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Monuments of the Ephemeral, Shadow Sculptures

Claire Kueny

Translation : Anthony Cordingley

The shadow is (the) ephemeral

- 1 Numerous reasons instinctively bring together the shadow's ephemeral quality — etymologically speaking, the ephemeral is that which lasts for but a day— and, by extension, that whose time is short. A projected shadow is the dark area created when an opaque body intercepts light and projects it onto a surface, such as a floor, a wall or a screen. It is at once an immaterial material, remaining elusive, but above all it is an ephemeral material, being slippery, mobile and fugitive, “which lasts but a day,” or less, since it disappears and changes over the course of a day. The shadow, furthermore, plays an essential role in the sundial, which was one of the first instruments to allow the time of the day to be measured, and thus indicate the passage of time.
- 2 What's more, “the theme of the shadow appears in the West as much as in the East, in the ancients as much as the moderns”¹ and, as Max Milner specifies, “the relationship between the shadow cast by the human and a part of himself destined to follow it (once separate they merge in this way at the moment of death) is a theme which has constantly stimulated the imagination of the world's people, between distant centuries and the most diverse civilizations.”² When reflecting upon time, one must be able to speak of a universal and anachronistic theme.
- 3 The shadow is a plastic image, but it is also symbolic if one takes into consideration the mystery it conveys and its metaphorical richness as a multifaceted symbol: it conjures up, most particularly, the soul, the ghost, the double and death. Paradoxically, these terms favor a certain definition of eternity, albeit one that is always volatile and intangible. A symbol of death, the shadow is also a proof of life, as several accounts from different periods attest. In such a fashion, *The Divine Comedy*, which marked the

beginning of the Renaissance, narrates Dante's discovery of Purgatory and its *shadows*. Confronted with shadows, Dante comes face to face with the dead, and it is in their presence that he discovers his own shadow, for he is the only body to cast one, his is the only body alive. Romantic literature will later confirm the role that the shadow plays in the image of the living body. So, in the children's tale by Chamisso, *Peter Schlemihl's Miraculous Story*, Schlemihl naively sells his shadow to the devil, which turns him into a pariah to society, excluded and rejected because of his difference, his "illness." While we do not ordinarily pay much attention to our shadow, these two stories insist on its fundamental role in the construction of one's identity, and this is not exclusive to Western thinking and beliefs.

- 4 Furthermore, and especially in religions which believe in life after death, many believe the shadow to be the part of every man and woman that survives them.³ At once ephemeral and in constant movement, shadows are also *eternal* and *surviving*.
- 5 The different paradoxes of the shadow invite consideration when they become the plastic and theoretical material of art. This will require an intervention into the vast field of sculpture to question, through a *corpus* of shadow sculptures each dating from the past twenty years, the role of the shadow in an artwork's visibility, understanding and perpetuity. Such perpetuity is highlighted here by shadows which, once sculpted, become fixed, set.
- 6 While artists rarely mention shadows, be it in the titles of their works or in the list of materials in the work's description, the shadow has always been a part of the vocabulary of art. From the outset, it held a place of its own in art practice and theory. Indeed, according to the compiler, Pliny the Elder, representation in the West may own its origins to the shadow. In volume 35 of his *Natural History* devoted to the art of his era, he relates the myth of the birth of art. According to Pliny, Butades of Sicyon, the Corinthian potter, and his daughter number among the first portraitists. The young girl, "being deeply in love with a young man about to depart on a long journey, traced the profile of his face, as thrown upon the wall by the light of the lamp. Upon seeing this, her father filled in the outline, by compressing clay upon the surface, and so made a face in relief, which he then hardened by fire along with other articles of pottery."⁴ From the very beginning, the image would thus involve rendering the absent and disappearing figure present, and the image's creation thus finds itself most intimately linked to love and death, to this strange couple formed by Eros and Thanatos and to the two greatest mysteries of human history.

Fig. 1

Alain Fleischer, *L'Homme dans les draps 4* [Man in Sheets 4], extract, 2003. Video in black and white, 12 min.

© Alain Fleischer/ADAGP, Paris, 2014.

- 7 *L'Homme dans les draps* [Man in Sheets] by Alain Fleischer (fig. 1) evokes this myth in numerous ways. By invisibly sculpting sheets, the profiles of ephemeral men appear as shadows in the bed, though none are present, or are no longer present. The material takes life, and yet, a doubly phantasmal presence inhabits the image, which is suggested by the white, empty sheets that cover not a single body, and the shadow, which is a synonym of the ghost, as much as the double. Do we witness the ghost of the morning lover who has since left the bed? Has he left for the day? Or forever? Or is this the shadow of the absent one has been dreaming of all night? By capturing and giving form to such everyday trifles as the folds that bodies leave in sheets, and by playing with men's dis/appearance, Alain Fleischer plunges the audience into a room where dreams mix with rest and lust, but also with memories, the instant and life; absence, loss and love.
- 8 Transitions, bodies, traces, disappearance, presence... Such are the recurring characteristics of shadow sculptures that grasp an instant or an event, and with their fixity they hold onto its recollection and memory. These shadow sculptures position themselves between the ephemeral and the monument, between the presence of a body and its ineluctable disappearance. When considering how to conserve the ephemeral, it would appear interesting therefore to conduct a study into the shadow. The link that the shadow sustains between ephemerality and eternity renders it the dialectical image par excellence, be it on a formal or a conceptual level.

Statues also die

- 9 It is interesting to study the shadow and the ephemeral precisely in their relationship to the monument, from which they are in principle poles apart. Indeed, according its definition in the *Petit Robert* dictionary of French, the monument is “an architectural work, a sculpture, destined to keep alive the memory of someone or something,” for the long-term, eternally. As Aloïs Riegl points out, it refers to a work that is “built for the exact purpose of keeping an action or fate forever alive in the living memory and conscience of future generations.”⁵ Yet, as paradoxical as it may seem, as Robert Musil claims in his *Nachlaß zu Lebzeiten* [*Posthumous Papers of a Living Author*] published for the first time in 1935, “the monument is invisible.” The monument may be monumental and it may adorn the centers of the majority of our public squares, but we fail to see it; and its content, which is supposed to commemorate and serve to remind, is thus rendered invisible and inoperative.
- 10 Is this the result of a world saturated with images, a world in which it has become difficult to see and most of all to observe images, to become aware of and understand them over time? Is it the outcome of a present “haunted by the empires of transience particular to mass culture”⁶ and the speed of fast food and instant messaging in our society that values productivity and efficiency at all costs, and in which we no longer take the time to stop and pause before a work? Indeed, statues also die, and as Alain Resnais and Chris Marker assert in their eponymous film, “(an object dies) when the gaze that once rested upon it fades to nothing.”⁷ Elsewhere, while denouncing colonialism and discussing African sculptures, they wanted to show how artworks are unquestionably denaturalized when they are decontextualized by institutions and subjected to a scientific gaze. They contend that, “At the very moment that African art is crowned as a great achievement, it becomes a dead language.”⁸ They continue: “Why does African art find itself in a museum of anthropology, the Musée de l’Homme, while Greek or Egyptian art finds itself in a museum of art, le Louvre?” The question demonstrates just how much the context of a work’s visibility influences its (non)-comprehension. So, how should a monument be conserved today? How can it be made visible and, above all, comprehensible? What can be done so that it doesn’t become a “dead language”? And, most importantly, how can one conserve the monument’s (transient) moment, so that it remains eternally and appropriately alive and visible?
- 11 Whether the moment expressed by artists is personal or whether it’s a matter of collective history, artists’ works have a need to refresh memory and keep remembrance alive in the present and for the future, to become aware of a living past that will itself become the issue. Thus, by linking the two elements that would appear to form an oxymoron in this article’s title, “Monuments of the Ephemeral, Shadow Sculptures,” the present aim is to analyze the paradoxes of the selected artworks and observe the manner in which attention to the shadow facilitates a new perspective upon them.
- 12 These shadow monuments are rendered increasingly beguiling when put into a dialogue with the Ancient Greek couple, *Collosos* and *Eidolon*, as interpreted by Jean-Pierre Vernant in *Mythes et pensées chez les grecs* (Greek Myth and Thought). Apart from the lexical analogy between *colossus* and monument, and the links between *eidolon* and shadow, double, mind and soul, the present study is concerned foremost with the formal and symbolic links between Greek statuary and the shadow.

- 13 From a formal point of view, shadow sculptures, like the *colossuses* in Greek thought, differ from “classical” sculptures in that they are decomposed: the coherent whole is in fact composed of two parts, of a volume and an *image*. This breaking of the sculpture into two spaces undoubtedly plays a role in its comprehension. A singular physical relationship with such works is established, placing the viewer in and “between” the sculpture, so as to be more effective in making one to take a stand with respect to it.
- 14 Furthermore, Jean-Pierre Vernant explains that with the *colossus*, “the Greeks were able to translate into a visible form certain otherworldly powers that reside in an invisible realm,”⁹ just as the artists mentioned here translate and perpetuate invisible phenomena in the visible realm, such as the ephemeral, emotions and memories. The *colossus* —which was erected to contain the soul, and thus the shadow, so that it would no longer haunt the world of the living— is closely connected with shadow monuments. Each oscillates invariably between eternal and ephemeral, between visible and invisible, between life and death, between the present and the past it reflects; these interdependencies conserve both the monuments and their memory, *ad vitam aeternam*.

Fig. 2

Cornelia Parker, *Cold Dark Matter: an Exploded View*, 1991. Wood, metal, plastic, ceramic, paper, fabric and wire, 400 x 500 x 500 cm. Tate collection, London.

Tate, London, 2014.

- 15 *Cold Dark Matter: an Exploded View* by Cornelia Parker (fig. 2) exemplifies this dialectic. This work was made with the assistance of the British army, which, at the artist's request, burned a garden shed, thus supplying the artist with charred debris that she conserved, reorganized, suspended and scattered around a light bulb. Illuminated as such the debris projects their shadows onto the wall, creating an atypical space which the viewer is invited to enter.

- 16 The work's title *Dark Matter*, which in astrophysics designates a hypothetical category of matter, justifies an interpretation of the work as an image of the Big Bang or another such cosmological or eschatological model. But the work's particular interest for the present study is the fact the artist's decision to freeze the explosion, the event and time, all the while giving the work the extra depth and resonance of space, owing to its shadows. Moreover, viewers project their own shadows onto the wall, finding themselves at the very heart of the explosion, and in such physical proximity to the work they also find themselves in its space and time (that of a catastrophe, of the event). This shadow sculpture typifies the monument of the ephemeral, as understand here: it inquires simultaneously into the event, memory, and a certain form of the universe's fragility, while humanity, which is in principle absent from the work, remains at its center, a real actor and decoder.
- 17 This should be the role of the monuments dotted about our cities. Their presence in our daily environments should change us into actors, or at least into active viewers of our spaces and our histories. They should invite us to consider the work and its content. For, as Robert Musil noted in the text cited above, there appears to be a "contradict[ion] [...], monuments are so conspicuously inconspicuous. There is nothing in this world as invisible [...] there are those that embody the expression of a living thought or feeling: it is, however, the purpose of most ordinary monuments to first conjure up a remembrance, or to grab hold of our attention and give a pious bent to our feelings [...] and it is in this, their prime purpose, that monuments always fall short."¹⁰
- 18 And yet, as Franz Kafka wrote in a letter to Oskar Pollak from January 27th 1904, "we need books and monuments to stop the sea from freezing. In frozen memory, the past is nothing but the past. Even if monuments speak of the past, their inherent temporality should be the future."¹¹ But when a work has been set in stone, how can one avoid fixing its time as that of the event, rather than conserving its temperamental and ephemeral nature? How can the emotion of an ephemeral event be conserved once it has been made stable and eternal?

Fig. 3

Le Semeur d'étoiles [The Star Sower/The Seeder], Kaunas, Lithuania.

Photo and creation: Morfai.

- 19 A monument in Kaunas (Lithuania) is transformed into an anecdotal but on the whole evocative piece that draws the viewer's gaze thanks to the shadow cast by its sower of seed —the generic image of invisible public monuments sown throughout our cities— whose effect is heightened by a graffiti artist's addition of stars upon the wall. This statue gained recognition through the internet¹² under the title of “The Star Sower” or “The Seeder” (fig. 3), and thus revealed it bore a new meaning and poetic touch. Might it be that the shadow renders the monument visible?

Fig. 4

Francis Alÿs, *Zócalo*, May 22, 1999, Mexico City, D. F. 1999. Single screen DVD projection with sound track. Variable dimensions, 12 hour duration, edition of 4.

Image: www.davidzwirner.com, courtesy David Zwirner, New York/London.

- 20 This is confirmed by Francis Alÿs's *Zócalo* (fig. 4), which records over the course of a day the progression of a flag pole's shadow across Mexico City's central square, the Zócalo. Twelve hours of video footage show the movement of shadow and crowd around this historic square that has seen revolutions and demonstrations. In step with the time of the day, and thus the length of the shadow, passers-by traverse the square, stopping at the flagpole's shadow. A line of citizens varying in length forms within the shelter provided by this protective shadow, bringing into view the flagpole and the whole public space that they have appropriated. Less symbolic than functional, the monument revealed by the shadow takes account of the human and its inscription in space, its transient passage in the environment.
- 21 This is a certain kind of monument, an architectural and/or monumental sculptural work that is situated in public space. But “the monument desires above all to be the vehicle of a memory —personal or collective— its vessel, the vector of a message throughout time.”¹³ For, even if the monument is rendered visible (by the shadow), over time its message fades away. Fixed, it evokes a past, a history that has since passed. But what can be done to make history and memory remain visible? What must be done so that the monument is capable of giving rise to a meditation on the past,

while at the same time producing contemporary modes of thought and a narrative for the future, in short, that it be a monument of the moment?

The monument is invisible

- 22 In *Faire de l'histoire, t. 1: Nouveaux problèmes* [Making History, New Problems], Pierre Nora insists on the fact that, “for an event to exist, it must be known,”¹⁴ but it must also be seen. The narrator of Alain Resnais’s film, *Hiroshima mon amour...* does not cease to repeat, “You saw nothing in Hiroshima.” But in the media saturated societies of today, the event takes shape in the image. And yet, if our world is saturated with perfectly visible images, they are not necessarily seen or noticed. It would appear therefore in disappearing the image appears, or else appears in its “imprint,” its inside out form, as a latent presence.¹⁵ Images and, in particular, monuments would need to acquire this formal necessity in order to reveal themselves in absence, imprinted, inside out.

Fig. 5

Ladder and Shadow Printed at the Moment of the Explosion of the Bomb. Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum

© Roger-Viollet Collection (9058-1).

- 23 The allusion to the film by Alain Resnais was not incidental. More monuments have been created for the Second World War than any other event. Furthermore, the link between Hiroshima and the shadow is of unsurpassed intensity. When the bomb exploded, at the very moment that the bodies of the habitants burned and perished, the heat was such that light printed the silhouettes of men, women and objects onto walls and floors, creating instant, lifesized, acheiropoietic images. These images have become, paradoxically, perennial traces of the event (fig. 5).¹⁶ As Georges Didi-

Huberman notes in *Génie du non-lieu* [Genius of the Void], Hiroshima created the most literal transposition of our beliefs into image: “When a being passes away, it is said to become a shadow.”¹⁷ While bodies die, shadows survive. He reminds us of a passage from *Hiroshima mon amour*: “Like you, I too have tried with all my might not to forget. Like you I forgot [...] Like you I wanted to have an inconsolable memory, a memory of shadows and stone. [...] Like you, I forgot. Why deny the obvious necessity for memory?”¹⁸ In the meeting of stone and shadow, and thus between the lasting and the transient, memory remains and feeling persists, inconsolable. It is hardly surprising therefore that artists use shadows to create monuments of the ephemeral, that is, monuments which allow one to read the ephemeral by evoking, implicitly, the past, all the while conducting it into the present, for tomorrow.

- 24 More recently, the events which have marked history are the September 11 attacks. The same images of the burning towers on the verge of collapse saturated the media, marking the beginning of a war waged against terrorism. Indeed, these towers appeared as a symbol at the very moment of their disappearance. How can we commemorate this event and pay homage to the deceased? What monuments should we erect?

Fig. 6

Tribute in Light, 11 September 2004. Two beams of light represent the Twin Towers, New York. September 11 Memorial.

Photo: Derek Jensen (Tysto).

Fig. 7

9/11 Memorial, New York City. Commemorative memorial of September 11.

Photo: Norman B.

- 25 Two experiments in New York ascertained the scale of the task and sought to pay homage by trying to distinguish themselves from the “voyeuristic” nature of press images. A diaphanous, immaterial monument was thus imagined, *Tribute in Light* (2004, fig. 6): invisible in daylight and ephemeral, two beams of light projected vertically into the sky make the towers appear —sporadically— and preserve the dual temporality and dialectic between what was (the “ça a été” dear to Barthes) and the here and now (“c’est là, ici et maintenant”).¹⁹ What is more, the site of the Twin Towers is now occupied by a subterranean monument (9/11 Memorial, fig. 7). No longer erected, the monument pierces, plunging us deep into the earth, into a black hole, provoking a sensation of vertigo.

Fig. 8

Mounir fatmi, *Save Manhattan 01*, 2004. Korans, books written around the time of September 11, 2001. Table and shadow, 130 x 160 x 70 cm, 1/5. Collection of the CNAP, Paris.

©ADAGP, Paris, 2013.

- 26 In the visual arts, one monument to September 11 draws our full attention: the first of mounir fatmi's 2004 *Save Manhattan* series (fig. 8). This monument to the ephemeral is composed of books and the shadow they project onto a wall which represents the New York skyline pre-September 11, and keeps alive the painful memory that is set in both "stone" (represented by the books) and shadow. Books treating September 11 are meticulously arranged in piles on the table, save two Korans which stand vertically, symbolizing the Twin Towers. The books were written in the frenzy of the moment, and suggest numerous theses about this shady episode of contemporary history and what lies behind it, beginning with *Sur les traces de Ben Laden* by Mohammed Sifaoui, or propose an autopsy of terrorisms, as Noam Chomsky does in *9/11*. These books were selected by mounir fatmi because they are as much signs of what was being plotted behind this episode as they are proofs of mindboggling and sometimes dangerous interpretations of the event. In an eminently political, and polemical, manner, with this piece the artist offers a reflection on the religious, assimilating the Koran into the Towers, and on the danger to be found in the weight of words, should they be misinterpreted, read literally or articulate noxious ideas. In denouncing religious extremism he denounces at the same time the media hype surrounding the event and its misunderstanding, the sad confusion between the Muslim religion and terrorism symbolized by the books and the shadow taken together. mounir fatmi thus evokes and remembers the past while rendering the monument visible, bringing it into the here and now and sustaining a commentary that even today makes one reflect, here, in a world in which not only terrorism remains alive, but also and above all confusion, misunderstanding, intolerance, and fear of the other, the elsewhere.

Perpetuating the ephemeral

- 27 In the works mentioned thus far, the shadows were fixed and set. The only way of making them disappear would be to switch off the light, to better switch it on [BB]. “For as long as we are alive,” writes Georges Didi-Huberman in *Génie du non-lieu*, “our shadows do not cease to shift about and, above all, vanish and disappear, we know not. Might our own disappearance give the shadow its permanence and compactness, its physical power to survive?”²⁰ The shadow has, in effect, a power of survival, since it allows monuments to be not only visible but most of all, permanent, surviving throughout time. Fixed in this way, memory and the ephemeral are conserved without losing their power, without fading away. The shadow reveals and enlivens the monument, as well its moment, at every instant. Yet, while they magnify and revive the monument, shadow sculptures and monuments of the ephemeral seek also paradoxically, in some ways, to defy and perpetuate them.
- 28 The artist Giuseppe Penone would like “the ephemeral to become eternal”; his sculptures ceaselessly question the relationship to time. “How does sculpture sculpt time? How does it move with this time—in memory, in the present, protending towards the future?”²¹ These questions have been addressed in part by investigating the capacity of a monument to conserve the fragility of the ephemeral, which is understood as a past *event* that continues into the present and opens a future. What remains, therefore, is to reconsider the ephemeral as a reflection on life and being.
- 29 The ephemeral, the monument and the shadow together question implicitly the fragility of life, of the human, the passage of time and death. In his book entitled *Pour une anthropologie des images* [For an Anthropology of Images] Hans Belting asserts from the outset that “the experience of death has been one of the most powerful engines for the human production of images. The image presents itself thus as a response or a reaction to death [...]. Furthermore, our contemporary images are no different,”²² even if this relationship does not apply universally to all images. We earlier saw that in the myth of the origins of art, the portrait survived the lover who left for war. One of the aims of art is to perpetuate the ephemeral that is life, to fix that which ceases to exist and to make art outlast life so as to further a questioning into life.
- 30 But how can a sculpture that is created at one moment be made to last? Certainly, its forms last, but what of their understanding? How can the ephemeral be sustained over the long-term? The role of art history is to perpetuate the life of art—as much through conservation as through discourse—and a good number of works endure, survive and transcend time. But what plastic, formal or other solutions do contemporary artists have to perpetuate the ephemeral? And this, in a society where, as Christine Buci-Glucksmann affirms, the ephemeral has become the new mode of time in the age of globalization, a real marker of society: “ephemeral families of shifting shapes and sizes, ephemeral work ever more ‘flexible’ and threatened, ephemeral lives and identities that lose their fixed bearings, everything leads to a kind of accelerated time that uproots old stabilities by denying the ephemeral’s limit point, death.”²³ How not to deny death? How can one not express a desire for eternity and immortality through “fixed” forms, namely, eternal artworks? How can one give priority to reflections upon the fragility of life? And how can one make these reflections last through time?

- 31 Many works today question memory, the fragility and transience of life, be they sculptural or pictorial works, performances, digital arts, photography, cinema or performing arts like dance and theater. “Impermanent” and moving mediums like video, performance, etc., easily manage to underline this fragility. But how does sculpture manage this, being a medium that, in principle, endures throughout time?

Fig. 9

Hans-Peter Feldmann, *Shadow Play*, Paris, 2011. Wood, electric motors, lamps, metal, ceramic, plastic, paper, fabric, glass, tin. One room 12 x 8 m. MANM Collection, Centre Georges-Pompidou, Paris. ©ADAGP, Paris, 2013.

- 32 Shadow sculptures are interesting in this respect because they are at the nexus of different art forms, namely photography and cinema, or popular arts, such as shadow theater. At once material and immaterial, fixed and mobile, ephemeral and eternal, artifices, illusions and realities, monuments and moving images, they defy traditional art categories to inquire more effectively into concepts like the ephemeral. Such is the work of the German artist Hans-Peter Feldmann, which shifts between monument and moving image, between permanence and impermanence. Since the beginning of his career, Feldmann has devoted attention to the everyday life, notably beginning with a practice of observing but most of all collecting objects and images, which he then reorganizes, purifying elements of their commercial intent, and giving them an esthetic, poetic and emotional charge. *Shadow Play* [*Schattenspiel*] (fig. 9) distinctly combines the mediums of photography, the black box, the magic lantern, shadow theater and sculpture to create a work that is at once fixed and mobile. Spot lights project shadows onto a wall that are cast from children's toys set on revolving platters arranged upon a table. In this way the artist stirs up one of art's essential themes, the relationship that one finds in Plato's *Republic* between the object and its reproduction, between truth and illusion, for which Plato calls upon a similar formal apparatus, the

cave. The movement of objects and their shadows creates a dance that is at once macabre and marvelous, provoking a sense of the uncanny.²⁴

- 33 Hans-Peter Feldmann manages thus to plunge the viewer back into their childhood. “Matter is memory,”²⁵ writes Georges Didi-Huberman in *Être crâne*, and the shadows even more than the toys themselves recall the moment when they spoke, were alive and accompanied us body and soul. Mixing mediums, forming a kind of moving monument to childhood, the artist gives an eternal quality to the work, all the while keeping it alive, mobile and thus invariably effective. As Céline Aubertin states in an article entitled “Sculptor le temps” [Sculpting Time], to sculpt the passage of time is to capture an eternal fluidity, to be freed from all heaviness and to lose the source of one’s perspective,²⁶ which is what Hans-Peter Feldmann proposes.

Fig. 10

Tim Noble & Sue Webster, *Dirty White Trash (with Gulls)*, 1998. Six months of the “worst of the artists’ rubbish,” two taxidermied seagulls, light projector. Variable dimensions.

© Tim Noble & Sue Webster.

- 34 By refracting the viewer’s gaze and playing with the dualisms of weight-light and body-soul, the artist couple, Tim Noble & Sue Webster also instil the ephemeral with the capacity to endure. *Dirty White Trash (with Gulls)* (fig. 10) is emblematic of their work. It presents itself as a formless sculpture composed of six months’ worth of the artists’ personal waste. This heap of rubbish is arranged such that when light is projected onto it, the two artists’ silhouettes appear upon the wall seated back to back. Through its two phases this work pinpoints a contemporary vanity, its decomposed sculpture evoking at once the extravagant consumer society and the fragility of existence. Playing with anamorphosis and featuring two stuffed seagulls pecking at left overs, the artists suggest that the human is nothing more than the shadow of a pile of trash that

consumes itself. It's a somber assessment of contemporary humanity's legacy to future generations.

- 35 "I like to watch a time that leaves its trace —I like the fact that with its wild imagination, time forms— and to work with all that spreads out, radiates, is intangible and allusive and which lasts the longest: shadow, ashes, dust,"²⁷ thus Claudio Parmiggiani brings to light this fertile paradox between the intangible, the allusive, the immaterial and that which lasts the longest. For the artist the enduring thing, which is shadow, ashes and dust, underlines once more the duality inscribed into the very heart of that image-matter that is the shadow. In this in-between the work and the work's memory remain intact, inconsolable.
- 36 Shadow sculptures are fundamental in the relationship they maintain between the ephemeral and the monument, not only in what they say of that to which they refer — that is, a body, its apparent disappearance, memory, its permanence etc.— but also for their capacity to refresh, to give life, and at the same time to stabilize and perpetuate images, forms, ideas, such as the monument and the ephemeral. As such, monuments of the ephemeral, shadow sculptures, are works of both the momentary and the continuous. They express a fragility not unlike an interior, "baroque ephemeral," that is following Christine Buci-Glucksmann's typology, associated with melancholic and meditative vanities, still lifes, skulls and reflections.²⁸ But they also approach an "exterior ephemeral," that of nature, in which light and shadows reveal the time of cycles, flux and seasons. This is confirmed in Samuel Rousseau's *Sans titre (l'arbre et son ombre)* [Untitled (The Tree and its Shadow)] (fig. 11), which projects in a loop the continuous cycle of a tree's shadow changing with the seasons, a work which inquires into the fragility and the transience of life, in all its *infiniteness*. Certainly, life is ephemeral, but perhaps to better begin again... The shadow remains, but most of all, it conserves forms, speech and memory.

Fig. 11

Samuel Rousseau, *Sans titre (l'arbre et son ombre)* [Untitled (tree and its shadow)], 2008. Looped HD video projection, hard drive, tree branch, steel, 3 x 19 x 92 cm.

© Samuel Rousseau, 2009, courtesy Galerie Claire Gastaud.

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ABSTRACTS

From more of an esthetic than a museographic perspective, this paper enquires into the perpetuating of "monuments" throughout time. Because monuments are works made "in the memory of," the question is not so much to know how to conserve monuments themselves, but rather how to conserve and continue the memory they contain. Whether this memory be personal and intimate or historical and collective, this paper analyzes the decisive role the shadow plays in the necessary refreshing of memory. By taking account of a *living past* that exists in a continuous dialogue between the ephemeral and the eternal, between the stone's fixity and the shadow's evanescence, between absence and presence, the monument and in particular the moment of the monument can be seen and above all understood and grasped, within themselves, today and for tomorrow. The monument is thus analyzed through the prism of the shadow.

INDEX

Keywords: disappearance, ephemeral, memory, monument, perpetuity, shadow

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