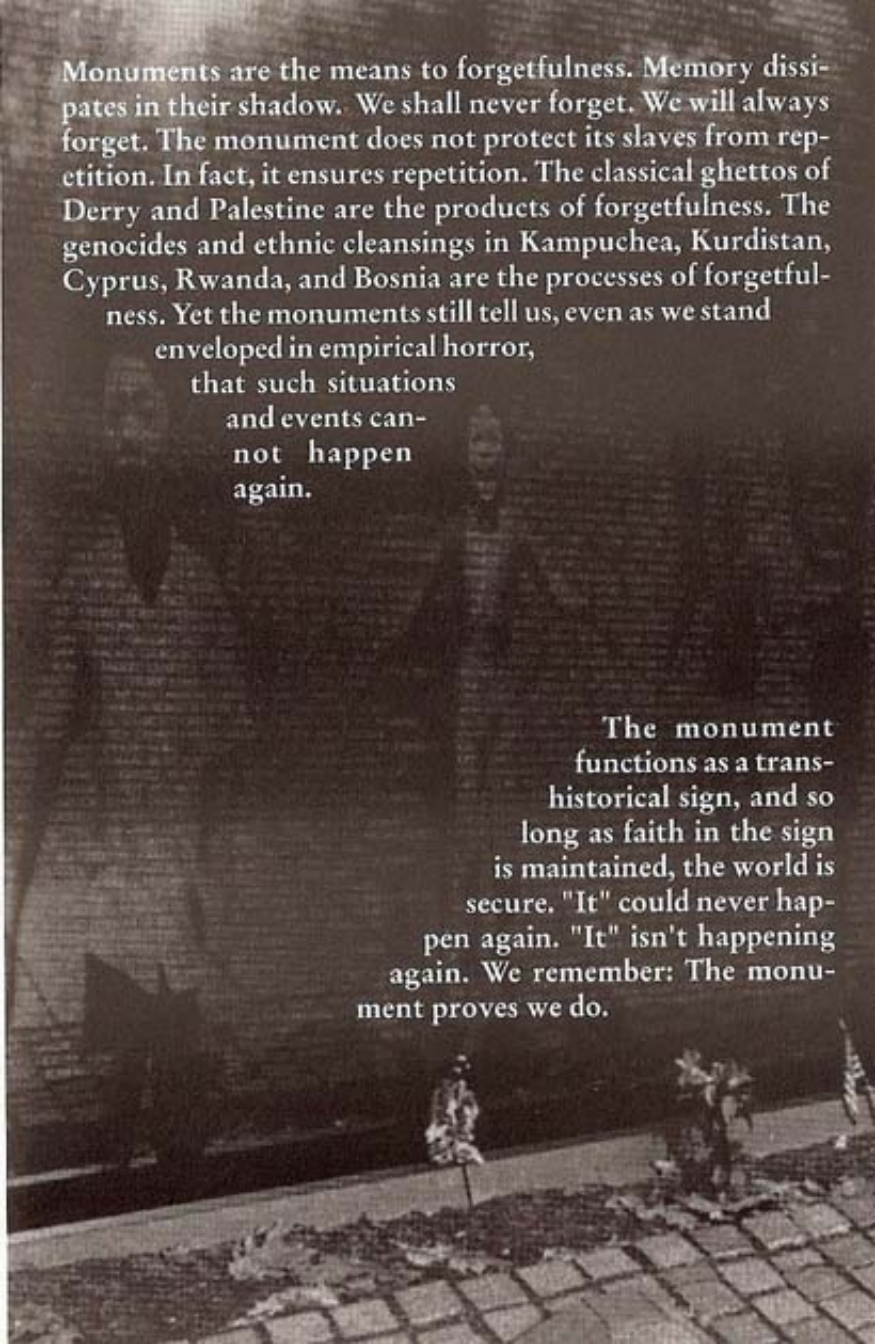


2 Nine Theses Against Monuments

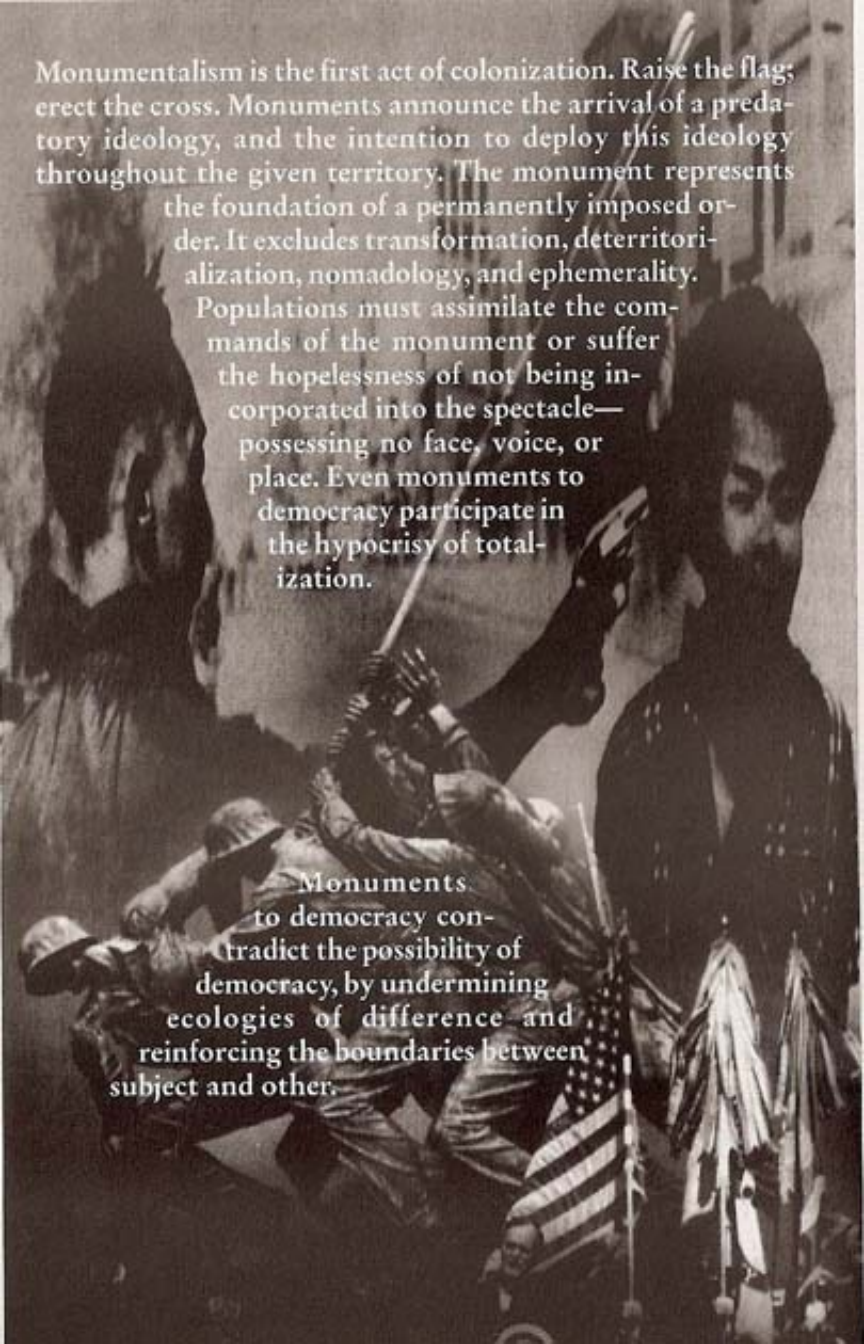
CRITICAL ART ENSEMBLE

Monuments function as concrete signs of reconstituted memory. The events that precede the demand for construction of monuments are those of the most extreme terror and violence, such as wars, revolutions or civil disturbances. The terror of disrupted continuity, the wound of history, is forgotten in monumental presence, and an absent glory is (re)membered. Minority interpretation, obscene sacrifice and the sense of loss are all removed from memory, and a pathological heroism is substituted for them. Such is the nature of the cynical nostalgia legitimised by the nationalist concerns of dominant ideology. Monuments are the dead history of the securing of the mind by the politics of predation.



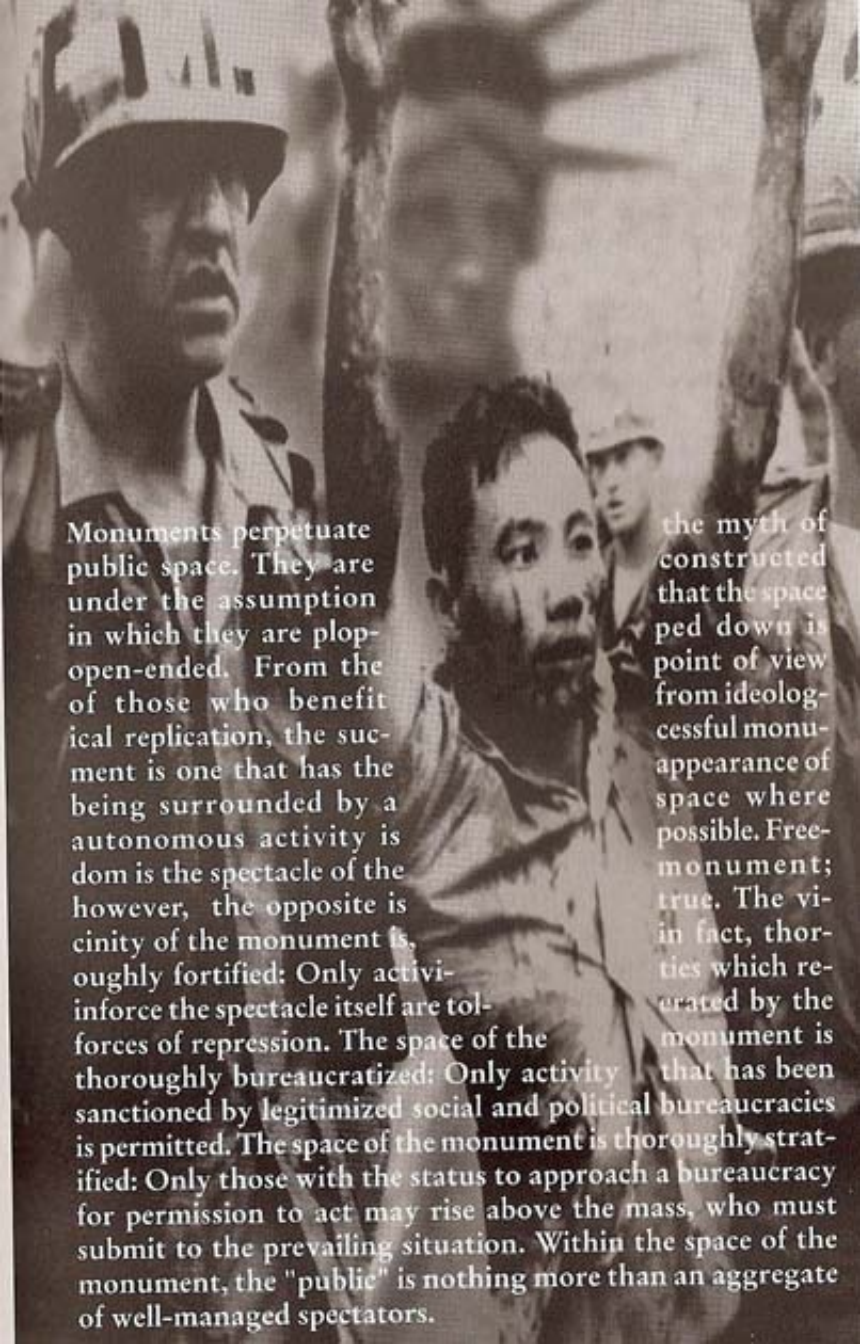
Monuments are the means to forgetfulness. Memory dissipates in their shadow. We shall never forget. We will always forget. The monument does not protect its slaves from repetition. In fact, it ensures repetition. The classical ghettos of Derry and Palestine are the products of forgetfulness. The genocides and ethnic cleansings in Kampuchea, Kurdistan, Cyprus, Rwanda, and Bosnia are the processes of forgetfulness. Yet the monuments still tell us, even as we stand enveloped in empirical horror,
that such situations
and events cannot happen
again.

The monument
functions as a trans-
historical sign, and so
long as faith in the sign
is maintained, the world is
secure. "It" could never hap-
pen again. "It" isn't happening
again. We remember: The monu-
ment proves we do.



Monumentalism is the first act of colonization. Raise the flag; erect the cross. Monuments announce the arrival of a predatory ideology, and the intention to deploy this ideology throughout the given territory. The monument represents the foundation of a permanently imposed order. It excludes transformation, deterritorialization, nomadology, and ephemerality. Populations must assimilate the commands of the monument or suffer the hopelessness of not being incorporated into the spectacle—possessing no face, voice, or place. Even monuments to democracy participate in the hypocrisy of totalization.

Monuments
to democracy con-
tradict the possibility of
democracy, by undermining
ecologies of difference and
reinforcing the boundaries between
subject and other.

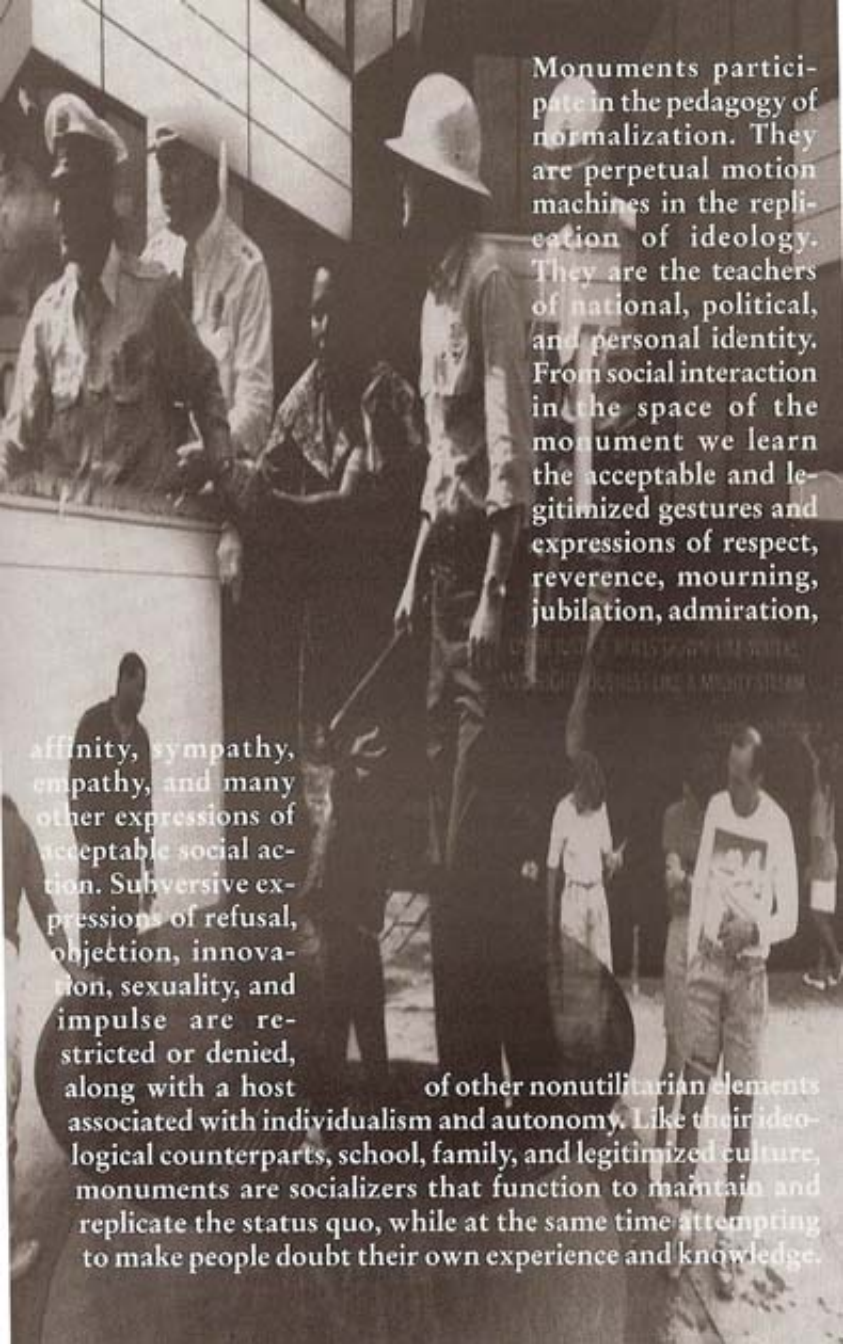


Monuments perpetuate public space. They are under the assumption in which they are plopped open-ended. From the point of view of those who benefit from ideological replication, the success of the monument is one that has the appearance of space where autonomous activity is possible. Freedom is the spectacle of the monument; however, the opposite is true. The vicinity of the monument is, in fact, thoroughly fortified: Only activities which reinforce the spectacle itself are tolerated by the forces of repression. The space of the monument is thoroughly bureaucratized: Only activity that has been sanctioned by legitimized social and political bureaucracies is permitted. The space of the monument is thoroughly stratified: Only those with the status to approach a bureaucracy for permission to act may rise above the mass, who must submit to the prevailing situation. Within the space of the monument, the "public" is nothing more than an aggregate of well-managed spectators.

Monuments eliminate the apprehension of locality. Monuments decontextualize their subjects to the point where the experience of the individual and the location of everyday life collapse into the category of the idiosyncratic. Those caught in the spatial net of monumentality have their existence reduced to a predetermined set of signs that represent the abstract desires of the state. Monuments do not recognize the shifting flow of class, race, ethnicity, age, or gender relative to grounded locality or historical moment, and attempt salitized utopian grand principles of reference to those to construct them, even when the monuments supposedly memorialize the other. Without a sense of localization, marginals of all varieties have no place, as the general is not a part of their situation (regardless of whether this situation is brought about by objection or by imposition).

to replace them with universal principles. Unfortunately, the monuments have meaning only in who have the power and legitimacy

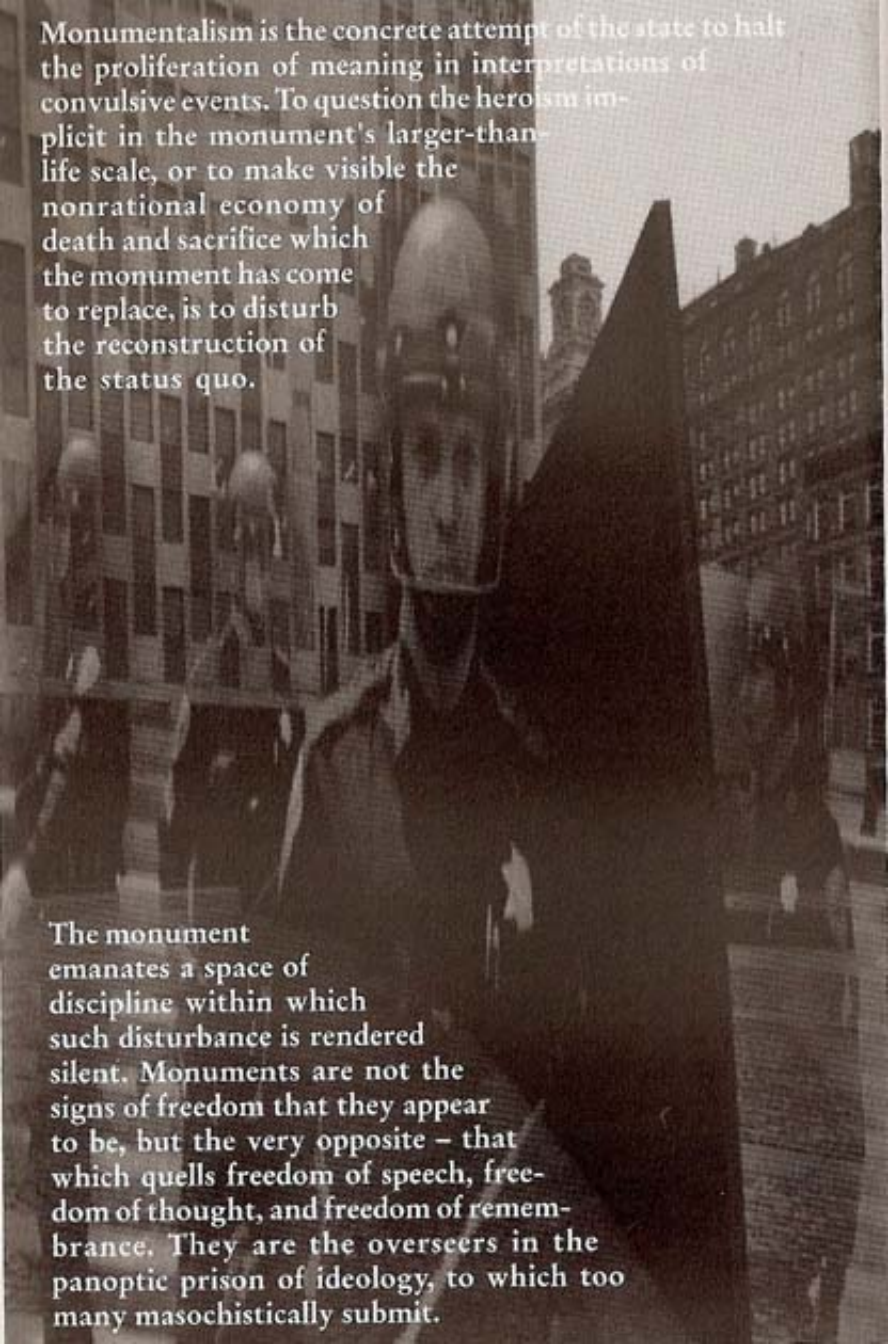




Monuments participate in the pedagogy of normalization. They are perpetual motion machines in the replication of ideology. They are the teachers of national, political, and personal identity. From social interaction in the space of the monument we learn the acceptable and legitimized gestures and expressions of respect, reverence, mourning, jubilation, admiration,

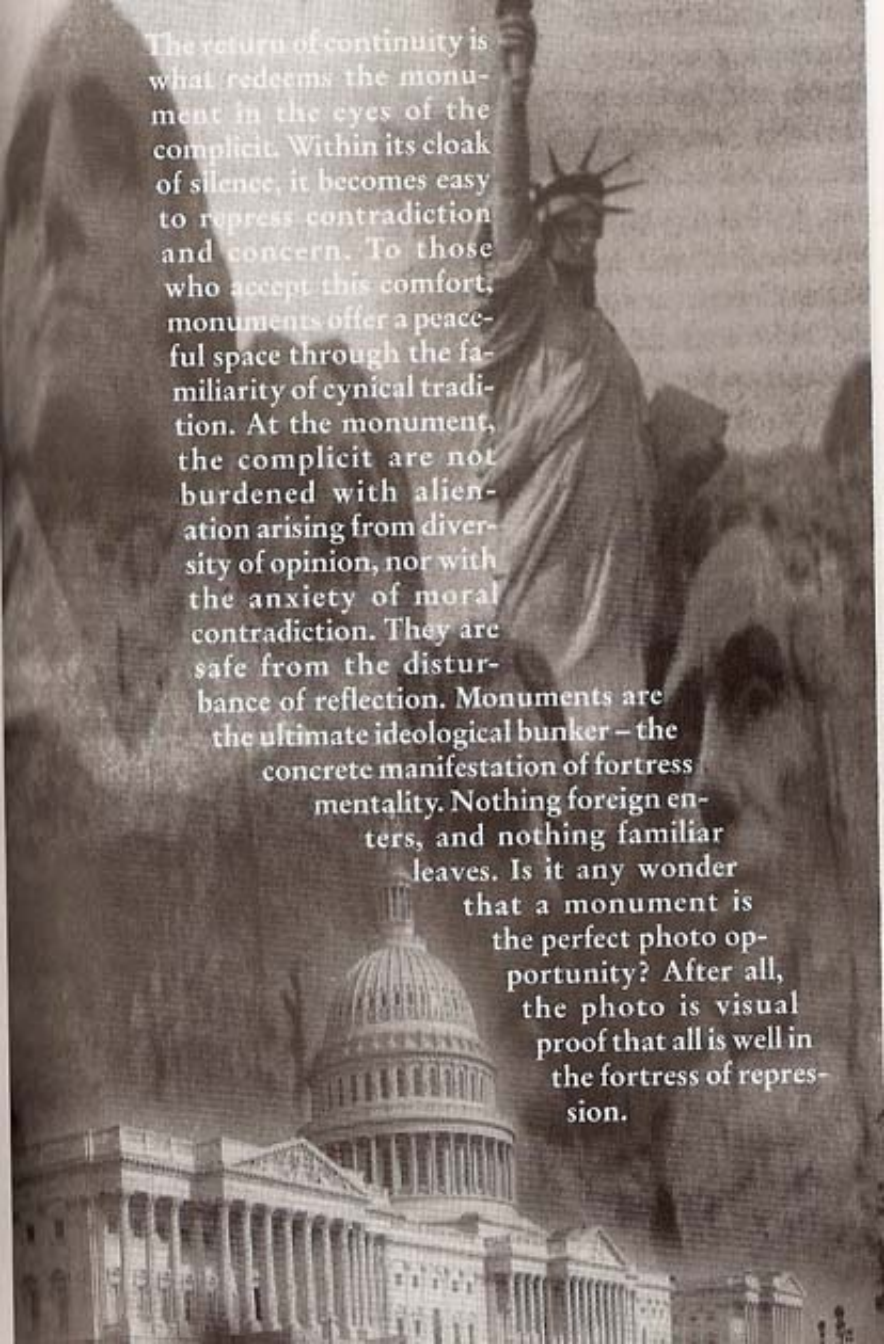
affinity, sympathy, empathy, and many other expressions of acceptable social action. Subversive expressions of refusal, objection, innovation, sexuality, and impulse are restricted or denied, along with a host

of other nonutilitarian elements associated with individualism and autonomy. Like their ideological counterparts, school, family, and legitimized culture, monuments are socializers that function to maintain and replicate the status quo, while at the same time attempting to make people doubt their own experience and knowledge.

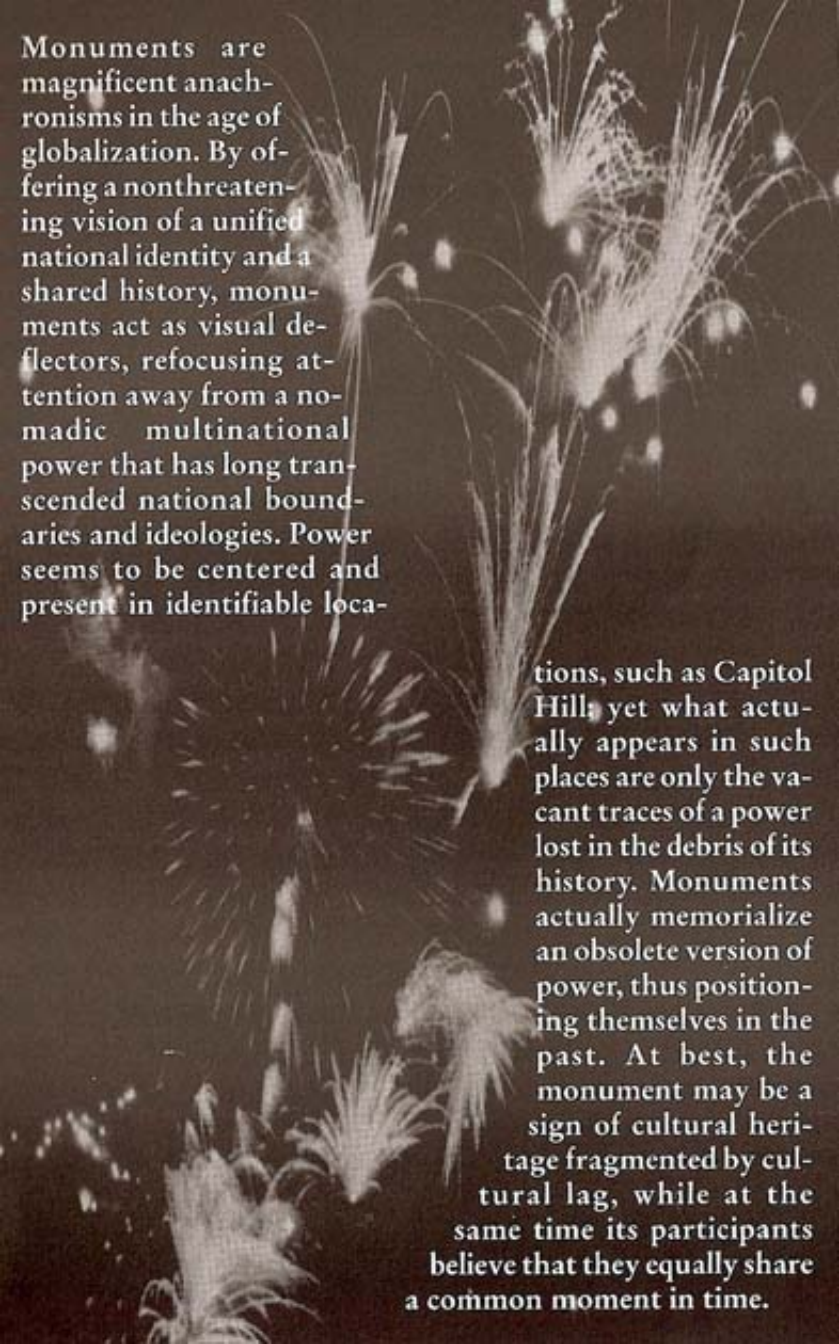


Monumentalism is the concrete attempt of the state to halt the proliferation of meaning in interpretations of convulsive events. To question the heroism implicit in the monument's larger-than-life scale, or to make visible the nonrational economy of death and sacrifice which the monument has come to replace, is to disturb the reconstruction of the status quo.

The monument emanates a space of discipline within which such disturbance is rendered silent. Monuments are not the signs of freedom that they appear to be, but the very opposite – that which quells freedom of speech, freedom of thought, and freedom of remembrance. They are the overseers in the panoptic prison of ideology, to which too many masochistically submit.



The return of continuity is what redeems the monument in the eyes of the complicit. Within its cloak of silence, it becomes easy to repress contradiction and concern. To those who accept this comfort, monuments offer a peaceful space through the familiarity of cynical tradition. At the monument, the complicit are not burdened with alienation arising from diversity of opinion, nor with the anxiety of moral contradiction. They are safe from the disturbance of reflection. Monuments are the ultimate ideological bunker – the concrete manifestation of fortress mentality. Nothing foreign enters, and nothing familiar leaves. Is it any wonder that a monument is the perfect photo opportunity? After all, the photo is visual proof that all is well in the fortress of repression.



Monuments are magnificent anachronisms in the age of globalization. By offering a nonthreatening vision of a unified national identity and a shared history, monuments act as visual deflectors, refocusing attention away from a nomadic multinational power that has long transcended national boundaries and ideologies. Power seems to be centered and present in identifiable loca-

tions, such as Capitol Hill; yet what actually appears in such places are only the vacant traces of a power lost in the debris of its history. Monuments actually memorialize an obsolete version of power, thus positioning themselves in the past. At best, the monument may be a sign of cultural heritage fragmented by cultural lag, while at the same time its participants believe that they equally share a common moment in time.