



‘Not only cast steel or chiselled stone; people can be monuments too’: an exploration of the *Memory Person* Cathrine Bublatzky & Franziska Windolf

When we think of monuments, we think of statues, memories and events from the past. They are site-specific, solid, immobile. How can they represent cultural and collective memories that are remembered by many, often very differently, and that over time experience new readings? How can monuments installed by institutions, organisations and states speak to and for everybody?

‘What bodies can do the creative work of memory? How can the actual labour of memory be foregrounded, its training, sharing and transmission?’¹

These questions are relevant to agents in the fields of memory studies and memory production, such as artists, cultural practitioners, institutions, governments and, most importantly, for various communities and people in their everyday lives.

‘[It] [...] is on the ‘act’ of memory, [...], inquiring into the processes of making, constructing, enacting, transforming, expressing, transmitting cultural memory through art and popular culture. [...] The notion of ‘performing memory’ thus presupposes agency.’²

1 Liedeke Plate and Anneke Smelik, *Performing Memory in Art and Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 2013), 2ff.
2 Plate and Smelik, *Performing Memory*, 3.



The *Memory Person* (they/them), ongoing since June 2023, by artist Franziska Windolf offers a common form of memory production. The *Memory Person* performed memory as ‘an embodied and localised practice’³ and was conceptualised in Munich during an artist residency at the Käte Hamburger Research Centre global dis:connect and in partnership with the ERC research project METROMOD (Relocating Modernism: Global Metropolises, Modern Art and Exile at LMU Munich).

In their joint exploration, anthropologist Cathrine Bublitzky and artist Franziska Windolf explore how the *Memory Person* represented a striking tension between the concepts of memory, monument and performance.

A performative monument

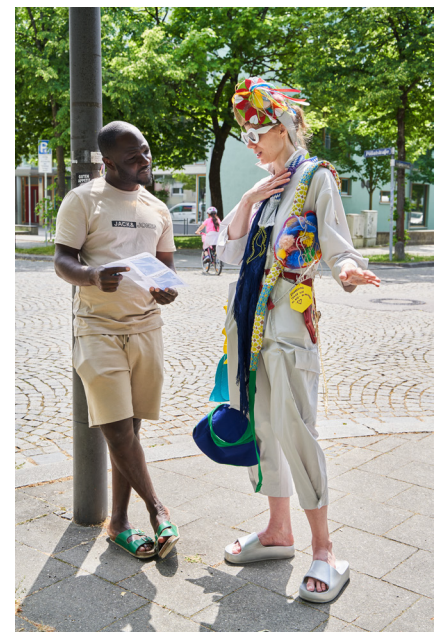
The *Memory Person* strolled through the Giesing quarter, a former workers’ district in southeast Munich. The *Memory Person* was enacted by different persons and embodied a variety of identities, genders and agencies. They were strikingly dressed, carrying several commemorative objects and memorabilia on their body. Each object has its own history, producers and memories. At the heart of the public artwork were ongoing and dynamic encounters between the *Memory Person* and passers-by, their lively and personal interactions, their shared stories and memories. The *Memory Person* was dedicated to creative people who have migrated or are living in exile, and anyone can participate.

*Not only cast steel or chiselled stone; people can be monuments too.*⁴

The *Memory Person* challenges the idea of ‘performing memory’.⁵ As a performative monument, they work with what anthropologists call the agency of humans ‘to create and construct their own reality’ and to ‘collectively [...] shape themselves in their behaviours and beliefs’.⁶ Performing the *Memory Person* entailed an uninterrupted metamorphosis in which their ‘form’ keeps changing. Their performances merged practices of collecting, storing and re-narrating, all resulting in a changing monument.

The public artwork becomes and operates as a performance based on the material interaction and dialogue with people in the streets.

Those who encountered the *Memory Person* are diverse. Some have long lived in Munich, some have moved from other countries, others have migrated or even fled war and other crises in their



←
Fig. 02, 03 top
© Leonid Hrytsak
Fig. 04, middle left
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Fig. 05, middle right
© Mathias Reitz
Fig. 06, 07, bottom
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Fig. 08, top
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Fig. 09, bottom
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3 Plate and Smelik, *Performing Memory*, 5.
4 Sebastian Adler, Spectator of the performance, 24 June 2023.
5 Plate and Smelik, *Performing Memory*, 7.
6 Plate and Smelik, *Performing Memory*, 7.

home countries. All have memories, often not shared with wider publics, as they are intimate and personal, sometimes even traumatic and frightening.

The Memory Person is a living monument that does not represent a particular memory or hegemonic narrative. They produce a host of memories of differently shared pasts in cities like Munich, shaped by migration and mobility.

A nomadic plinth celebrating diversity

The *Memory Person* is a practical invention. Due to the lack of publicly accessible knowledge about creative migrants, exiles and their work in greater Munich, memories and biographies have to be actively sought out in order to become visible.

As a living monument, the Memory Person stimulates an interplay of creative expressions and reflections. The collection of memories and memorabilia, and their endowment to people is open-ended.

Fig. 10, 11 top left and middle

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Fig. 12, top right

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Fig. 13, 15 bottom left and right

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Fig. 14, bottom middle

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Dieses Stück stahlfreier Edelrost
sei mein Beitrag.
Man kann schöne Dinge er-
schaffen und erhalten.
Am Ende bleibt alles
Sternenstaub. Fritz

The web of relationships between the memorabilia changed with each new contribution. The *Memory Person* decentralises and mediates whilst connecting shared memories with people.

This flexible and responsive artistic form is open to renegotiation and emergent values. Their sharing and (re-)telling is on display, mediating memory culture as a lively, contested practice.

The Memory Person and their counterparts became 'facilitators, knowledge producers, hosts and vision seekers'.⁷

The *Memory Person* as a performative monument is alive and constantly 'becoming'.

But what is actually remembered in such unforeseen encounters?

7 Vera Hofmann et al., *Commoning Art – Die transformativen Potenziale von Commons in der Kunst* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2022), 34.

Fig. 16 top left
© Milena Wojhan
Fig. 17, top middle
© Leonid Hrytsak
Fig. 18, top right
© Mathias Reitz
Fig. 19 bottom left
© Mathias Reitz
Fig. 20, 21 bottom middle and right
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Encountering the *Memory Person*

Often, curiosity and eye contact sparked the encounter with the *Memory Person*. Their colourful, unconventional appearance, which defies stereotypical assumptions about a carnival or the Oktoberfest, attracted attention and made people wonder what the *Memory Person* is all about. Once they grasped the goal of the performance, many started to talk about their connections to Giesing and other residents, artists and migrants. They referred to creative people and places. Upon a second, deeper encounter, they contributed a personal commemorative piece as a fragment of their memory.

The creativity of the monument is very broad and includes music, tinkering, crafting, knitting, cooking, graffiti, etc.

Thus, the *Memory Person* addressed as many people as possible. Their objective was to raise awareness of the lack of memorials for migrants and creative people in the neighbourhood. Everyone was invited to celebrate and honour the creativity and work of past and present exiles and migrants by participating.

The initial performances of the *Memory Person* in June and July 2023 were a curated city walk to sites of exile in Giesing, revealing their continued relevance with a pre-selected audience. The spectators accompanied the *Memory Person* and witnessed their encounters and interactions with passers-by. Participants were invited to carry the memorabilia with the *Memory Person* and to contribute a wish for a future monument, a memory or memento of a creative migrant who once lived or moved to Giesing.

The performances in August and September 2023 were more frequent, focussing only on encounters with residents and passers-by. The route through the district was more improvised, with time and space to revisit people and businesses, play table-tennis, etc. On these occasions, the *Memory Person* collected memorabilia and commemorative articles devoted to creative exiles and migrants from anyone who wanted to commemorate.

How the *Memory Person* embodies the monument and interactions with participants in the artwork is shaped by three elements:

1. The *Memory Person* opens encounters by approaching passers-by during a curated city-walk (June/July 2023) whilst strolling through the neighbourhood without a pre-selected audience (August/September 2023);
2. Alternating subject positions between the *Memory Person* and passers-by/audience;
3. Evolving artwork when the artwork is relationally produced with participants.

All three registers played out in each *Memory Person* performance. But the performances in June/July 2023 were less dynamic and open, as the *Memory Person* held a fixed position as the ‘guide’ to explain and share knowledge during the curated walk. The material contributions to the performative monument were largely predetermined (written notes on textile/foam rubber prepared by the artist).

The evolution of the artwork is produced more ‘with’ than ‘by’ the participants.

By contrast, the performances in August/September 2023 provided more space for give and take, including returning moments and memorabilia. Due to the spontaneity of the encounters, the *Memory Person* and the passers-by had more freedom to participate and exchange objects.

Ethics of dialogue / ‘commoning’

‘Commoning’ refers to art that is produced with, not by, the participants. The *Memory Person* is the formation and interplay of relationships and their material effects that shape social space and animate memory cultures.

‘The wider challenge here is that of finding new ways of understanding forms of being-in-common that refuse or exceed the logic of identity, state, and subject. In other words: how to be in common without creating a community?’⁸

If ‘commoning’ is when people in a community or neighbourhood become equal in sharing their diverse memories, how does the prescribed content balance with individual conceptions of the monument?

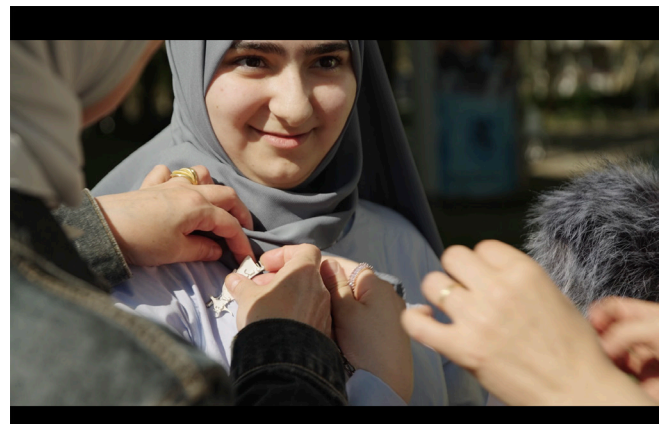
The more reciprocal insights, the more equitable the dialogue and the more shared reflections and relationships can emerge.

Individual identities and property rights don’t apply, as is evident in the ‘materiality’ and ‘objecthood’ of the performative monument. The focus lies on togetherness and the common production of a new monument, whilst the particularities of each person involved gain space to express themselves.

‘It is a collective productive resource that is antithetical to property, whether “public” or “private”?’

8 Harry Walker, ‘Equality without equivalence: an anthropology of the common’, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 26, no. 1 (2020): 148, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9655.13183>.

9 Walker, ‘Equality without equivalence: an anthropology of the common’, 147.



The monument belongs to no one, though the objects the monument comprises signify belonging, which inheres in 'commoning'.

Amanat

All memorabilia engender the dialogues. They resemble *amanat*, which is a Persian word meaning something that one gives to another person as a custodian. This requires awareness and trust – a sense of the reciprocal capacity and will to build a meaningful relationship.

The object becomes a signifier of a shared moment of remembrance and a common (emotional) value that represents other things such as the conversation, a memory, a loss or a personal or communal journey.

The *amanat* contributes and 'transforms' the world, memories, exile and identification.

The emerging performative monument becomes a common gift to creative exiles and society from all participants.

The different materialities of the performative monument speak for the coexistence of different voices

Fig. 22 top left
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Fig. 23, top right
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Fig. 24, 25 bottom
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and situations to which the artwork responds or is created within.

The silver brooches, for example, are given away, so they should be as durable as possible. The *Memory Person* provides a platform for (re)composing and (re)evaluating the objects. Objects converse with each other and provide a 'language' for often ineffable stories. There is no definite way of 'reading' them.

Diversity is the core of the performative monument, representing an anti-hierarchical, even decolonising understanding of what the Memory Person as a 'living monument' embodies.

The actual labour that needs to be done when underrepresented/ invisible knowledge is sought out emerges. Contrasting the glorious surfaces of conventional monuments, the *Memory Person* allows for the contradictions, detours and failures that occur when people are building relationships. The *Memory Person* responds to recent decolonial debates and demands for monuments and statues of a contested, colonial past to fall.

The past is created by and about participants' voices. The Memory Person performs it without repeating it.

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Fig. 26
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