

Conclusion

In spite of differences between the Vél' d'Hiv' and Holocaust Monument – between architectural forms, institutions, political agents and the conditions established in petitions by citizens' action groups – each site acquired analogous symbolic functions as a national monument. Both debates were conducted between intellectual, political and artistic elites in the form of articles, speeches, exhibitions, public conferences or parliamentary debates. They were both initiated by citizens' action groups which collected signatures and published petitions in the press calling for a symbolic commemoration of Jewish victims of deportation and genocide. Moreover, both petitions provoked the response and engagement of the mass media, associations representing victims, and national political leaders. The debates were interrupted and influenced by presidential and parliamentary elections in France and Germany respectively. And in both countries, these monuments were called for as a guarantee of symbolic reparation or even national salvation, compensating for the perceived lack of an appropriate central memorial to victims of war crimes committed under the former regimes. Finally, language employed during the debates was based on analogous interpretations of the monuments as focal points referring to war crimes, the negation of which and the affirmation of alternative national traditions, from 1789 in France or 1949 and 1989 in Germany, for example, offered historical orientation for future generations. Both memorials represent the symbolic integration of “negative” memories of crimes of the past into a repertoire of national symbols, and thereby subvert the conventional function of monuments as sites of memory fostering positive emotional bonds within a community. The parallel commemorative procedures observed in each country by institutions and intellectual and political agents also suggest that, despite distinctly local and national perceptions and interpretations of events, the Second World War is not only a national but also a supranational site of memory.

It is not possible to define the significance of contemporary monuments with one comprehensive concept on the basis of these case studies. We may nevertheless conclude that monumental sculptural forms are eclectic or *open*; that they operate as focal points of political controversy although, being contingent on multiple and changing interpretations, they are ineffective or *inexpedient* as supports for political messages; and that their significance derives only partially from their representative function as sculptural forms in urban settings, and essentially from public participation in the *procedural* negotiation of forms of historical transference and of their precise purpose: as carriers of the memory of “what” event, “for whom”,

in the name of “what community”, and “how”. In this way, a degree of reconciliation was reached over the Vél' d'Hiv' and consensus over the Holocaust Monument only after stringent conditions imposed in petitions (conceiving of the monument as a national “duty” in Germany and as a prerequisite for a national “cure” in France) were matched by adequate commemorative measures. In both countries, these measures were ultimately fulfilled by the state: by the president in France and by parliament in Germany.

The combined commitment of associations and states to the construction of the Vél' d'Hiv' and Holocaust Monument, and the explicit appeal within petitions to the national representative function of these monuments, means that it is not possible to ascribe them to either social or state initiative. As products of both social *and* state enterprise, the Vél' d'Hiv' and Holocaust Monument do not fall into any single category of symbols embodying either a local, ethnic, party or state vision of the past. The claim that the social impact of monuments is regularly overestimated¹ would be valid if these debates had been confined to any one association or social sphere, or to intellectual, political and artistic circles. However, the numerous mediating institutions implicated in the construction of these monuments, including the mass media, political parties, parliamentary committees, pressure groups, several associations and educational establishments, broadened opportunities for the active and passive participation of the public in these debates, and suggests that the reception of the monuments extended beyond the strictly institutional spheres of public communication. This study has shown that monuments do not embody national memory, and that they may not be interpreted as fixed sets of coded documentary “archives” but as focal points of an ongoing process of public dialogue operating in conjunction with historical, journalistic and political appropriations of the past.

¹ Cf. Peter Burke, “Two Crises of Historical Consciousness”, *Storia della Storiografia* 33, 1998, pp. 3-16, p. 3; Winter & Sivan, “Setting the Framework”, p. 29.