

Title: Political and Artistic Claims on the Wall
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Abstract:

My paper attempts to explore the urban landscape of St. Petersburg, Russia. Since spaces are economically, politically and ideologically charged, as Henri Lefebvre puts it, the landscapes are created through ceaseless conflicts and negotiations among various actors who claim their own right to the city. Among urban practices, urban interventions have operated as a practice of resistance in many contemporary cities. They immediately bring the invisible into focus, transforming passive passers-by into active spectators. In this paper, I would like to focus on the urban projects, revolving around memorial plaques and city sculptures. Popular in the Soviet years, they are more widespread and elaborate since the fall of the Soviet Union, either solidifying or challenging the traditional landscape and preservation of urban memory. For example, the urban art group Ghandi set up fake plaques that parodied traditional biographical inscriptions. In the other, the human rights society Memorial launched the project “Last Address,” which erects metal plaques with the simplest of biographical information dedicated to victims in the Stalinist years. The two projects, which parody traditional memorial plaques, utilize the same platform of the previous art and memorial practices, but imbued are with different contents and intentions that articulate peripheral voices. Those plaques do not simply invoke the lingering presence of the past, but challenge and invert the traditional politics and aesthetics of memorial plaques in the cityscape, in the process revealing them to be a locus in the heterotopic practices of a modern city. A focus on memorial plaques and city sculptures lead to questions on urban politics among different “sensible orders.”