

Stumbling upon memory

A discussion event focusing on the *Stolpersteine* micro-monument project

Organised by the Councillor's Office for Memory of Barcelona

Curated by Kathrin Golda-Pongratz

Saturday, 27 February 2021,

3.30 pm–8.30 pm

El Born CCM in Barcelona and online

Online activity with prior registration on the websites for the Councillor's Office for Democratic Memory and El Born CCM. Mixed format, with speakers in the Sala Moragues at El Born CCM and others connected online.

The *Stolpersteine* micro-monuments project was devised and launched in Germany in the 90s by German artist Gunter Demnig. Through reflection on the terror of the Nazi regime and in an attempt to highlight the effects of the Holocaust and the countless lives that were lost, the project's original purpose sought to introduce a civil memorial response that would act as an alternative to the official memorial initiatives launched by a reunified Germany. Since then, the project has expanded across Europe and, to date, more than 70,000 stones have been laid in 24 countries.

These minimalistic commemorative pieces are individually laid in the public space by the artist himself. Originally, they were installed in front of the house in which the person being remembered had lived, the place from where they were taken by the Nazi regime and thus literally removed from their community and society as a whole. The key strength of this initiative lies in its ability to draw attention – albeit subtly, by means of a humble *Stolperstein* – to how the Nazi authorities forcefully made individuals “disappear” from their urban communities. Demnig's project eschews the state and its institutions, which have traditionally curated public monuments. The *Stolpersteine* function as a private endeavour: individuals commemorate other individuals by contacting the artist and providing information about the person who was taken, persecuted and, in most cases, killed. Each *Stolperstein* remembers an ordinary person, a neighbour who lived on a street, a citizen of a city, one of the billions of victims for whom there is no mention in the history books. The stones become embedded, quietly and almost invisibly, in the urban landscape. Originally, they were laid almost as an act of rebellion, sometimes without the appropriate permits from the council. Since then, community initiatives have emerged across Germany and in many cities in other European countries, with local councils typically authorising the placement of the stones. This has become so prevalent that their involvement can sometimes be seen as a facile act of political correctness.

The increase in the number of requests for tiles to be laid, along with the growing number of mass, institutionalised installations, has led to a transformation and dilution of some of the original principles of the project – principles which had bestowed it with a remarkable strength that other commemorative efforts across Germany and

Europe lacked. Newly arising dynamics are testament to this: in 2018, the artist himself decided that the project would also commemorate victims of repressive violence and of the Franco regime. As part of this expanded scope, he gave the name “Remembrance Stones” to the pieces that were laid in Mallorca, in 2018, to commemorate twenty local mayors and politicians who were imprisoned, tortured and killed between 1936 and 1939 at the hands of nationalists and Franco followers. In the same year, Memorial Democràtic promoted the installation of the first *llambordes de memòria* (memory stones), which included one for the survivor of the Ravensbrück concentration camp Neus Català in the village of her birth, els Guiamets, with a ceremony which she attended. The Generalitat has organised the placement of *Stolpersteine* as a tribute to the republicans who died in the stone quarries in Mauthausen, and to the Catalan survivors and victims of Nazi camps in various locations, including Navàs, Girona, Manresa, Igualada, Castellar del Vallès and Sabadell.

The Barcelona City Council has received an abundance of requests. The most noteworthy among them was for a *Stolperstein* to be laid on Plaça de Sant Jaume to commemorate Lluís Companys, which was ultimately installed on 15 October 2020 following the request from the Generalitat. The City Council is now promoting this debate as a way to respond to demands from political parties and remembrance organisations as it seeks to find its own way to pay tribute in a manner that is specific to the city of Barcelona.

Key themes of the discussion

- Gunter Demnig’s project originally began as a memorial gesture that strongly appealed to the human community as a whole, breaking away from the restraints of national communities and narratives. What becomes of this gesture once it has been institutionalised? What is the place of this gesture, alongside individual, family and civil initiatives, within the context of institutionalised arrangements?
- If this gesture becomes institutionalised, how will the hierarchies among the victims be addressed, and how will we decide who deserves to be commemorated and who does not?
- What is the relationship between the institutions and the collectives who promote commemoration?
- If commemorations become mass events, is there any way to retain the project’s “invisible” nature and the way it silently confronts passers-by with the fate of an individual in an everyday and non-politically charged location? How can we avoid the risk of running into “memorial inflation”?
- Is it appropriate to extend the project so that it marks other regimes and commemorates victims of repressive violence? Is it fitting to mix commemorative codes?
- How can we build a universal dimension that promotes empathy, from a moral and ethical perspective, among passers-by (both local and international) for the victims being commemorated?

- Is there a way to depoliticise commemoration while still doing justice to the victims through a radically different gesture?
- What is the role of cities, including Barcelona, in the context of a commemorative fabric?
- How is the memory of republican victims defined? Which contemporary artistic codes – aside from “Remembrance Stones” – could be used to pay tribute to the republican memory?

Event

The event will be structured around three central themes that will both contextualise and feed the debate currently taking place in Barcelona. It will include an introduction to the evolution of the *Stolpersteine* project; discuss the historical task of portraying the memory of the republicans deported from the city of Barcelona during the Franco dictatorship; look at the expectations of the civil associations who act on behalf of victims of reprisals and deportees; and search for a memorial gesture that can simultaneously frame itself within and stand out from the European debate.

Each theme will take the form of a virtual round table, which will feature three to six different voices and stances. Speakers will be given 10 minutes each and there will be time for a debate.

3.30 pm – 3.45 pm

Opening and welcome speech
Introduction to the event

3.45 pm – 4.30 pm

1. The genesis of a project: the *Stolpersteine* micro-monuments – Origins, evolution, international repercussions and critical discussion

Anna Warda (Stiftung – Spuren – Gunter Demnig, Potsdam)
 Estela Schindel (Frankfurt/Oder)
 Peter Carrier (Berlin/Braunschweig)

4.30 pm – 4.45 pm

Q&A and debate

Break (20 min)

5.05 pm – 6.15 pm

2. The case of Barcelona: amid the calls and expectations from victims’ associations, the will to act and political appropriation

Jordi Font (Memorial Democràtic de Catalunya)
 Rosa Toran (Amical de Mauthausen)
 Teresa del Hoyo (Amical de Ravensbrück)
 Jordi Guixé (EUROM. European Observatory on Memories)

Marko Daniel (Barcelona Public Art Council)

Jordi Rabassa (Barcelona City Council)

6.15 pm – 6.30 pm

Q&A and debate

Break (20 min)

6.50 pm – 7.50 pm

3. Republican memory: towards a commemorative and reconciliatory gesture – Perspectives for action

Marta Marín-Dòmine (Barcelona)

Marta Simó (Barcelona)

Ricardo Brodsky (Santiago de Chile)

Robert Jan van Pelt (Toronto)

7.50 pm – 8.05 pm

Q&A and debate

Break (10 min)

8.15 pm – 8.30 pm

**Collection of the ideas, proposals, controversies and demands discussed
Summary and closing**

Key bibliography

Assmann, Aleida (1999): *Erinnerungsräume* [Commemorative Spaces]. C. H. Beck.

Brodsky, Ricardo (2018): *Trampas de la Memoria*. Flacso.

Carrier, Peter (2016): “Stumbling Stones (Stolpersteine). The Moral Authenticity of Micromonuments”, in: Golda-Pongratz, Kathrin and Teschner, Klaus (eds.), *Spaces of Memory – Lugares de Memoria*. *Dialog* 118/119, p. 64-68.

Golda-Pongratz, Kathrin (2018): “Memoriales, Monumentos, Museos del Genocidio judío (en Europa y América)”, in: Vinyes, Ricard (ed.), *Diccionario de la Memoria Colectiva*. Gedisa, p. 308f.

Schindel, Estela (2018). “Stolpersteine”, in: Vinyes, Ricard (ed.), *Diccionario de la Memoria Colectiva*. Gedisa, p. 452f.

Vinyes, Ricard (2020): “Sobre usos y rutinas de la *stolperstein*”, in: <https://blogs.publico.es/dominiopublico/31141/sobre-usos-y-rutinas-de-la-stolperstein/>

<http://memoria.gencat.cat/ca/que-fem/stolpersteine/>

<http://www.stolpersteine.eu/>

Brief biographies of the speakers

Introduction and moderation

Kathrin Golda-Pongratz

Kathrin Golda-Pongratz is a Doctor of Architecture and Urban Planning, a professor at the Polytechnic University of Catalonia and the UIC School of Architecture, and spokesperson of Institut dels Passats Presents of the Barcelona City Council and the Ateneu Memòria Popular.

1. The genesis of a project: the Stolpersteine micro-monuments – origins, evolution, international repercussions and critical discussion

Anna Warda

Anna Warda is a PhD candidate at the University of Potsdam, Germany. She is the coordinator for the European art memorial Stolpersteine, a project which commemorates victims of Nazi extermination or persecution at their last known residence, and an acting board member of the parent foundation Stiftung – Spuren – Gunter Demnig.

Estela Schindel

Estela Schindel is a Doctor of Sociology, a memory scholar and the academic coordinator of the Viadrina Institute for European Studies, Faculty of Social and Cultural Studies, European University Viadrina in Frankfurt (Oder), Germany.

Peter Carrier

Peter Carrier is a Doctor of Philosophy, historian, research fellow at the Georg-Eckert Institute in Braunschweig, Germany and the editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Educational Media, Memory and Society*.

2. The case of Barcelona: amid the calls and expectations from victims' associations, the will to act and political appropriation

Jordi Font Agulló

Jordi Font Agulló is a historian and cultural manager, former director of the Museu Memorial de l'Exili (La Jonquera) from 2008 to 2019, and director of Memorial Democràtic de Catalunya.

Rosa Toran Belver

Rosa Toran Belver is a Doctor of History, a teacher, former president and spokesperson of the Amical de Mauthausen and spokesperson of the Ateneu Memòria Popular.

Teresa del Hoyo Calduch

Teresa del Hoyo Calduch is a Delegate of the International Committee of Ravensbrück and a member of the Executive Board of Amical de Ravensbrück.

Jordi Guixé Coromines

Jordi Guixé Coromines is a Doctor of History, a professor at the University of Barcelona and the founder and director of EUROM (European Observatory on Memories) in Barcelona.

Marko Daniel

Marko Daniel is a Doctor of History and Art History, the director of Fundació Miró and a member of the Barcelona Public Art Council.

3. Republican memory: towards a commemorative and reconciliatory gesture – perspectives for action**Marta Marín-Dòmine**

Marta Marín-Dòmine is a graduate of literature, Doctor of Translation and Multicultural Studies, writer and tenured professor of Literature at Laurier University (Canada), director of the Centre for Memory and Testimony Studies at the same university, and spokesperson of the Institut dels Passats Presents of the Barcelona City Council.

Marta Simó Sànchez

Marta Simó Sànchez is a Doctor of Sociology, a professor at the Autonomous University of Barcelona, a researcher on the ISOR group (Research in Sociology of Religion) and a member of the Executive Committee of EHAS (European Association for Holocaust Studies).

Ricardo Brodsky Baudet

Ricardo Brodsky Baudet is a graduate of literature, director of the Museo Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna, former executive director of the Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos in Santiago de Chile and of the Museo Gabriela Mistral de Vicuña.

Robert Jan van Pelt

Robert Jan van Pelt is a Doctor of History of Art and an architectural historian, a Holocaust scholar, a professor of cultural history at the University of Waterloo (Toronto) and a member of the Architectural Board of the Babi Yar Holocaust Memorial in Kiev, Ukraine.