Finally, the authorities deemed the monument a copyright infringement, as it was modelled on Borofsky's Hammering Man. In October 2013, the authorities went ahead and outlawed the monument on grounds that 'it plagiarizes the Hammering Man by Jonathan Borofsky' (Vetter 2013a, 2013b).

Coincidentally, prior to my visit to Frankfurt, I had emailed Borofsky about the monument, assuming the Kleine Hammering Man a work of his due to stylistic similarity. Borofsky replied that the monument was not his but rather 'one of the many reinterpretations of my Hammering Man image that have been produced over the years', and that, 'with any work of art that is placed in the public realm, it is common for people to repurpose the imagery based on their own needs and interpretations'. Having witnessed Vedat and Kamil's desperation, I told them of Borofsky's reply. They were ecstatic:

> You have brought us a great present; this message can save the monument. People at the City Hall, they think, 'These *Gastarbeiter*s [migrant workers], they will not understand a word. They will soon get confused and give up'. But we have been telling them, if this is a participatory and democratic society, and if we have been

> here for the past thirty, forty, fifty years, if change does happen anyway in the built environment, we would like to be part of it! If we constitute 30 to 35 per cent of the neighbourhood's population, if we have our own schools, roads, cemeteries, etc., this monument is part of our history, too. If we are to belong in here, which we do, then that is going to involve culture as well, and hence the importance of this monument. It has been here for the past fifteen years, and it deserves to be legalized. 'We will obtain a *Bleiberecht* [indefinite leave to remain] for this monument', that is what we have always said. Like the monument, we initially also arrived as 'illegal immigrants' but then became permanent.

Three months after my fieldwork, I received an email from Kamil titled 'urgent'. It read that the Kleine Hammering Man is about to be removed on grounds of plagiarism and kindly asking that I share with him the email exchange which I had earlier had with Borofsky. I fulfilled his request, to then receive a second email from the activist on 13 November informing me of how 'our monument is now permanent in Frankfurt; it has acquired indefinite leave to remain' thanks to the Borofsky email.

The commemorative statement incorporated into the street sign 'Hülya-Platz' relates the Solingen victim as having died in an attack 'against foreigners' (*ausländerfeindlichen*). A few metres away, the Kleine Hammering Man continues to debate that foreigner-ness. Its story recalls Lucia Volk's suggestion that memorials in the public realm 'do political work in three distinct ways':

> [as] 'rhetorical spaces' where citizens and political elites debate images and symbols, values and identities; … [as] 'real physical spaces' where people congregate to hold commemorative ceremonies and conduct rituals of remembrance; moreover, after the public ceremonies … they appear as reports in newspapers and other media where they have a second life as texts. (Volk 2010: 24–25)

The square where the Kleine Hammering Man is located does function as rhetorical, physical and textual space. But it also introduces a new angle to Volk's triad. In Hülya-Platz, the three functions are not so sequential and chronologically 'distinct' as they are for Volk. The activists' struggles to legalize the monument have emphasized not only the legacy of fascism's victims such as Hülya but also latter-day issues concerning their own belonging and identity, forging a link between 'the historical moment in which the memorial is produced' and the past (Apel 2008: 217). Moreover, they have pursued this 'rhetorical' struggle through 'physical' production, relentlessly replacing the monument at every turn. Thus, physicality has served as the struggle's medium rather than simply an outcome or illustration thereof. Finally, as the safety of the Kleine Hammering Man's 'life' has not always been guaranteed, its textuality has been part and parcel of the monument's very existence rather than a merely representational process that gave it 'a second life'. This is evident in images of the monument stencilled on Frankfurt's urban surfaces (Figure 6), which activists have referenced as evidence of public support during their negotiations with the authorities and which have therefore undoubtedly contributed to its gaining 'indefinite leave to remain'.

Figure 6: Stencilled images of the Kleine Hammering Man, Frankfurt.

Conclusion

Many of the cases discussed above resonate with recent aesthetically focused debates on memory in Germany. They display what James E. Young has called a 'dialogical quality', helping to engage with the interpretation of history as a participatory and continuously open-ended task (Young 2008: 364). In Germany, the concern for dialogicness has indeed characterized a post-reunification wave of aesthetic engagements with the country's violent histories. Young has termed these 'counter-monuments' and suggested their participatoriness stems from a conduciveness to myriad interpretations by publics (Young 2000: 9). A much-celebrated 'dialogical' artwork has been Hans Haacke's 2000 piece *Der Bevölkerung* (To the Population), which mobilized participation and publicness to be able to reflect – both materially and semantically – the full range of contemporary notions and experiences of citizenship in Germany.[11] If Young considers counter-monuments' unconduciveness to closure evident in the xenophobic reactions they trigger on site (Young 1993: 37–38; 2000: 102), in Haacke's case, invited participants' refusals to contribute to the work are seen as such evidence (Deutsche et al. 2004: 72).

Unlike Young's 'counter-monuments' and Haacke's work, though, not all examples discussed above are 'dialogical' by intention. Closure was what the Solingen monument's designers pursued through the participatory pile of rings; if this design decision has resulted in a counter-monumental effect, it has done so

unintentionally. In the Frankfurt case, avoidance of closure has resulted not from an artistic or architectural decision but from the struggle over the monument's material production and legal recognition. These cases, then, show that the 'dialogical quality' of memorials is much more than simply a feature of their physicality or entrepreneurs' visions. The Frankfurt case, in particular, demonstrates how a monument may become controversial in ways that speak directly to the history it is intended to commemorate, where the controversy need not involve its being located in an unconventional place such as 'a somewhat dingy suburb … located thirty minutes from the city centre' (Young 1993: 30), or its appeal to often neglected audiences such as 'a mix of Turkish guest-workers and blue-collar German families' (Young 2000: 130). The controversy at work here, in other words, is not an outcome of tension and contestation in a broad sense. Instead, it derives from a struggle for agency: specifically, the victims, survivors and their socio-political heirs' struggle for agency to produce and promulgate aestheticizations of violent histories in ways they see fit.

The Kleine Hammering Man's story shows that the publics of 'participatory' artistic and architectural projects may well refuse being mere audience members and instead demand to participate as authors in order to leave their imprint on their 'dingy suburbs' and reject the 'guest-worker' identities imposed on them. Such a demand has also marked the discussions in Solingen. Recall the discrepancy between the Solinger Appell activists' ideas of memorialization and those endorsed by the governing authorities. Whereas the activists foregrounded the socio-political nature of the attack and its structural underpinnings, the authorities underlined that all related decisions are taken in consultation with the victims' family. Whereas the Solinger Appell members challenged ethnically oriented interpretations of the attack, the City has contradicted this by co-organizing commemorations together with official institutions and individuals representing Turkey. These differences demonstrate that questions like where the victims – and others deemed *Ausländer*s – belong and who has the right to determine where they belong have yet to be resolved. That the only Solingen location that appellatively memorializes the victims is named after their native village in Turkey is evidence of this lack of resolution.

Therefore, many of the memorial enterprises discussed in this article are not merely instruments to engage with violent histories as a continuous task. Rather, the contestations, exclusions and struggles these enterprises have engendered render them extensions of violent histories. In making this argument, I do not intend to strike a socio-politically defeatist tone about the role of participatory and public aesthetics in testifying to violence and such testimony's potential for extending rights and citizenship to those denied them. Contrarily, I intend to reframe how the publicness and participation at work here are understood. I propose to understand them not as idealized means through which to access existing forms of citizenship, but rather as necessarily exclusive ones which, while requiring improvement, are nevertheless inevitably instrumental for the expansion of actually existing rights

and citizenships – an expansion that must be pursued as a continually open-ended imperative as rights and citizenships will, in practice if not necessarily in theory, always require betterment.

To return to aesthetically focused mobilizations of testimony, the imperative is to challenge the exclusions and hierarchies that structure participation and publicness in any given context. It requires attending to the enslaved Africans and colonized Americans who were not recognized as fellow humans by the same Europeans that, as per Sliwinski's history of visual testimony, granted the Portuguese this recognition. The imperative, then, is not only to condemn Nazism where it once entirely reigned, but also to ask who is allowed to condemn it and on what terms. Finally – to reflect on my exchange with Borofsky and its impact on the monument in Hülya-Platz – if any given public space or sphere in which to participate in and access citizenship is by definition limited, then the task of experts (i.e. artists, critics, researchers) may not involve disavowing expertise à la Azoulay. Instead, it may require them to take up their share of the division of labour and responsibility involved in the political work of expanding citizenship and rights through the aesthetics of testimony by doing their own expertise justice and offering it to the service of this expansion.

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Notes

1. In this article, I use aesthetics in broadly Rancièrian (2004) terms: the arrangement and continuous rearrangement of matter, space and bodies in ways that are available to the senses and that are political not simply because they take place in public but rather because they actively constitute the publicness in question.
2. Participation has recently become a prominent theme not only in the scholarship on architectural memorialization but also in architectural history and theory at large (for a thorough critique, see Miessen 2011).
3. Other attacks included the 1988 arson in Schwandorf where a married couple of Turkish origin and their son were killed, the 1991 attack on an asylum seekers' hostel in Hoyerswerda, the August 1992 attack with Molotov cocktails on an asylum seekers' shelter in Rostock-Lichtenhagen, and the November 1992 arson attack in Mölln where neo-Nazi youths killed three people of Turkish origin.
4. The NSU murders killed nine shopkeepers of Turkish, Kurdish and Greek origin, as well as a police officer. This brought the total death toll of racist violence in reunified Germany to 135 (Bertelsmann Foundation 2009: 188).
5. For a chronology of migration from Turkey to Germany, see Göktürk et al. 2007.
6. Founded in 1984 as an international branch of the Republic of Turkey's Directorate of Religious Affairs (the country's highest Islamic religious authority established in 1924 following the abolition of caliphate), DİTİB is one of Germany's largest Islamic organizations.
7. Before this plaque was placed in 1995, the only commemorative reference on site was a tin plate sign fixed to the adjacent railing, which read, 'On 29 May 1993, five Turkish women and girls died at this point in an arson attack targeting foreigners. We will never be able to forget this' (Fischer 1995).
8. The plaque reads: 'This memorial was built by young people from different countries around the world in protest against the infamous arson attack of 29 May 1993 on the Genç family. At the foot of the memorial countless rings with names of thousands of people are welded together as public expression of peaceful coexistence. Each ring has thus become a symbol. If you also wish to contribute to the memorial, you can make a ring with us', followed by contact details of Siering's workshop. There is another relevant plaque on the monument itself that reads: 'Memorial: Citizens of Solingen. We do not forget. We do not want to look away. We will not be silent. Many people in this city mourn and remember the arson attack of 29 May 1993 in which five Turkish girls and women lost their lives. Connected as these rings, we want to live together'.
9. A text incorporated into the street sign 'Mercimek-Platz' explains: 'The Genç family, who lost five members in the Solingen Arson Attack on 29.05.1993, comes from Mercimek in Turkey' (*Aus Mercimek in der Türkei stammt die Familie Genç, die beim Solinger Brandanschlag am 29.05.1993 fünf Angehörige verlor*).
10. The place in question is 'Saime-Genc-Ring' in Bonn where, in 2013, local authorities renamed a crescent on the outskirts of town after Saime Genç, the four-year-old victim of the attack.
11. *Der Bevölkerung* consists of fourteen letters materializing its title, which are enframed by a rectangular 21-by-7-metre mini-garden placed in a courtyard within the German parliament building, the Reichstag. It is a textual and material play on the statement '*Das Deutsche Volk*' (To the German People) inscribed into the Reichstag's frontal architrave, and participation is key to its use of materiality to that effect. Haacke invited parliamentarians from across Germany to contribute to the mini-garden with soil from their constituency, who brought 'earth from concentration camps, from Jewish cemeteries, from places where immigrants had been murdered' (Deutsche et al. 2004: 80).

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