



Recordando a

Walter Benjamin

Justicia, Historia y Verdad. *Escrituras de la Memoria.*

III SEMINARIO INTERNACIONAL
POLITICAS DE LA MEMORIA

CENTRO CULTURAL DE LA MEMORIA HAROLDO CONTI
Buenos Aires - Argentina

The Eagle of History **Notes on the cultural memories of Armenians**

Jürgen Gispert¹

Abstract:

Monuments are materialized condensations of events. They inform us about the way a culture deals with its past. The Genocide Monument in Armenia's capital, which was built in memory of the 1.5 million murdered Armenians in 1915, is representing this. In the integrated museum documents are exhibited, which witness those states having recognized the Genocide. To each of these documents particular problems are inherent due to international sphere. This affects absent documents, too, especially those ones by the Turkey or the USA. Discourse about the recognition of the Armenian Genocide not only recovers different national strategies of perception of a historical fact, but by that narrates something about processes of reproduction of cultural memory.

In the seventh chapter of his "On the concept of history" Walter Benjamin writes: "There has never been a document of culture, which is not simultaneously one of barbarism. And just as it is itself not free from barbarism, neither is it free from the process of transmission, in which it falls from one set of hands into another." In an indirect manner this chapter's part informs us about the way how governance is able to charge the framework of the perception of collective memory, as the French sociologist and philosopher Maurice Halbwachs showed us by his own Work, too. But there is a difference between framework of the perception of collective memory and collective memory in itself. Thus we get a connection between Maurice Halbwachs and Walter Benjamin, particularly by Benjamin's ninth thesis, where he is interpreting Paul Klee's painting "Angelus Novus" by the term "Angel of history".

We are able to identify such an "Angelus Novus" in the case of Armenian memorizing. I've found out the term "Eagle of history" to picturize the content of the memorial stone on the monument area of Sardarapat, which is dedicated to fallen warriors in the Karabagh conflict. As a token it is not only connected to the other parts of the monument but also interconnects Sardarapat with Tsitsernakabert thus evoking parts of emical understood relationships between past, presence and future.

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The Eagle of History Notes on the cultural memories of Armenians²

At the end of May this year the Turkish Head of State, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, cancelled a visit to Argentina during his South American trip. We were told that he was annoyed that the planned unveiling of a monument to the founder of the modern Turkish state, Kemal Ataturk, had been forbidden in Buenos Aires. He suspected that this was the work of the Armenian community in Argentina.³

In my opinion this piece of news contains elements which any discussion about Armenia in connection with the work of Walter Benjamin needs to address. In the first decade of his rule, the “grand father” Mustafa Kemal, who was responsible for the creation of Turkey in 1923, eliminated some important elements of the Turkish-Ottoman culture, including the language and the Caliphate, as well as the wearing of headscarves. But very tightly linked to that is also the history pre-1923, the end of the Ottoman Empire, and the *aghet*, or *mets yeghern*, which most Armenians, and most historians internationally, refer to as “the Genocide”. Ataturk did call this crime by its name, but cynically interpreted the event as necessary for the creation of the Turkish state, thereby helping to create some of the mythology around the founding of the country. This became tied to acts of political forgetting and denial, however, which were in turn integrated into an educational policy, the effects of which are still felt today, and which paved the way for nationalist and fundamentalist movements – within this context, memorials or monuments to the murdered Armenian-Turkish journalist Hrant Dink stand in contrast to the forbidden Ataturk monument in Buenos Aires.

On the other hand, we have the above-mentioned concepts of *aghet* and *yeghern*, which appear contemporaneously right at the beginnings of the written Armenian language (5th century) in connection with the books of the Maccabees. Here *aghet* describes an exceptional situation where Armenian men and women are unable either to retreat or to

² I'm indebted to Lindsay Gasser, Sosua, Dominican Republic and Helen Cheshire, Penetanguishene, Ontario/Canada for their grand help and the translation.

³ ORF.at, “Disagreement about Atatürk-monument: Erdogan cancels foreign trip”.

<http://orf.at/?href=http%3A%2F%2Forf.at%2Fticker%2F370282.html> (downloaded 7.6.10)



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overcome the situation.⁴ *Yeghern* means a massacre, a crime, and the phrase *mets yeghern* is reserved for the events of 1915.

The emic attribution of *mec yeghern* needs to be distinguished chronologically from the equivalent *tseghaspanutyun*. This is a direct translation of the imported term “genocide” invented by Rafael Lemkin in 1944. Here it must be noted that whenever foreign language imports arrive, there is always an attempt to find a corresponding expression in Armenian. In this particular case, *tsegh* means “tribe, clan” or *azg* for “nation”. *Tseghaspanutiune* from an emic perspective means exactly that that happened, i.e. the attempted or successful destruction or killing of a complete people. The back-translation transforms the international standard meaning of “genocide” to fit the specific Armenian case. This is significant in as far as Armenia is not trying to adapt to international standards, but rather the opposite. It wants to translate international standards of interpretation to its own cultural context. You have to remember that in his studies of the concept of “genocide”, Lemkin referred to the massacres from 1894 to 1896 under Sultan Abdul Hamid as well as to the description of events in 1915.⁵ In addition, he was informed about the trial against Soghomon Tehlirian in 1921: Tehlirian had murdered the former Minister of the Interior of the Ottoman Empire, Talaat Pascha, in Berlin: he reported on the atrocities before the court, and was acquitted. The Armenian Genocide itself was not even mentioned explicitly at the UN Convention on Genocide of 1948, having apparently vanished. In this sense, and in line with Benjamin’s thinking, we can certainly speak of an “echo” from a silenced past, one that is being heard again through the use of the term *tseghaspanutun*. As a component of the echo, the word itself is a transition link between the translation and the original,⁶ and so keeps the past alive in the present.

In this respect the echo also represents and expresses the content of historical and politically motivated cover-ups, kept alive through the continued debate around acknowledging the events of the past. In the museum attached to the Genocide monument, documents are exhibited which acknowledge those states that have recognised the Genocide. Each of these documents is controversial, due to international politics. This is true, of course, for the absentee documents too, especially those from Turkey or the USA. Debates about the

⁴ Mihran Dabag, “Torture and memoirs of the Armenian community”. In : Loewy, Hanno and Moltmann, Bernhard (Eds.), *Experience – Memories – Meaning; Authentic and reconstructed memory*. Campus, Frankfurt am Main, 1996, pp. 177-235; p. 178f.

⁵ See Raphael Lemkin, “Raphael Lemkin's Dossier on the Armenian Genocide. Turkish Massacres of Armenians”. Center for Armenian Remembrance (CAR), Glendale, California, 2008.

⁶ See Walter Benjamin. “The Task of the Interpreter”. In: *ibid*, *Illuminations*. Campus, Frankfurt am Main, 1977, pp. 50-62.



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Armenian Genocide not only uncover different national strategies for how historical facts are perceived, but also reveal something about the processes of how cultural memories are handed down.

In his seventh thesis on “The concept of history” Benjamin states: “No document of cultural history ever exists without there being an equal and opposite one of barbarity. And as it is itself not free of barbarity, neither is the process of transmission, by which it is passed from one to the other.”⁷ These sentences summarise what occurred at the end of the Ottoman Empire, contributing to Ataturk’s “Modernising Reforms” as well as what was on the political agenda at the birth of the Turkish Republic. If barbarity in the cultural context means not solely extinction, but also ignoring, actively forgetting, then the process of transmission refers not only to what was handed down, but - and above all - to the conditions under which it was handed down.

The Armenian word for “tradition” is “awandutiune”. The verb “awandel” has connotations such as “hand over”, “hand on”, “leave a legacy”, “entrust to, or give for safekeeping”. These are nuances which, along with whatever is considered to be the legacy, also highlight the actual process of transmission. For example, physical space is required if it is necessary to find a place for safekeeping. Ultimately, the etymological dictionary of the Armenian language refers explicitly to the Armenian language itself: *hayotz lesu awandel*” means “to teach the Armenian language”, which in an emic context for Armenians means more than just passing on a means of communication. It is the medium of language itself which stores the race memories. Maurice Halbwachs, the French theoretician of memory, counts language as one of the four most important social frames of reference for collective memory. The individual, according to Halbwachs’ principal theory, only acquires their own memory subject to certain social preconditions. Social frames of reference are part of these pre-conditions.⁸

So we can link Benjamin’s quote with Halbwachs’ approach, although we must remember that there is a difference between the frame of perception of a collective memory and the memory itself – the current slow beginnings of a discussion within Turkey about the 1915 genocide make that clear. We can in fact regard the collective memory as memories of experiences shared by Armenians and Turks (relating to the shared time in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey), seen from different perspectives. This difference between the frame of

⁷ Walter Benjamin, “On the concept of history”. In: *ibid*, *Illuminationen*. SV, Frankfurt am Main, 1977, pp. 251-261, p. 254.

⁸ Maurice Halbwachs, *Memory and its social conditioning*. Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 1985



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individual perception of the collective memory and the memory itself reveals a further connection between Maurice Halbwachs and Walter Benjamin.

Since 1915/1923, historical developments in West Armenia (present-day Turkey) on the one hand, and in the former Soviet region of Armenia (present-day Republic of Armenia) on the other, provide us with some insight into the different pre-requisites for the perception of historical phenomena and their meaning: the consequences of these pre-requisites differ according to the frameworks of Armenian and Turk perspectives.

One form of transmitting and recognizing historical events is the memorial or monument. A monument is a material crystallisation of events, informing us about the way a culture deals with its past. This is demonstrated by the Genocide Monument in Armenia's capital, which was built in memory of the 1.5 million murdered Armenians in 1915.

The monument to Sardarapat, which is 40 kilometres outside the capital and close to the Armenian-Turkish border, was dedicated in 1968 on the 50th anniversary of the battle of Sardarapat, when the invaders from the Ottoman Empire lost to the defending Armenians. Both the genocide monument and that of Sardarapat combine different motifs from Armenian history, which I would like to look at more closely.

To reduce my scope somewhat and to provide a suitable starting point, I will take the monument with the graves of eight Armenian defenders who fell at Sardarapat. This probably demonstrates the most visible change to the memorial landscape since Armenian independence. Behind the graves there is a memorial stone with the carving of an eagle as its focus. It is less the generic symbol of the eagle in mythology which is of interest here, but rather the unusual position of the eagle.

In his ninth thesis, Benjamin interprets Paul Klee's painting "Angelus Novus" using the term "Angel of History". We are able to identify such an "Angelus Novus" in many Armenian memorials. I have therefore coined the term "Eagle of History" to refer to the focus of the memorial stone for Sardarapat, which is dedicated to fallen defenders in the Karabagh conflict.

Just as Benjamin's "Angel of History" is caught in a strange historical dilemma, so too is the Armenian "Eagle of History". It is facing the history of Paradise, from which direction a storm is blowing and driving the eagle backwards into the future, whilst casting rubble at its



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feet. Unable to resist the onslaught with its wings, it tries to reconstruct the rubble, but ultimately fails to do so, because the forces of progress are stronger than it is.⁹

Symbolically, this section of the memorial stone is not only connected to the other parts of the stone itself, but is also inextricably connected to the Sardarapat monument and to Tsitsernakabert, the hill supporting the Genocide monument in the Armenian capital, thereby evoking aspects of emically understood relationships between past, present and future.

The Sardarapat Monument initially comprised 5 main elements: at the entrance to the monument area, there are two winged bulls on the right and left of a flight of stairs. Behind this in the centre, there is a large bell-tower consisting of four uprights. On the left of this, there is a long avenue, bordered by 5 sculptures of eagles on the right. In the centre of the avenue is a semi-circle, the so-called Wall of Memory. At the other end of the monument, there is a museum. In 1995, a cemetery with a total of 8 graves was added to the right of the bell-tower, along with the memorial stone and its carved eagle. All components of the monument site, including the museum, are faced in red tuff stone, creating a dramatic contrast to the blue sky.

According to mythology, the eagle is the symbol of the power of the gods, of fire and of immortality. Since ancient times in Armenia, it has been widely used as the symbol of the sun and symbolises the courageous strength in the souls of warriors. Immortality, courage and strength are attributes of Vardan Mamikonian. On the rear of the so-called Wall of Memory at the Sardarapat monument there is a carving of a book, representing the book by Elishē about Vardan's battle in 451. We can therefore draw a further connection between the Karabagh graves and the eagle. The Vardan myth goes back to the historical figure of Vardan Mamikonian, who went into battle in 451 against the Sassanids and lost. His enemy was Vasak Siuni. Elishē, the historical author from the 5th century, describes the battle. According to him, Vardan is the hero and the defender of Armenian Christianity, whilst Vasak is the traitor.¹⁰ The Sassanids wanted to force the Armenians to adopt their religion, whereas the latter wanted to maintain religious autonomy.

The geopolitical dilemma, within which this phase of Armenian history plays out, seems to return again and again. Whether it was Byzantium and the Sassanid Empire, or the Ottoman Empire and Persia, later Russia, and most recently Turkey and the Soviet Union, the Armenians have developed their own culture under the influence of these other powers. This

⁹ Vgl. Walter Benjamin, "On the concept of history". In: Benjamin, Walter, *Illuminations. Selected writings*. SV, Frankfurt am Main, PP. 251-262, P. 255.

¹⁰ See for a description of this: Levon Abrahamian, *Armenian identity in a changing world*. Mazda Publ, Costa Mesa, 2005, pp 331-335.



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“*inter esse*” creates a culturally determined interest which runs like a paradigm throughout Armenian history. In this way, the Vardan myth stands in conflict with Vasak, as does the current Karabagh conflict, where the fight for the former Soviet enclave is identified as the fight for a national history. Religious affiliations are accreted through the contrast between Christian Armenia – Moslem Azerbaijan. In the same way, we can see the conceptual linking of ideas between Vardan Mamikonian and his “descendants” the dead soldiers in Sardarapat. The Eagle of History absorbs the semantics of Vardan and makes past events current. The history of Vardan is therefore not simply frozen in the present, but is kept very much alive alongside, through, and as part of the story we are being told about the Karabagh conflict. The thematic focus of “Karabagh” switches between Sardarapat and Tsitsernkaberd – in Yerevan, it is the sacrificed martyr, in Sardarapat, the dead hero. The bodies of the fallen were buried in Tsitsernakabert from 1990-1994, and the eagle serves to link the loss of West Armenia with the “gain” of Karabagh.

The figure of Vardan remains ambivalent – although he lost the battle, at least his people took away a moral victory, as Christian religion was preserved in the face of the Sassanids. The figure of the eagle can be viewed as an allegory of the Armenian hero, as well as of the martyr. It holds on to the rubble of Armenian history in the present time, representing remembrance. Even if the rubble existed in reality, holding on to it as a symbol of remembrance is Utopia, which can be deciphered from the architectural configuration of the monument’s component parts

It is such ambivalence which determines the position of the eagle. Symbolically, the eagle is exposed to the storms of historical events, in front of which the rubble piles up uncontrollably. That in turn blocks its view of Paradise, the country itself in which the Armenians live. What the eagle sees as a heap of rubble is in fact history for the West, and at most will be remembered as such. *We* (in the West) regard a chain of events as progress, experiencing them as an apparently logically connected chain. What is seen as progress on the one hand, however, is regarded by the eagle as the rubble of destruction.

The rubble motif and its representation in the picture of the eagle carving lays bare the path to the nexus of relationships between past and present.

Halbwachs polemically positions history in opposition to current times, to the collective memory. History with Halbwachs is studded with discrepancies and discontinuities, while the



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collective memory seeks to identify similarities and continuity.¹¹ Walter Benjamin maintains that memory, made concrete in the form of monuments, is not an instrument of, but a medium for, exploring past events: “Armenian art since the genocide is less a memorial than a process of remembering, of “unearthing” as ‘memory is not an instrument for exploring past events, but it is the medium. It is the medium of what was experienced, in the same way that the earth is the medium in which old cities lie in ruins.’ ”¹²

In this context, let me bring in the much-quoted passage from Marcel Proust’s “In search of lost time”, where, on tasting a mouthful of Madeleine cake, he finds himself transported back into the past, thereby connecting his past memories to the eating of cake. Forgotten memories have been restored to his conscious mind.¹³

If the place of remembrance refers to aspects to be recalled, then it denounces the absence of a living memory in the relationship with the recipient. In the case of Armenia it is an absent living memory, in the sense of absent but alive, which is what the phrase “lost present” is trying to describe.

I encountered this term when I took part in two excursions in the Armenian border area. In this border area, which joins Turkey and the Republic of Armenia, the medieval capital of the kingdom of Armenia, Ani, lies, which fell to the Seldchuks in 1064. Here is a typical overlay of time and place. Ani today is divided between Armenia and Turkey – on the Armenian side is the abandoned cemetery of the ruined city. A destroyed bridge over the Achunian, the border river, symbolises the condition of the town and its division. As part of Sovietisation, or of the Turkish War of Independence, the area around Ani fell to what became Turkey. This also makes it a symbol of former independence now lost, and also of the ownership of larger territories, of a past culture and – in reverse – the symbol of a shared common history and its associated war of independence. During both excursions, it was noticeable that both older and younger participants had brought paper bags or other containers with them, which they filled with soil and took home. This act symbolises what I call “lost present”. “Lost present” means a special relationship between time and place. The soil taken home takes with it the loss of territory, but also offers strong links to the individually

¹¹ Jan Assmann, *The cultural memory. Writing, memory and political identity in early major cultures*. Beck, 1992, p. 42

¹² Kristin Platt, “Signs of survival”. In: Museum Bochum, Armenia. Rediscovering an ancient cultural landscape. Exhibition catalogue, Bochum, 1995, pp. 437-444, p. 444. In my opinion the moment of the living process of memory goes back in time past the genocide.

¹³ See: Marcel Proust, “A la recherche du temps perdu. Vol. 1: Du cote de chez Swann. Paris. I.” P. 69, quoted by Walter Benjamin, “On some motifs in Baudelaire”. In: *ibid*, *Illuminations*. Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 1977, pp. 185-229, p 188



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experienced present. This means that the specific past, that of Ani, is subject to a currently select definition, and as such is kept alive in the present. The collected soil, the relationship to time which is incorporated in it, is moved into the present by the displacement in space, so that moving it ensures that the past remains current in the present. A past which is kept alive in this way can in special cases both gather up what is to be handed down and transform it at the same time.

In the following example from the time of the genocide, Hermann Goltz talked in a lecture about the "rescued treasure of Cilicia"¹⁴ by Armenians. During their deportation in 1915, the Armenians saved cases of silverware etc from a fast-flowing river into which they had fallen, and many of these were liturgical items. According to Goltz, the "memory of Armenian history" embodied in this treasure becomes inextricably linked to that of the genocide.

That means that the treasure serves not only as a medium for embodying the memory of Armenian history, but is also a medium for that of the genocide. The treasure from Cilicia links to the era of the kingdom of Cilicia. Sis was the capital at the time, and the seat of the Catholicosate.¹⁵ The so-called Great House of Cilicia, with its dukes and kings, together with the institution of the Catholicosate, represented an important political factor for both the Roman and the Byzantine factions, just as the Catholicos was a partner in discussions for both the Latin-Roman and Greek-Byzantine wings of the church.¹⁶

The small troupe of monks, which the Sis monastery sheltered, were forced to go to Aleppo on 13 September 1915. The cases referred to above were the most valuable items in their treasure. Both the treasure itself and Armenian history are now brought by Goltz into a relationship with the genocide. You could therefore conclude here that the sacred treasures and writings were vectors of a third concept ie. that of Armenian history, which is somehow embodied within them.

That the financial value was not the most important factor in this rescue can be seen in the way the treasure was saved. As monks, they looked past the purely monetary value of the treasures, thereby linking it again to Armenian history. The saving of the treasure coincides here with the rescue of Armenian culture itself.

¹⁴ Note, report Hermann Goltz, "The rescued treasure of Cilicia". *Dies Academicus*, Halle 2.12.2003

¹⁵ Today it is called Kozan (Turk.).

¹⁶ Hermann Goltz (Ed.), *The rescued treasure from Cilicia*, Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, Wiesbaden, 2000, p. 6



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The treasure from Cilician times becomes a point of attachment for individuals to Armenian cultural tradition. Through the process of remembering, the individual gives the object of remembrance, the items from the past, a special type of presence in the present time.

“By a ‘point of attachment’ I mean an event, a state of awareness, whose point in time, i.e. its distance from the current moment, is known and can be used to measure other intervals of time. These points of attachment are states of awareness, which are able to withstand oblivion better than other events, thanks to their intensity or the complexity through which they are interconnected to others, thereby increasing their chances of revival. They are not chosen arbitrarily but rather they impose themselves upon us.”¹⁷

This means that a past event is never remembered in and of itself, but always appears in combination with current events or facts, rendering them inseparable. This has a bearing on the relationship between present and past: “Memory is ... not simply the relationship of past and present, but rather a relationship between two relationships: that of the past to the present, and that of the present to the past.”¹⁸

We need to place the concept of a ‘lost present day’ in this context, supporting it with a look at the architecture of the ethnographic museum at Sardarapat.

Architecture is not created within a space. Architecture first creates the space. This does not mean, however, that the space is constructed. Space is not separate from everything else, but exists alongside and within it. Architecture produces artefacts which enable space to be created as well¹⁹.

Things are taken away or added, as in the case of the Museum at Sardarapat, which has only two windows. One window looks out on Mount Ararat in Turkey, the other on Mount Aragats in the Armenian Republic. The effect is as if the two are connected by means of the museum, and so the political border between states is symbolically overcome. This needs to be put in the context of the overall design of the building, which through its architecture and exhibitions provides a glimpse into the depths of time, the history of Armenian culture. This includes the socialist movement, which after its collapse is able to remain intact so to speak through this interconnection with the present day.

¹⁷ Maurice Halbwachs, *Memory and its social conditions*. Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1985, p. 176.

¹⁸ Horst Folkers, “Rescued history. A reference to Walter Benjamin's concept of remembrance”. In: Harth, Dietrich (Ed.), *Menemoseyne forms and function of cultural remembrance*. Fischer, Frankfurt am Main, 1991, pp. 363-377, p. 363f

¹⁹ Bernhard Waldenfels, “Architecture based on the body”. In: *ibid*, “Sensory thresholds. Studies on the phenomenology of the unknown 3”. SV, Frankfurt am Main, 1999, pp. 200-215, p. 202



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In the case of Armenia, the opposite is true: time is turned into space through the medium of architecture and is evenly expressed through the organisation of space, through the interconnectivity of the artefacts.²⁰

From the mainly inferior or (semi)autonomous position of the Armenian nation, as compared to that of foreigners or enemies, come the cultural “shards”, or actual ruins, out of which Armenia needs to reconstruct its own history.

“Old cities”, which lie buried in the ground, disintegrate into shards when they are uncovered through excavation. This also has relevance in the case of old Armenian monuments, from whose ruins stones were taken for more mundane buildings, either through ignorance or intentional policy. In a metaphorical sense – as also in the Armenian Republic – formerly hidden remains are now tangible right here on the surface.

The problem lies with the constellation of such remains: Benjamin places a ‘find’ in relation to the layers through which you have to go to reach it. This means that there is no “intrinsic value” to such an artefact, but rather its location and date of discovery must also be taken into account. In our case, this actually means the relationship between voluntary and involuntary memory. The ‘find’ (artefact) is placed in a three-way time relationship. It is important not only how (i.e. when and where) the ‘find’ came to us, but also, how we actually found it. These two relationships then connect to the relationship with the artefact at the moment of its discovery. This concept of Benjamin’s releases the artefact from a simply arbitrary position and is particularly relevant for Armenian content. It must be stressed that the Genocide monument is symbolic of this dichotomy – it represents not only the fact of the *mets yeghern*, the great catastrophe or “crime”, meaning the Genocide itself, but also the struggle for its recognition, ideas that culminate in a monument. When considering a possible framework of remembrance for Armenia, we can now refer to this content. History and the analysis of ritual show that, although monuments and ritual are to be understood in the context of stabilising the system, the conflicting “anti-history” is necessary part of history as well. It does not coincide with it, but rather reaches out beyond it: Benjamin’s “concept of image does not match that of a representation. A clear distinction must be made between socialist theories of reflection and representation, and the concept of realism which is based on them. Finding words *about* something is not the same thing as the process of representation which finds words *for* something. Benjamin’s image does not occupy reality,

²⁰ Cf. Henri Lefebvre, for whom the mastery of space over time seems to be a characteristic of modern capitalism, by which space is also appropriated. Ralph Ubl, “Spatial sceptics - Lefebvre and Auge”. In: *Texts On Art*, Nr. 47 / September 2002, *Space Tidying up: Space-Classics New arranged*, pp. 134-148, see Fn. 36.



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neither does it replace it. It processes it, visibly retaining its difference to it."²¹ A monument cannot therefore simultaneously represent itself as an anti-monument.

While the monument officially symbolically represents the history of the victors, it also works allegorically as a monument to the 'anti-history' – in this respect, it makes a statement about *power*.

Sardarapat and Tsitsernakabert are both media by which the past is not only explored from our current social circumstances, but through which it is also created. This phenomenon also appears for example after Sumgait in 1988, at the time of the Karabagh movement (both find expression at Tsitsernakabert and Sardarapat through the materialisation in the form of graves), when the historical connection, which had been buried by the official cultural policy, was once again brought to the surface for the inhabitants of the Soviet Republic.²² In the face of earthquakes and conflict, the sudden eruption of remembrance world-wide by the Armenian diaspora, recalling historical origins, is clearly reminiscent of Benjamin's categories of discontinuity, fragmentation and remembrance.

The discovery of broken remains – to which the ruins of the famous ancestral city belong – and the taking home of soil go beyond a depiction as part of Armenian folklore, beyond the practice of a custom: in the Armenian word "*soworutiune*" for "custom" we have the verb "soworel" meaning "to learn", and so it is contextually linked to that that is to be handed down.

If we wanted to drag pathos into this, then the soil taken home would also be a way of experiencing fragmentation – Benjamin is less interested in the glue for mending the fragmentation between present and past than he is for being aware of the schism itself. The same applies to creating space and overcoming this schism through museum architecture.

The collected soil, in and through which a relationship to time materialises, is brought into the present day through its displacement in space, so that the past remains current in the present.

The soil here takes on the same functional value as any other material, as a possible object of remembrance. Both the object to be recalled and the person recalling it are locked into a relationship, in which the material form – here, earth - not only reflects the expectations of the individual, but also shapes them. This can only occur to the extent that the individual is a member of a group capable of doing something with the material form of a "monument",

²¹ Sven Kramer, *Walter Benjamin an introduction*. Junius, Hamburg, 2003, p. 72

²² Compare the case Armenia in: Levon Abrahamian: *Armenian Identity in a Changing World*. Costa Mesa, CA, Mazda Publishers, 2006; pp. 231-232.



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one that can classify it. Halbwachs talks about the fact that individuals *as members of a group* retain an awareness of the material form.²³

A material form such as this takes on the role of a “point of attachment” for an individual. This means that, with a social construct of memories, the individual in the act of remembering uses points of attachment to create a framework, making it easier for him to organise external things, content and events. Conversely, every state of awareness is also engaging in a constant exchange with its environment as part of a self-referencing system, or schema, as well as with the parameters of the framework it brings with it.

Points of attachment can be connected to new situations, events – constellations. A constellation relates to the simultaneous perception of things which may be *de facto* quite unrelated. But how does this constellation relate to the individual, or to collective memory?

We can find a “*linguistic path*” to the connection between individual and collective in relation to memory. The Armenian word *hischatakaran* comes from the verb *hischel*, “remember”, but which also translates as “collect” or “report.”²⁴ The figurative sense of “collect” for *hischel* echoes the English *to recollect*: in “recollect” you can see both the individual who collects as well as the community, with which he gathers collectively (“*to gather together*”).

We also need to add to this the connection to the situation where the space-time relationship is perceived as a point of attachment. This offers us the category of *mémoire involontaire* as opposed to *mémoire volontaire*.

Involuntary memory is the source of a memory of which one becomes aware, but which cannot of its own accord be recalled on demand like information from a memory bank. Awareness and memory appear to have a contradictory relationship in relation to involuntary memories. According to Benjamin, memory has the task of preserving stimuli as impressions. Here it is working as a source of organisation. It is *experiences*, which are held in memory. According to Freud, everything which is consciously noted has no lasting effect, disappearing at the moment of consciousness. “Becoming aware and leaving a trace in memory (are)

²³ See Jean-Christophe Marcel and Laurent Mucchielli: A basis for the *lien social*: the collective memory according to Maurice Halbwachs. In: Egger, Stephan (Ed.), Maurice Halbwachs. Aspects of his works, UVK Verlagsgesellschaft, Konstanz, 2003, pp. 191-225, p. 214. It should be added here that in a *qualitatively* understood environment the object seems to acquire subjective abilities, which let the subject become and object (Bernhard Streck: On the rhythm of eternity. Time concepts of “archaic” cultures, in: Landeshauptstadt Munich, Kulturreferat (Ed.), Each culture has its own time. Documentation of the series of events under the same title from November 1999 to February 2000. Munich 2001, p. 108-124, p. 109

²⁴ Heide and Helmut Buschhausen, “The illuminated book of Armenia”. In: Armenian – Re-discovery of an ancient cultural landscape., Museum Bochum, Bochum 1995, pp. 191-210, p. 192.



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incompatible with each other”²⁵. The prime function of awareness is not to absorb what is perceived, but in fact to protect the unconscious from too much input. It actually acts a protection against stimuli and particularly against shocks: “The threat from these energies is that of shocks. The more the conscious mind is used to recording them, the less likely the shocks are to have a traumatic effect”²⁶. The shock is obviously whatever cannot be handled by the conscious mind, to be stored in the area of involuntary memories. Normal shock defences work by negotiating with the conscious mind.

The concept of “remembrance” stands orthogonally to that of experience. Remembrance itself can in turn be linked to experience. Benjamin completes the distinction between discovery (learned) and experience (lived) by comparing the difference between involuntary and voluntary memory. In modern times, individuals are constantly shielding themselves from shocks, using their awareness, or conscious mind: “The larger the proportion of shock in the individual impressions, the more persistently the conscious mind has to watch out in order to protect itself from stimuli, the greater the success with which it works, the less these become part of the (learned) experience, so the more they match the definition of the lived experience.”²⁷ The dulling of the ability to accept new stimuli leads to low levels of learned experience, but high ones of lived experience.. In modern times, lived experience is replacing learned experience, without being its equal. Learned experience is on an individual plane, showing up as unconsciously entering memory. Here the chance event of access to memory becomes the decisive moment. The actual context of the madeleine cake is created by the shock of biting into it. Seen this way, the bite becomes the threshold of awareness re. the “source” of the bite. There is also a trace of memory here which enters the consciousness and so becomes learned experience, standing in contrast to the lived experience of the conscious bite – it is a ‘re-taste’ not a ‘taste’”²⁸ Whereas for Bergson the so-called “*mémoire pure*” can be achieved by free decision, in Proust this becomes involuntary memory (Benjamin 1977:187).²⁹ Benjamin distinguishes himself from Proust on this point.

²⁵ Freud according to Benjamin, see Walter Benjamin, “On some motives in Baudelaire”. In: *ibid*, *Illuminations*, Selected writings. SV, Frankfurt am Main, 1977, pp. 185-229, p:190.

²⁶ Freud according to Benjamin, see Walter Benjamin, “On some motives in Baudelaire”. In: *ibid*, *Illuminations*, Selected writings. SV, Frankfurt am Main, 1977, pp. 185-229, p:191

²⁷ Walter Benjamin, “On some motives in Baudelaire”. In: *ibid*, *Illuminations*, Selected writings. SV, Frankfurt am Main, 1977, pp. 185-229, p. 193.

²⁸ See Walter Benjamin, “On some motives in Baudelaire”. In: *ibid*, *Illuminations*, Selected writings. SV, Frankfurt am Main, 1977, pp. 185-229, p. 188.

²⁹ For Bergson memory has purely individual abilities (Maurice Halbwachs, *On collective memory*. Fischer, Frankfurt am Main, 1991, p. 85.



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The problem now appears when Benjamin relates involuntary and voluntary memory *exclusively* to the isolated individual in modern times.

Although Benjamin brings together both types of remembering the past in cults, he does deem them to pre-date modern times.³⁰ In this context, we will look at the figures of the collector and allegorizer. These figures of collector and allegorizer are typical of modern times in that, judging by their behaviour, there are inherent forms of disintegration relating to cults. The collector for example chooses things for his collection when they “happen” to him, which gives rise to the “buffer zone”, which Benjamin found so typical of the cult era. This leads to a subordinated trace of memory. In Benjamin’s thinking, however, I feel there is too much emphasis placed on the moment of the “isolated private person”. In addition he also contrasts the pre-modern cult to the modern (collapse of cult values, of memory).

Let us look again at the Armenian expression for memory:

Etymologically *hischel* or *jischel* (west arm.) refers to *mitke gal*, *mitke pahel*, meaning “Thought, idea that arrives” which, in the context of thought, can also mean “happen to”, or the “thought which is retained, saved”. It is in this context that we see the collecting, based on a certain idea. Collecting is therefore also the result of a collectively developed concept. The collector separates items from their original contexts and sets them into a relationship with one another. The things the collector needs for his “showcase”, however, just happen to come to him. This notion of the “appearance of” collectibles contradicts the idea of “search for” items required for a collection.³¹ While the “appearance” of things could be classified as *involuntary memory*, the other classification must be that of *voluntary memory*. Collecting has a lot to do with practice, the basic principle of which, however, only seems to be known to those who do the collecting. But in exactly the same way as the collector separates out the objects, “incorporating” them into his collection, so they also directly appear to him. This also creates the above-mentioned relationship to the past, as related to the targeted perception of the collectibles. He sets up his own order of things against that of the world. The meaning of the object for the collector does not only relate to the thing itself, but also to its history, although attention is only given to this whole, if it is valid within the reconstructed world order of the collector. Seen like this, the fate of the object becomes the fate of the collector. The collector creates his own past as a meta-present, creating his own myth within an auratic buffer zone. The allegorizer tends to look through present day things in order to see past ones

³⁰ See Walter Benjamin, *Papers. Collected Writings* (Tiedemann, Rolf. Ed.) Vol. 1-2, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 1991, p. 611.

³¹ See Walter Benjamin, *Passage-Work*. Suhrkamp, Frankfurt, 1989, .H1a.5



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and is attracted to them. The collector needs the present, in order to create a meta-present. Reminiscences can be labelled as memories³², to which the collector does not need to comply as the past does not afford any legitimacy. His relationship with the past is a purely selective one, which with its meta-present overtones seems to still access the present. The collector creates an alternative world order, which is consistent in content with his own personal concept. Thus you can reach the construction of the past by the collector. The allegorizer on the other hand manipulates the present by using the past history of things, by how he imagines and constructs them. The rubble which he happens on in the present, is not simply literal fragments, but is also something that as been artificially destroyed. The allegorizer destroys and reconstructs whatever was destroyed in new ways, using his concept of the past. They both have their own view of the world, frameworks of ideas, to which they subordinate things that appear to them but which they also manage to discover intentionally. The here-and-now becomes the place for constructing history with ever different perspectives. The allegorizer looks through the (self-created) rubble to history, the collector constructs it using the logic which is inherent to his collection: "In every collector there is an allegorizer and in every allegorizer a collector. As far as the collector is concerned, his collection is never complete; even if there is just one piece missing, still everything he has collected remains just bits and pieces, which is the way things are for the allegorist from the start."³³

As we saw above, for the collector both the object *and* its history have a meaning, which he organises into his own peculiar framework. While Benjamin now appears to subjectively contrast the modern isolated individual and his memory with the obviously decaying collective memory, like Maurice Halbwachs, I would prefer to start with the idea of the fundamentally socially determined nature of memory. The past of an object, which the collector plays around with, has both individual *and* collective roots. This parallels the contrast between memory (individual and collective) and its different forms (voluntary and involuntary).

The principles behind and content of the collection result from the connections brought along by the fragments and artefacts. From a historical and political point of view; this ends up as a conflict with the history of the winners, resulting in events and stories, such

³² Walter Benjamin, *Passage-Work*. Suhrkamp, Frankfurt, 1989, J 79a, 1

³³ Walter Benjamin, *Passage-Work*. Suhrkamp, Frankfurt, 1989, H4a,1



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as the following which occurred in Yerevan on 8 March, just a few days after the Sumgait pogroms (end February 1988).³⁴

On 8 March, International Women's Day, a demonstration was organized by the mourning women. It started from the Opera square, which was the main location of the mass rallies of 1988. A special place was assigned on the platform in front of the crowd, where pictures of the victims were placed, so that everyone could see them. Candles were lit in front of each picture. In addition to declaring the remembrance day as the Day of Genocide, the demonstrators decided to go to the monument. Moreover, it was decided to place a cross-stone for the victims of Sumgait on the monument. On the way there, the actual location was decided. At the head of the procession, which comprised several thousands of people, there were mourners carrying candles and pictures of victims. It was a procession which looked like a funeral; the names of the victims without a photograph were written on blank sheets. At the designated place, wreaths and flowers were laid. The interesting point is that, given the events in Sumgait, the significance of the Genocide faded in the vicinity of the monument. No one went to the eternal flame. On April 24, the day of remembrance, the prepared cross-stone was installed. The people carried it, as they would the deceased in a coffin. So the cross-stone not only symbolized the missing dead, but in this case, really represented the deceased person. Once placed, it again took on the symbolic function of representing the missing dead. The placing of the cross-stone, its background, may be understood as an action of connection with the monument, and Sumgait achieved the same importance as the Genocide of 1915. Symbolically similar, a classification was created. Moreover, the state of martyrdom that the victims gained through this was remarkable. The relatives, with the pictures, stood apart and so were emphasized in front of the demonstrators. Not only did the pictures create a sacred atmosphere, but also through this sacred atmosphere, the image of the victims and their sanctification were connected. The victims stood for the whole nation of Armenians, for whose very existence they had died. The battle in Karabagh had achieved the same relative importance in cultural memory as that of the lost territory.

The meaning of 8 March as International Women's Day was hijacked both in content and in visual form. It became a day of mourning for the Armenian family nation. The official path was abandoned in favour of the path to the Genocide memorial. The large Armenian family, symbolised by the crowd walking behind the cross-stone, which played the role of the

³⁴ For the following information I'm indebted to Levon Abrahamian, Institute for Archeology and Ethnography, Academy of Science, Yerevan, Armenia



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coffin on the bier, formally carried this to its grave. The symbolic graveyard and actual memorial site were created right next to the monument itself, and their contents merged.

The cross-stone is a vertical stone with a westward-facing carved side. The background is made up of geometric elements interwoven with plants. Cross-stones are the descendants of steles, which started with the megaliths in the 3rd millennium BC. These stones are found right across the Armenian uplands in old settlements and cemeteries, at cross-roads, on mountainsides, springs, wells and bridges as well as near monasteries. They are also found where Armenian refugees erected them along the roadways they used.³⁵ A cross-stone is an individual art form, not just for Armenian art but also as part of the early Christian cult of the cross. Alongside the sun as the most powerful and immutable body in the heavens, they symbolise salvation, eternity and resurrection, life, death, redemption and destruction.³⁶ They represent the end of heathenism, but as such carry the heathen elements with them through the ages, ensuring they are always present. They symbolise periods of life and history which were not only important for individuals, but also for Armenians as a whole. The events which give rise to their erection can be secular as well as purely sacred.

Cross-stones can be set up in a (planned) row which includes a large number of these stones, erected for similar occasions from as far back as the Middle Ages.³⁷ A singular, historical event becomes a link in a time-based chain which stretches a long way back. In this way, a cross-stone not only reduces the complexity of history to its own shape and its content, but reformulates it as a symbolic event using an original Armenian code, which includes the aforementioned current event, but at the same time transcends it. Only the initiated can decipher this.

The cross-stone functions as a medium of memory, as its carrier even, one which injects the stored history into the event, as a result of which it was erected. Thus it maintains its presence in the present day. The medium releases its own “power” which has an influence on the way of thinking, perceiving, remembering and communicating – media both open up and simultaneously restrict access to the world. We are therefore required to distinguish between the medium’s form and content, in order to be able to relate them both to one another. Writings, like books and cross-stones, relate to their content not just as independent carriers. If we remember the origins of the Armenian script, or take into account the fact that

³⁵ Petrosyan, Hamlet, “The Khatchkar or Cross-Stone”. In: Abrahamian, Levon and Sweezy, Nancy (Eds.), *Armenian folk arts, culture, and identity*. Indiana University Press, Bloomington/Indianapolis, 2001, p. 60

³⁶ see. Hofmann, Tessa, *An approach to Armenia: history and present-day*. Beck, Munich, 1997, p. 321;

see. Van Loo, Katharina, “The Iconography of the Armenian Cross-stone”. In: *Armenian – Re-discovery of an ancient cultural landscape*. Museum Bochum, 14.1. to 17.4.1995. Bochum 1995, p. 145; see. Petrossjan, Hamlet: *ibid*, p. 60, p. 63, p. 64; see. Asarian, Levon: *The art of the Armenian cross-stones*. In: Platt, Kristin: *ibid*, p. 109

³⁷ Barkhutarian, P., “Medieval Armenian architecture and stone monuments “, Yerevan, 1963, p. 57



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it is thanks to the process of “book printing” that we are able to reproduce collective memory and incorporate it into our own culture, then we can see that the media are not a uniform – or single – material indication of memory: “The media-supported collective memories and interpretations always (retain) a ‘trace’ of the medium itself.”³⁸

In that the medium can be regarded as a “trace”, then it cannot also be assumed to be a single, monadically closed symbol for a vehicle.³⁹ Rather the medium itself is a vehicle for that which is absent. Because the medium is “here”, it implies a third-party which is not present, but which is carried by the vehicle: “The medium is not just the message; rather some trace of the medium attaches itself to the message.”⁴⁰ And the medium is not just an instrument used intentionally by protagonists, but rather a device for memory media. Devices are more than just containers of externalised information: “As ‘devices’, memory media, such as monuments, books, paintings and the internet, go well beyond the simple task of extending the individual human’s memory capacity by storing information externally. They create worlds of collective memories, depending on their specific capabilities for memory storage – worlds which would not be known to a community of memories, if they did not exist.”⁴¹

Materialised forms with historical references can sometimes resemble traces, to which individuals relate during their process of socialisation and therefore position as a point of attachment. The very nature of these traces generates their multi-purpose uses, without their giving rise to a contextual contradiction. Thus Ani, Tsitsernakabert and Sardarapat all present traces to which people can attach current events, as the example of 8 March 1988 shows us.⁴²

By its very nature, the cross-stone there allows the historical event, the content, for which it was erected, to not simply be extracted from its context. Erected within this context, it becomes a quotation of, or itself “quotes”, what happened: “Writing history also means

³⁸ Astrid Erll, “Introduction”. In: Erll, Astrid and Nünning, Ansgar (Eds.), *Medias of the collective memory. constructiveness - historicity – cultural specific*. De Gruyter, Berlin, New York, 2005, pp. 3-22, p. 6

³⁹ But Krämer means a different type of trace to what Nora is thinking of. Nora locates the existence of the trace of the *milieux* in place of remembrance as a moment apart from society, and preserved as such and representational. Krämer places the trace more as an action-initiating reference for the recipient, which reaches them due to the separation of the medium as carrier and the content as message.

⁴⁰ Krämer following Erll, *ibid*, P. 6, note 8

⁴¹ Astrid Erll, “Introduction”. In: Erll, Astrid and Nünning, Ansgar (Eds.), *Medias of the collective memory. constructiveness - historicity – cultural specific*. De Gruyter, Berlin, New York, 2005, pp. 3-22, p. 6

⁴² In this sense memories are “Traces in the sense of the fingerprints and detritus of a lived life; but traces also as recognisable symbols of a past which can still be discerned in the present”, Nicolas Pethes, “Constellations. Memory as a break in continuity in Walter Benjamin’s theory of memory, culture and history”, 2009, p. 2 (pr. Mscpt).



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quoting history. But the concept of quoting already implies ripping the historical object out of its own context”⁴³

This is applicable to the cross-stone of 8 March because the people who deviated from the official route in order to develop the idea of the stone, were to an extent setting out to create a quotation, setting up the stone as part of the monument, a synecdoche alongside the original, as it were.

According to Benjamin, you can define the lived experience behind this as “lived experience in the strictest sense”, when “specific contents of individual pasts converge in memory with similar collective ones”⁴⁴ and then combine. As an example, Benjamin refers to the area of festivals and cults, whose rituals leave no room for the exclusiveness of arbitrary and involuntary remembering.

The ritual on 24/4 at the Genocide monument must be put into this context. The cross stones, which have all been added since 1988, have become part of the scenery (in both senses) for the annual ritual.

On April 24 each year, hundreds of thousands of people visit the Genocide monument at Tzitzernakaberd. These are not only people from the capital city and the regions close-by, but also Armenians from diaspora countries, mostly with family members, who come to pay tribute to the victims. From early morning until late evening, people follow the standard path: from the street near the Razdan Bridge, they move onto the hill on a path through a park. All day long loudspeakers fixed to the trees broadcast spiritual music of mourning. Arriving at the plateau, the people pass by the cross-stones. Many of them first visit the exhibition in the museum and go afterwards to the symbolic tomb. At the actual tombs to the left, on the way to the original part, some relatives (mothers, wives, children) of the Karabagh victims can be found standing. Reaching the main "tomb", you step down to the circle of the eternal flame. On this side of the monument, three of the twelve gaps are left open to allow people entrance into the "tomb". At the flame, visitors place flowers, stand for one minute, then leave by the stairs on the other side of the "tomb". On the way back to the starting point, you meet those who are thronging to the monument. Another path leads to the Razdan stadium, not far behind the monument, but of significance is the fact that only a single path leads through the tomb itself.

⁴³ See Walter Benjamin, *Papers. Collected Writings* (Tiedemann, Rolf. Ed.) Vol. V-1, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 1991, p. 595

⁴⁴ Walter Benjamin, *Papers. Collected Writings* (Tiedemann, Rolf. Ed.) Vol. 1-2, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 1991, p. 611.



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The Armenian word for ritual, "araroghutyun" is derived from the stem "arar", which means effect, deed, action and performance, thereby ascribing the very substance of performance to the ritual act. Consisting of the elements of representation and performance, it differs from theatre in that there are no distinctions between actors and audience. In the descent of the masses into the "tomb", we recognize the passage of Armenians to the places of death in 1915. This is reinforced by the implication that the murdered people are buried here, though in reality they are to be found in Western Armenia, as actually seen in a picture in the museum.

According to Turner, the term 'performance' is derived from the French term 'parfournir', which means "to conclude, accomplish". Thus, a performance is also the appropriate conclusion of an experience, which in our case is connected to the collective shock, which is passed down from the survivors to succeeding generations. April 24 serves as an initiation to this experience, as reflected in the fact that fathers from the large diaspora community take their sons with them to this place. At peak times, it can take up to an hour to get to the monument.

The ritual as a public action is not only a completion of this experience, but is also its expression because of the mimetic duplication of millions marching to their death. The relationship to the past is thereby brought alive and is dramatized in the present.

Reflecting on the past, connecting it to the present, and transforming it all into ritual can be regarded as a reformulation and reintegration of the original conflict. Of all the sememes which can be connected with the events, those showing a similarity with the Genocide are stressed, and so combined with the original text of the "tomb".

One does, however, have to consider that the present does not dissolve when recalling the past. In fact, the opposite is the case. Lost ancestors and territory can be visited and fictitiously reassembled through the text of ritual.

At first the masses visit the museum, then pass the tombs, then descend into the "tomb", performing the three-step ritual described above. Although the relatives standing behind the soldiers' tombs are isolated from the event in its entirety, the presence of real tombs serves to emphasize the full significance of the monument. The obelisk, however, as a symbol of Armenia's rebirth, remains in relative isolation, especially as the masses leave it to their right as they move into the tomb, where the past and a fictitious future are united. Acknowledged by the Communist party as a symbol of rebirth, the monument takes on another form in the practice of the ritual associated with it. The open "tomb" transmits light,



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i.e. life, thereby connecting with the idea of resurrection. Thus, for the masses, the 'tomb' represents a sense of Armenian unity (including ancestors and the dead) as well as hope for a common territory in the future. The people absorb the spirit, passed on to them by their ancestors, and with this, they leave the circle by the flame.

The ritual transcends in its composition pure remembrance of the Genocide and refers intrinsically to facets of Armenian cosmology. The place of the ritual generates in Foucault's words "contra-placement or counter forts, Utopias made reality, where the real places within the culture are simultaneously represented, disputed and repelled, to an extent places beyond place, although they can actually be reached."⁴⁵. Moreover it is a mixed form of Utopia and heterotopias, something excluded from the cultural paradigm but actually extant. The architecture of the monument area is therefore inherent to the space – architecture is a form of thought, whose movements as well as those of the participants, need to "in-closed"⁴⁶.

Monuments present themselves to us as intersections of space and time. On the one hand, the construction of the Genocide Monument and the development of the ritual seems to stabilise the political system. On the other, the ritual reintegration remains ambivalent, if you look closely at the content of the ritual: the tension is not resolved. The genocide is not recognised, the loss of territory remains an open wound. This is therefore not simply directed against the Soviet system itself, but also builds a Utopian counter-proposal, with non-real spaces⁴⁷.

The element of the dead in front of the flame links itself to the territorial reunification with West Armenia. We must not forget that this part of the monument also carries the symbol of "rebirth"; in addition, the 12 basalt stones symbolise the opening grave, the resurrection of the dead. Those who were murdered are honoured by the laying of flowers. This process also corresponds to a spiritual union with them. The Armenian phrase for this is "woki arnel", "absorb the spirit". According to Foucault Utopias are locations without any real place, which have a connection, however, with real space as a direct or reverse analogy. Here it seems to be the reverse of the social (political) reality represented.

⁴⁵ Michel Foucault, "Other spaces". In: Barck, Karlheinz et al (Eds.), Aisthesis. Perception today or perspectives of another aesthetic, Leipzig 1992, pp. 34 - 46, see Fn 14, p. 38f

⁴⁶ Bernhard Waldenfels, "The many voices of speech. Studies on the phenomenology of the stranger 4". Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 1999, pp. 204f – the concept of "enclosing a room" includes both the process of installation of a room and that of allowing entry and so defines the relationship of the recipient to the work of art, see. Juliane Rebentisch, "Place specialists - O'Doherty and Heidegger". In: Texts on Art. Vol Nr. 47 / September 2002. "Spaces"

⁴⁷ See Michel Foucault, "Other spaces". In: Barck, Karlheinz et al (Eds.), Aisthesis. Perception today or perspectives of another aesthetic, Leipzig 1992, pp. 34 - 46



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In practice, not only do the official interpretation of the artwork and that of Armenian origin not match up. They contradict each other. The semantics of the Sardarapat Museum do not operate solely in the context of official Marxism-Leninism of those times, but rather the interaction of space and time specifically in this spot manage to cancel out socialist policy through the positioning of the windows. By this means, we see a configuration similar to that of the eagle.

The officially “forgotten” separation by frontier is cancelled out and replaced by the unofficial, the specific configuration of the architecture.

Here, as there, the perceived discontinuity between present and past is stressed, but not in order to “patch it up”: “Benjamin did not react dismissively to the modern perception of discontinuity but instead, proposed a matching theory of memory expressed discontinuously. The thesis from Benjamin, the theoretician, is that his work is permeated by this model of memory, so that the theory of discontinuity can be defined as a continuum in his work.”⁴⁸

This means that the graves at Sardarapat, which are represented by the eagle, represent a symbol of this discontinuity. For Walter Benjamin, the memories and behaviours which accrete to monuments are not an instrument, but a medium for exploring the past. Sardarapat and Tsitsernakabert are both media of this type, through which the past can not only be explored under current societal conditions, but equally be created.

The figure of the eagle combines both the collector and the allegorizer. Both can be defined by their perspective on the rubble, which they see in front of them. The allegorizer in the eagle looks through the rubble into the distant past, to paradise. The current configuration of the rubble in the present determines the image that the angel of the past takes on. The experience from the shock, which the fragment (of history) gives him, brings the past closer to him through memories. The ruins from the past determine his view of the present. The collector in the eagle shows clearly, if you look at the configuration of the rubble itself, how the eagle manages to put the pieces together as well as the structure he creates for this rebuilding. The present is re-combined each time at a meta level using a specific concept, that of the internal connecting line. The collection is incomplete because in the present, new fragments keep appearing which need to be fitted in and which keep driving the eagle back,. The fate of the object, and the place it is given in the collection, is that of the collector himself. If we look at the organisation of things, it can tell us something about its creator(s).⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Cf. Pethes, same work, p. 3

⁴⁹ In the library about the Genocide, in the House of the Scientific Academy, which adjoins the museum in Tsitsernakabert, I found in the catalogue book titles about Karabagh, the events of 1988 (Sumgait) and 1990



Recordando a

Walter Benjamin

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(Baku). The Catalogue itself includes all titles which deal with the genocide. Therefore a priori Sumgait and Baku are included in the category of genocide, which can only be understood, if you are aware of this “internal connecting line”, through which objects/events are combined (as lived experiences).