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JOURNAL

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Title: Memory and the Arts: Justice, Environment and Ruin – Dora Apel in Conversation with Martin Pogačar

Published Online: July 17, 2023

Published in Print: 2022

Doi: [10.47659/mj-v7n1-2id135](https://doi.org/10.47659/mj-v7n1-2id135)

Referencing Style: Chicago

Section: Interview

How to Cite the Article: Apel, Dora, and Martin Pogačar. 2022. "Memory and the Arts: Justice, Environment and Ruin: Dora Apel in Conversation with Martin Pogačar." *Membrana – Journal of Photography, Theory and Visual Culture* 7 (1&2): 123–140.

<https://doi.org/10.47659/mj-v7n1-2id135>.

Memory and the Arts: Justice, Environment and Ruin

Dora Apel in Conversation
with Martin Pogačar

Dora Apel and Martin Pogačar

“By picturing the beauty of decay or apocalyptic catastrophes, the terror these events produce in photography or disaster films are aestheticized and viewed at a safe distance that allows us to take pleasure in the experience.”

This conversation revolves around Dora Apel's work in the field of art and memory. Memory, in its mediating force, is critical for our understanding of the present and the construction of a future, or, rather, as Dora Apel posits it in her recent book *Calling Memory Into Place*: “Memory effects are not about the past. How do they shape the present and future? Can the way we remember the past play an active role in fighting ongoing forms of oppression and persecution?” (2020). These questions are a critical invitation to think about events, topics and processes that also mark Dora Apel's work. In this conversation we discuss the issues of memory and ruin, justice and oppression, as well as the environment in the context of thinking about art. Thus, we hope to bring forward not only the mechanics of how memory in the arts operates in the present, what it foregrounds and obscures, but also its relation to the environment.

Keywords: memory, art, photography, justice, ruin, environment

In 1984, Orwell put it: “Who controls the past, controls the future: who controls the present, controls the past.” If Proust’s reminiscing about the madeleines can be said to allude to cultural aspects of memory, Orwell’s statement is decidedly political. It alludes to the power (and ambitions) of political elites to define reality, as well as to the technological means to do so (not least the archive). The motto “All that was needed was an unending series of victories over your own memory” (Orwell 1949) is eerily relevant today.

We seem to be living in a time when not only the present and the future are precariously unstable, or at least perceived as such, but so is the past. Currently, we are witnessing the reinterpretation of some of the legacies that defined the political and ideological, as well as cultural and popular, beliefs and expectations of the twentieth century and beyond. The liberal project – that historically gave way to totalitarianism after the revolutions of 1848, as well as in the years leading to WWII, and that embraced neoliberalism of the late 1970s – seems to be trading again with the far-right, neofascist or post-fascist ideologies, to keep financial and social status in apparent dispossession of political power. Such trends can be observed throughout Europe and the US, most pronouncedly after Trump, and most recently with Meloni in Italy.

There is, however, one crucial difference present today. The stage that life takes place on, the stage “we always” knew would be there even when the most disastrous political abominations and social catastrophes pass, is increasingly becoming unstable and unpredictable in the context of accelerating “geological violence,” which comes on top of war-time, racial, political, and economic violence inflicted upon humans and nonhumans alike. And this also raises the questions of more-than-social justice and future in a significantly different way. In that, the social and political roles, uses and abuses of memory and ruin also open important questions about environment and justice, gender and race.

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These questions are a critical invitation to think about events, topics and processes that also mark Dora Apel’s work. In this conversation we discuss the issues of memory and ruin, justice and oppression, as well as the environment in the context of thinking about art.

Memory these days seems to be increasingly politicized. With digital media, the political invaded the intimate, and the intimate was sometimes forcibly brought out into the public, and made political. In the process, the status of knowledge, fact and fiction became increasingly precarious and interchangeable, the past became inherently unstable. It became a weaponized “standing reserve” ready to be decontextualized, skewed, misrepresented, to be used and applied as a weapon in any present for any purpose. At the same time, the relevance of the intimate in both studying and consuming memory is undeniably powerful. At least partly a response to top-down nationalizing narratives, and embedded into the hyper-individualist neoliberal contexts, the focus on the individual and the intimate (memory) is pharmacological inasmuch as it is both a danger to collective narratives as well as their (potential) rehabilitation. As you say in *Calling Memory Into Place*, a cultural and political critique, a memoir and family history: the individual and the intimate may be used to convey the visceral feeling of embodied encounters with places, events, and visual images. And, you emphasize that “embodied and experiential ways of knowing are equally valid and construct knowledge in a unique and complementary way” (Apel 2020). How do you see the role of memory (and memory studies) in the contemporary world?

The role of memory and memory studies in the writing of history took on greater importance in the 1970s and has boomed across disciplines in the last several decades. Especially since the 1990s, the idea that memory is fixed and irrefutable has been challenged by the idea that the past is always interpreted and reinterpreted according to the needs and pressures of the present historical moment. And this is true in both individual and collective terms. Experience, politics, identity, and memory all mediate each other, making memory the product of cultural construction and reconstruction, embedded in media and technology, art and literature, monuments and memorials, which are themselves subject to historical mediation. Memory is therefore dynamic and unbound, moving across cultures, generations, media, and disciplines.

What makes this especially important is that memory studies focus on giving a voice to past forms of injustice and making those who have been marginalized or forgotten visible. As memory studies scholars have argued, monuments and memorials that are focused on past oppression

and persecution, for example, do not merely convey historical memory but embody a form of memory activism by which a memorial asks something of the viewer beyond remembering the past. Memory activism asks that we not only recognize what has been suppressed or overlooked, but that these newly visible narratives of past injustice help shape our present and future through political struggle.

Enzo Traverso has argued that memory studies arose as Marxism fell out of favor. Despite what has been called the “crisis” of Marxism and a retrogression of class consciousness over the past several decades, the rise of memory studies and memory activism suggests that social struggle for an egalitarian society cannot be suppressed because the alternative is enormous inequality, suffering, and global ecological devastation.

Indeed, capitalism today is worse than ever. Based on the drive for an expanding rate of profit, capitalism means a push to commodify everything possible, including the earth, air, and water. This drive toward privatizing and monetizing everything includes resources that should be free and available to everyone. It also means concentrating wealth in the hands of a small elite, who will do everything within their means to maintain their power and their wealth.

What is the role of media technologies, particularly photography in these processes?

Photography, especially documentary or journalistic photography, and video, make visible what might otherwise remain invisible, which would serve the forces of domination. Photography can act as a witness to history and create a public sphere, especially via the internet, to which most people have access and in which they can be a participant. It is therefore broadly democratic and can mobilize public consensus nationally and globally in support of those who are persecuted and oppressed. Digital imagery provides a means of presenting grievances and airing atrocities that might otherwise have no way of becoming broadly and quickly visible.

And we know that images can be much more powerful than text, so the photographic image or video is crucial to emancipatory social struggle. The video of the police killing George Floyd in May 2020 is an example of this.

The world watched for an agonizing nine minutes as a white policeman kept his knee on the neck of a helpless Black man until he stopped breathing. This resulted in a global protest movement against historic racism and police brutality.

Who has (or rather takes) the power to shape present and future, who the ambition? Who is excluded from the process, and at the same time instrumentalized in it? How do we make sense of the past that is in the process of constant revision and reinterpretation?

I am interested in how individual and cultural consciousness reflect and construct each other, how personal and cultural memory exist on a continuum and mediate each other, so that changing our understanding of the past means not only changing our understanding of history, but also of ourselves and our future. I am also interested in the way we experience cultural monuments based on what we know about them historically as well as what we bring to them through our personal and embodied response, which itself is shaped by place, culture, inherited trauma, and politics. As a commemorative form, the public monument was meant to be a repository for an unchanging collective memory. But the debates around monuments, at least since the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and more recently around Confederate monuments, have raised important questions: What memory is being preserved? For what audience? And what memory is being left out?

The Memorial for Peace and Justice, also known as the lynching memorial, is a good example of a memorial that reshapes the national memory landscape. The lynching memorial opened at a crucial moment in American history, when there was a massive resurgence of white supremacist ideology. When Donald Trump launched his immigration war against Muslims and Central Americans, as well as people from majority-Black countries, what was at stake was the very notion of who had the right to become an American and who did not have that right. In this sense, the struggle for racial equality is the struggle for the rights of citizenship. We see this struggle most blatantly today in the widespread legislation meant to prevent Black people from voting or discounting the votes they cast.



Figure 1. Dora Apel, Memorial for Peace and Justice, Montgomery, Alabama, 2018. Courtesy of the author.

But the efforts to keep Black people from voting go back more than 150 years. And we must remember that the principles of liberty and equality, on which the United States was founded, co-existed with and were established upon the fact of slavery. Many of the men who wrote or signed the Declaration of Independence and led the US from its inception were slaveholders. The Civil War ended slavery but it did not achieve equality. So, it should come as no surprise that the legacy of this central and fundamental contradiction continues in an unresolved and traumatic form today. After slavery was abolished, wealthy planters and employers feared an alliance between poor whites and poor Blacks, thus fostering economic competition between them for access to land and jobs. By supporting and facilitating economic competition and racial violence, the wealthy capitalists helped to keep wages down and maintained the hegemony of the white patriarchal elite.

Uniting to persecute Black people and people of color creates a sense of racial community and a heightened sense of empowerment when whites feel economically deprived, downwardly mobile, and emasculated. It channels their anger not against their enemy but against their natural allies. We see this very much in action today: By inflaming racial animosity, the wealthy white elite

takes the focus off the class divide that is the real source of impoverishment and causes poor and working-class whites to unite in political alliance with the same corporate class that exploits and oppresses them.

Racial violence in the lynching era was also rooted in gender anxieties that especially criminalized sexual relations between Black men and white women, although white society looked the other way at the rape and abuse of Black women by white men. White supremacists especially feared the enfranchisement and education of Black people that might further such relations and destabilize the white-dominated power structure by “blurring” the color line through intermarriage. Today we see the continuing widespread attempts to disfranchise Black people consistent with this legacy while trying to suppress the history of racial violence in America through book-banning and attacks on Critical Race Theory.

So the history of lynching was therefore part of a struggle over racial and national identity that affected everyone, because “whiteness” was defined only in relation to “Blackness.” In fact, race is unbounded and contingent, making “whiteness” a slippery category that is always threatened and always in need of defense. The lynching memorial remembers this history through the hundreds of stelae or markers that fill the walkways of the memorial, gradually rising and evoking the bodies of the lynched, with the names of lynching victims etched into the corten steel stelae. By publicly remembering this history of racial terror and naming names, the lynching memorial, like the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, focuses on absence and loss while resisting historical closure and evoking activist memory. Remembering this history disturbs the hierarchy of power through a confrontation with the nation’s past that is long overdue.

We could also look at Holocaust Memorials like Peter Eisenmann’s Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin or Rachel Whiteread’s Judenplatz Holocaust Memorial in Vienna which also concretize loss while shaping what is remembered and how it is remembered for the future. Or we could look at more recent Covid memorials, which have appeared in a number of places, such as Brooklyn, the Bronx, Queens, Detroit, Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, Austin, Texas, Atlanta, Georgia, and Phoenix, Arizona, as well as cities around the world. These, too, are meant to keep memory alive and create a new public narrative. Trump downplayed the effects of the virus and repressed the science from the beginning, in an attempt to insist on silence and forgetting, as if those losses didn’t matter. But people refuse to forget.

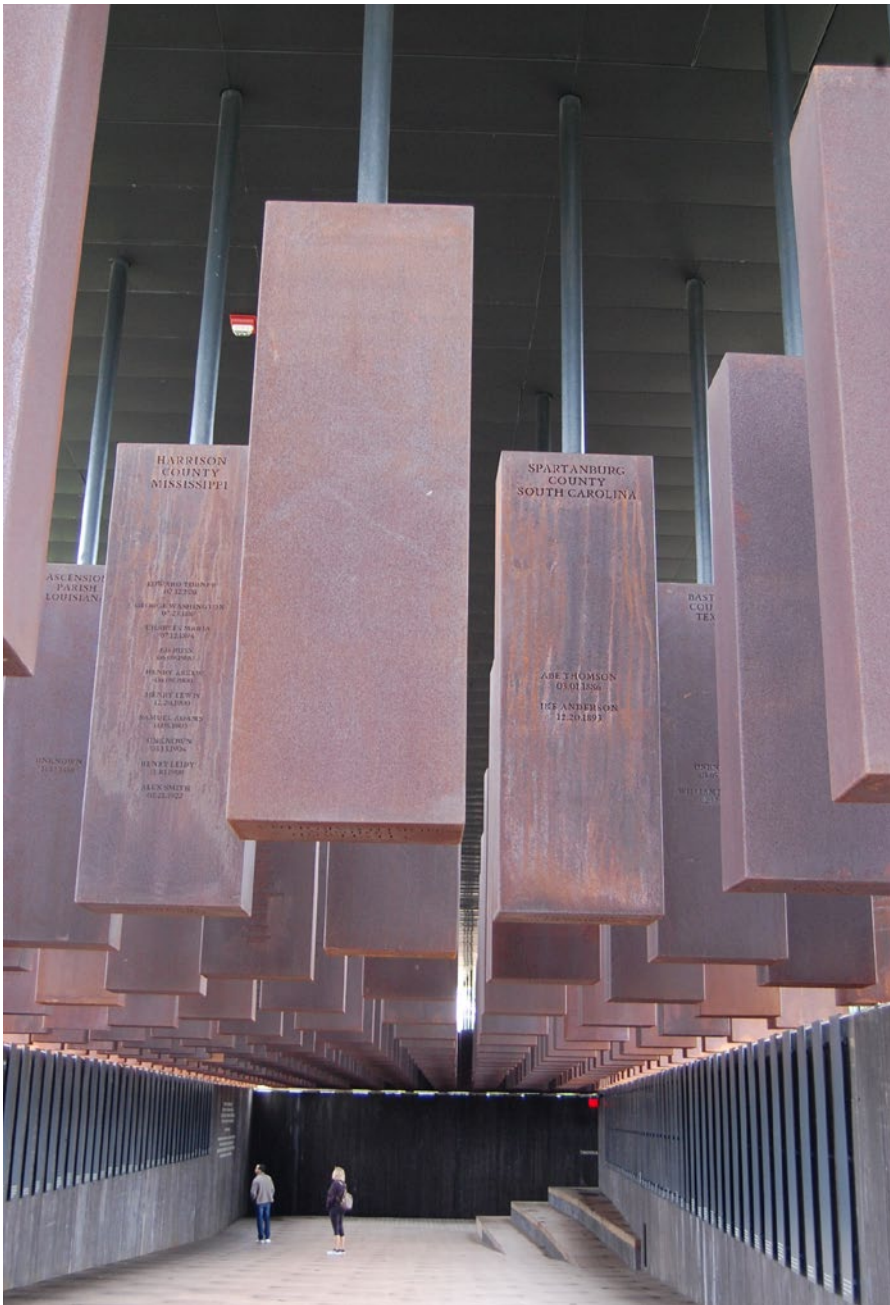


Figure 2. Dora Apel, stelae with engraved names by county, Memorial for Peace and Justice, Montgomery, Alabama, 2018. Courtesy of the author.

The lynching memorial, the Vietnam memorial, the Holocaust memorials, and the Covid memorials all attempt to change the official narrative, provide a space for public truth-telling, to acknowledge the trauma, to mourn and honor the dead, and to change our perspective going forward. They ask us to recognize what has been marginalized, suppressed, or forgotten, and to fight for social justice.

How to use art, photography in particular, to give voice to the unheard, the unseen? How to find meaning in fluid and contradictory events, and their mediated representations, and their social and political framings?

I think that art and photography can always play a political role. I don't mean that it is necessarily intentionally political or activist but if it connects to our everyday lives and to the anxieties and pressures we are experiencing personally and collectively, then it produces an embodied response that affects our consciousness. This, in turn, has the ability to connect us empathically to other subjectivities and collectivities. By affecting personal and cultural consciousness, art and photography in its various formats can help us to better understand who we are, who we want to be, and what kind of society we want to live in.

In terms of the production of meaning, meaning is produced in different ways, depending on context, so that the same image can be made to represent opposing political perspectives or agendas. Meaning therefore is not stable and is not inherent in the image itself. The photographer makes choices about what to include in the frame and what to exclude, based on their own assumptions and political perspective, but the intentions of the photographer do not necessarily determine how the image might produce meaning. It depends on how the image is used, where it is displayed, the surrounding discourse, as well as the subject position of the viewer. We must learn how to read images according to their contexts and framing, based on an informed grasp of the political situation.

In your *Beautiful Terrible Ruins* (2015), you write about ruins and ruination, particularly in the context of deindustrialization (Detroit), and how the understanding of ruins changed from gazing at antiquity and contemporary (deindustrialized) ruins. Ruins are essentially the effect of the corrosion of time upon matter, as well as of neglect or of the victorious on the conquered. In the case of industrial ruins one might add the

neoliberal transition to service economy, and displacement of dirty industries to the global south. But industrial ruins, as seen across the former west and east, are also a display of what might be called “infrastructural fatigue:” a manifestation of the fact that contemporary infrastructure dates in large part to the post-WWII era and is now approaching a time of decline (collapse, lead pipes). Large-scale privatization, not only of resources but infrastructures as well, has led to disinvestment and poor maintenance, and consequently to rising cost and poor service. Still, ruins hold appeal either as a measurement of time or as a tool for romanticizing the past.

Do you think that admiration of industrial ruins, also powered by visual arts, or reveling in infrastructural fatigue is an expression of the desire to construct a certain faux-temporality as a backdrop against which progress can be measured?

Ruins are all around us as warfare, climate change, deindustrialization, and nuclear meltdowns wreak their destructive effects. Ruination undermines our faith in the progress and rationality of the capitalist order as poverty, urban deterioration, and ecological destruction grow. This growing cultural pessimism and anxiety about decline in turn seems to feed an enormous appetite for the imagery of ruins. I think this is because the pleasure of viewing scenes of ruination from a space of safety helps to mitigate the anxiety of decline. We live in fearful times, made worse by the global pandemic and natural disasters such as floods, tsunamis, tornados, and hurricanes. The fear of economic and social collapse is real.

By picturing the beauty of decay or apocalyptic catastrophes, the terror these events produce in photography or disaster films are aestheticized and viewed at a safe distance that allows us to take pleasure in the experience. Because there is an emphasis on industrial ruins, I call this the deindustrial sublime, which is in dialogue with the romantic sublime.

The idea of Romantic philosophers such as Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant was that the sublime depended upon mental distance in time and space for the enjoyment of a scene that would otherwise be too terrifying to endure. This led to a lot of ruin gazing which became known as “ruin lust” by the end of the eighteenth century. At that point, the wealthy went so far as to build fake ruins, known as follies, which allowed them to feel politically superior to the

civilizational decline of other eras. This is what produced the British Grand Tour, which included the Roman Empire, Greece, and the Middle East, which allowed the ruin gazers to confirm their own sense of superiority by gazing at the ruins of other civilizations.

But today we gaze upon the ruins of our own civilization, so this does not induce a sense of superiority; rather, it becomes a chilling warning of contemporary social collapse and the downward spiral of progress. The ruins of the past suggest we may be gazing at our own future. At the same time, there are intrepid urban explorers who enjoy visiting ruins and see themselves as survivors of both past and future collapse. In this way, the pleasure of urban exploration mitigates the anxiety of decline. But urban explorers tend to be middle class adventurers with a certain view of those forced to live among the ruins as “the Other.”

I want to note that Kant distinguished between the sublime and the beautiful. Whereas the beautiful is found in nature and does not produce tension in the viewer, the sublime, on the other hand, is not found in nature but in the mind of the viewer who overcomes and masters the terrifying. So the deindustrial sublime is an aesthetic experience arrived at through contemplation made possible by safety and distance. It tames the terrifying and makes it enjoyable.

In this way, ruin imagery helps us to contain and control our anxiety through mental mastery and the pleasure that affords.

But we must not be lulled into complacency or cynicism, but focus on the causes of ruination—the corporations and capitalist state—to fight for a society based on equality and counter the economic and social violence at the core of ruins and ruin imagery.

Ruins, therefore, are connected to environment seen not just through degraded natural spaces but also in the decay of infrastructure. In *Calling Memory Into Place*, you put it emotively: “We might say that memory is written upon place and place is written upon the body” (Apel 2020). Environment, taken as place, then, can be said to be inscribed into and onto our existence, affecting the body even invisibly, e.g. microplastics in hale and fetuses. This opens up the question of the consequences of endless extraction (fossil fuels, rare earths) that not only gives us hi-tech gadgets but is the stage of exploitation and subjugation of humans and the environment

(Congo, cobalt, lithium, Serbia). Similarly, water, an increasingly scarce resource, is the target of speculation and privatization. Heineken, for example, leases two breweries in Slovenia (among other assets around the world) sat on aquifers. You have done research on the much more radical case of water privatization in Flint. How does environmental collapse make its way into the arts, particularly, as you say in *War Culture and the Contest of Images* (2012) that artistic innovators lost their connection to mass political movements, forming instead relations with art institutions?

The income inequality gap has only widened in the last few decades and continues to grow wider. Since the 1970s, the modus operandi of neoliberalism has been to privatize government services, deregulate corporate industries, and cut social services and social spending. The result is that poor, Black, and minority populations bear the brunt of economic decline and environmental degradation. And because these neoliberal measures do not benefit the vast majority of people, it has also meant massive assaults on privacy, democratic rights, and union-busting.

The degrading of the environment can be seen in a variety of ways, as exemplified by faulty safeguards on nuclear power plants, genetically modified organisms, pesticides, water and soil pollution left behind when companies abandon factories, or while they are still operating. These are the consequences of corporate deregulation and so-called free market reforms. They lead to corporate enrichment while causing human, economic, and environmental disasters. We can look at what happened in Detroit and Flint in the last few years as examples of unbridled corporate greed.

The governor of Michigan appointed an emergency manager for the majority-Black city of Detroit in 2013, effectively usurping the authority of the elected city government. The emergency manager, who was in charge of all city resources and finances, then took the city into bankruptcy. He hired his own former law firm, Jones Day, which represented some of the very banks holding the city's debt, and they decided that the way the city would repay the banks was by cutting the pensions of city workers. Jones Day is the same firm that was embedded in the Trump administration and helped pick ultra-conservative judges for the Supreme court.

And it wasn't just pension funds, which affected more than 32,000 city workers. They also slashed or eliminated medical benefits. This was known as the

“Grand Bargain.” Of course it was only grand for the banks, who continued to make reckless investments, like the ones that led to the 2008 financial collapse, because they knew they would be protected.

The emergency manager could also privatize public resources as he saw fit, transferring wealth from public institutions to private corporate hands. There were plans to privatize the Detroit water system. These plans were not ultimately carried out but the emergency manager sent out crews to shut off the water to three thousand homes *each week* and this became a major crisis in the city. No such threats to cut off water were made to large corporations or institutions who were delinquent in their bills and even running water in vacant and abandoned buildings was not shut off.

A massive demonstration in downtown Detroit was organized by National Nurses United and even the United Nations stepped in, asserting that access to water was an international human right for all people without discrimination. Under massive pressure, the emergency manager was forced to suspend water shutoffs and returned that power to the city’s mayor. After a few months, though, the mayor started shutoffs again but on a much smaller scale.

Even the art collection at the Detroit Institute of Arts was considered a city asset that could be monetized. The DIA is the fifth-largest encyclopedic museum in the nation with a yearly attendance of nearly six hundred thousand visitors. It has works by artists such as Jan van Eyck, Rembrandt, Degas, Cezanne, Van Gogh, Rothko, Warhol, and many others. Museum directors around the nation saw selling off part of the collection as looting the museum, violating the public trust, and spelling the end of Detroit as a cultural entity. The bond insurers argued that selling the art collection would help limit cuts to pensions, which was a false equivalence. The creditors didn’t see the collection as a precious cultural resource or form of cultural capital but as a nonessential city asset. Outrage was widespread and under pressure, a bankruptcy judge denied the creditors the right to remove artworks from the walls of the DIA. Meanwhile, the people of Detroit and surrounding suburbs, in a rare show of unity, endorsed a tax initiative to fund the DIA, putting it on secure financial footing for the first time in decades while providing free admission to residents of those counties.

In the case of Flint, another majority-Black city with an emergency manager assigned by the governor, the main source of the city’s water was switched from

the Detroit water system to the local Flint River even though the city did not have the proper infrastructure to put safety measures in place. This had disastrous results. When residents began to complain that the dirty brown, foul smelling water coming out of their taps caused chemical burns and skin rashes, or caused their hair to fall out, state officials repeatedly and falsely reassured them for a year and a half that the water was safe for drinking, cooking, and bathing. But pipe corrosion had produced lead poisoning of the water, with 40% of the city's homes experiencing elevated levels of lead, a powerful neurotoxin that particularly harms pregnant women and children. About 9,000 children under the age of six were affected. There was also an outbreak of Legionnaire's Disease, which killed at least twelve people and injured dozens of others.

Such blatant disregard of public health, particularly when it affects Black people and people of color, makes a powerful statement about corporate greed, race, and second-class citizenship. This was captured in an artwork by the New Orleans-based artist Ti-Rock Moore who created a water fountain with a constant stream of brown running water under a plaque that said "Colored." Displayed at the international art competition ArtPrize in Grand Rapids, Michigan in 2017, it recalled the segregated water fountains of the Jim Crow era and the long legacy of American racist oppression and Black second-class citizenship.

The examples of Detroit and Flint raise a basic question: Is the right to resources such as water a human right or a corporate right? I think it is clear that we cannot afford to let private interests seize and maintain global control of public resources such as water for their own profit, especially as the world runs out of freshwater and ever-greater numbers of people live without access to clean water or simply cannot afford to pay for it. Corporate control of the non-replaceable resource of water augers is a potentially irreversible ecological disaster that not only dispossesses people but will eventually destroy the planet. Instead, we must fight for common public ownership of resources such as water, managed according to need and the public good rather than profit.

The topic of justice, political and philosophical, is a constant companion of human lives. Over the course of history, and particularly in the last centuries, the valence of utopias importantly shaped the everyday realities as well as future imaginaries, in light of attempts to come up with a system that would be just and equitable, for instance communism and various (socialist) utopias. The post-WWII world seemed to have been on a quest of

finding a way to ensure justice, through the post-war trials and denazification, the UN, anti-colonization and non-alignment movements. Historically, the quest for justice and against oppression, was often tied to resistance movements seeking alternatives to their predicament by expanding the field of rights and access to the public sphere. Such quests have become fragmented and with little leverage when it comes to influencing corporate-dependent public policies, making it necessary to, as you say “frame alternative realities [...] and to expose the racist, anti-democratic, and class interests of the state and to strengthen the critical polemical power of the forces that oppose it” (Apel 2012). Justice and resistance have also been historically driven by artistic engagement, in twentieth-century cinema and photography. Where can we find a common ground today in recognizing injustice and instate justice, particularly in terms of migrants and oppressed minorities?

Today, there are many artists engaged with issues of social justice. The site where George Floyd was killed in Minneapolis was turned into a street memorial and is now known as George Floyd Square and includes a mural of George Floyd. At the site where Michael Brown was murdered by a policeman in Ferguson, Missouri, the community builds a street memorial each year on the anniversary of his death. Such street memorials become places for collective grief and mourning but I think they are also more than that. They are not meant to provide closure, but to prevent closure, to become sites of resistance against the continuing racist murders of Black people.

Many artists also engage with the global problem of migrants and refugees. There have been a number of art exhibitions on the plight of refugees, including *The Warmth of Other Suns: Stories of Global Displacement* at the Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C., in partnership with the New Museum in New York City in 2019. Works in these exhibitions, such as Albanian artist Adrian Paci's short video *Centro di Permanenza Temporanea (Temporary Detention Center)*, help illuminate the perspective of refugees and migrants, who feel compelled to leave their country because of war, climate change, and impoverishment despite becoming stateless and rightless. In Paci's video, a group of refugees approach a set of isolated airline boarding stairs in single file, standing near a runway in an open landscape. They climb up to the platform and fill the stairs. Then they wait. Several planes trundle by and take off, but none approach the boarding stairs where the refugees crowd together, endlessly waiting. They are displaced, forgotten, and stranded in the middle of nowhere.



Figure 3. Adrian Paci, *Centro di permanenza temporanea* (*Temporary Detention Center*), 2007, 4'32". Courtesy of the artist and kaufmann repetto Milano/New York, and Peter Kilchmann, Zürich.

At the same time, the ongoing racial violence in the US today is in large part a backlash to the browning of America. White nationalists don't consider brown and Black people real citizens, which has a theoretical framing in replacement theory.

Replacement theory is premised on the fear that white people, along with their political and cultural dominance, will be replaced by Black people and people of color. White nationalists would like to establish a white "ethnstate" that would not only restrict immigration but would also dismantle social welfare programs.

In 2017, the white nationalists and neo-Nazis in Charlottesville, Virginia, chanted, "You will not replace us!" and "Jews will not replace us!" demonstrating their embrace of replacement theory as well as their fear of an existential threat from Jews as well as Black people. This fear is embodied in the neo-Nazi concept of "white genocide," which refers primarily to contraception and abortion, which they oppose. White nationalists see women primarily as vehicles for sex and reproduction and this is why they hate feminism and women's desire to work and to have rights over their own bodies.

White nationalists were also inspired by Anders Behring Breivik, who killed eight people by detonating a van bomb in Oslo, then massacred sixty-nine

young people at an island summer camp to publicize his white nationalist manifesto in which he blamed feminism for a European “cultural suicide” and called for the deportation of all Muslims from Europe. The male shooter who massacred fifty-one Muslims and injured forty-nine more inside two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, in 2019, was also a white nationalist who supported the “white replacement” conspiracy theories that posit a concerted plan to replace whites with non-whites through immigration, abortion, intermarriage, racial integration, and land confiscation. This belief that whites must maintain political hegemony, along with a form of aggressive male supremacy, has become the basis of right-wing ideology.

In the context of digital media and surveillance technologies, how do we make art a tool to fight oppression and what may it take to come up with alternative frames (with a view to viral videos of oppression, as well as their censoring for using copyrighted material, e.g. music played by the police)?

Artworks, exhibitions, monuments, and memorials that recall a history of brutal persecution or present images of people enduring precarity and oppression not only make national and global catastrophes visible but also frame them in terms that suggest global capitalism’s inability to support and sustain its own populations. Capitalism not only fails to meet the crises, but creates the economic, ecological, social, and political conditions that lead to them. By producing a visual public sphere of art, video, photography, film, and other forms of representation, it is possible to produce a civic arena that helps facilitate and promote political opposition and political struggle, which is the only way that any gains can be made, even if those gains are often temporary. To be permanently successful, a political party with a revolutionary, anticapitalist program is needed.

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Short Biographies

Dora Apel is an art historian, cultural critic, and author and the W. Hawkins Ferry Endowed Chair Professor Emerita of Modern and Contemporary Art History. In 2017, she was elected a lifetime member of the WSU Academy of Scholars. Her work focuses on visual culture and politics, engaging with issues of trauma and memory, sex and gender, racial and ethnic oppression, class, war, globalization, and capitalism. Her most recent book, *Calling Memory Into Place*, considers the dynamic nature of memory and memorials, the ways in which memory can be mobilized for social justice, and the ways in which memory is embodied, including her family's experience of the Holocaust and her own experience of breast cancer treatment. Her other books include: *Beautiful Terrible Ruins: Detroit and the Anxiety of Decline*, *War Culture and the Contest of Images*, *Imagery of Lynching: Black Men, White Women, and the Mob*, and *Memory Effects: The Holocaust and the Art of Secondary Witnessing*.

Martin Pogačar is a researcher at the Institute of Culture and Memory Studies, Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts. His research interests include memory in digital media ecologies, technology and memory, as well as Yugoslav popular culture and industrial heritage. He is interested in the influence of the media on the processes and practices of transmitting, recording, and re-presenting the past and the social imaginaries that emerge out of the intertwining of technology, media, and memory practices. His recent publications include *A Microphone in a Chandelier: How a Secret Recording Sparks Mnemonic Imagination and Affect*, a coedited volume (with Iva Kosmos) *Social Impact in Arts and Culture: Diverse Lives of a Concept*, and *Media Archaeologies, Micro-archives, and Storytelling: Re-presenting the Past*.