

JOURNAL

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— September 2016
Snapshots Issue

— Transmitting Contentious
Cultural Heritages with the Arts

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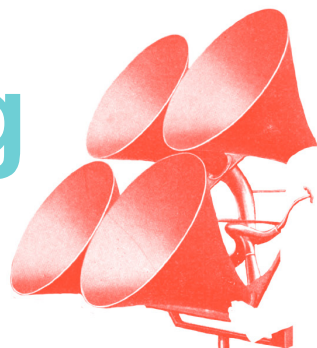


looking

forming

listening

Long



Kesh



analysing

Maze

gauging



dialoguing

**Martin Krenn
Aisling O'Beirn
(Ulster University, Belfast)**

{ editorial }

European cultural heritage is inherently complex and layered. Conflicting or controversial perspectives on different historical memories and experiences have always been colliding in the variegated cultural landscape of Europe. Such contentious heritages are often particularly difficult to convey to a wide public and can impede inclusivity as well as prevent the development of convivial relations. Nevertheless, if transmitted sensitively, they can contribute to a process of **'reflexive Europeanisation'**, in which the European imagination is shaped by self-awareness, on-going critical reflection, and dialogue across different positions.

Which kind of new knowledges and perspectives onto a renewed European identity based on contentious cultural heritage might emerge from long-lasting collaborations between artists, researchers and cultural agencies? How can they contribute to institutional and social change?

To investigate such questions, the EU project *Transmitting Contentious Heritages with the Art: From Intervention to Co-Production* has brought together established and emerging scholars, artists, and cultural workers. In the next three years they will explore challenges and opportunities raised by the transmission of difficult heritages in contemporary Europe with the aim to identify new directions for cultural institutions and museums.

To do so, the multidisciplinary team involved in the project has initiated theoretical investigations pertaining to different research fields, and a series of art-based action researches, including five **Creative Co-Productions**: *Absence as Heritage* (Mediaș, Romania); *Awkward Objects of Genocide* (Krakow, Poland); *Casting Of Death* (Ljubljana, Slovenia); *Dead Images* (Vienna, Austria and Edinburgh, United Kingdom); *Transforming Long Kesh Maze Prison* (Belfast, United Kingdom), presented in the following pages.

— Francesca Lanz

A Dialogical Project to Counter the Antagonistic Politics of Architectural and Linguistic Limbo.

This project aims to find ways through dialogue and discussion with various people, to try to open up how the Long Kesh Maze former prison site in Belfast and place of memory (in reference to 'lieux de mémoire' by Pierre Nora) can be thought about in the future.



Selected images from the Mediaş Synagogue Archive used during the workshop *Developing Past(s)* at the conference: 'Jewish Heritage: Projects, Methods, Inspirations' at the Museum of the History of Polish Jews, Warsaw, June 2016.



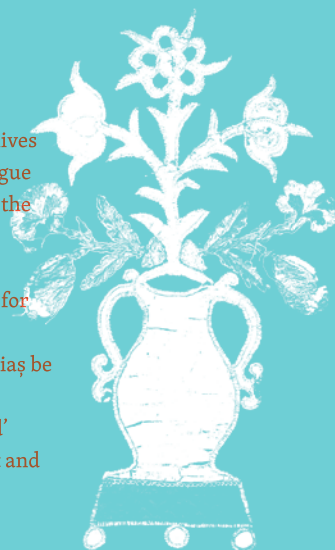
Absence as Heritage

The project *Absence as Heritage* draws from archives and other material found in the Mediaș Synagogue (Romania) to engage the local community with the cultural heritage of absent populations.

In light of this absence, whose duty is it to care for this material?

How and why should the Jewish history of Mediaș be made relevant for local citizens today?

How can places, items, or traditions of 'silenced' heritage be used to understand a collective past and how can they be employed to create a future of positive, multifaceted European identities?



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Prisoner number 231
1978, Franciszek Skocz
(b. 1908 Bochońnica - d. 2000 Pyrzyce, Poland).

Nazi camp prisoner, painted wood, 23 cm, Seweryn
Udziela Ethnographic Museum Collection, Krakow.
Inv. 55467/6 MEK.

Photo by Marcin Wąsik.



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Awkward Objects of Genocide: The Holocaust and Vernacular Arts in and beyond Polish Ethnographic Museums

Eastern Europe witnessed 14 million deaths in the period of the Second World War, between 1933 and 1945. The local impact of such widespread and wanton killing, as it reverberated in towns, villages, and communities over the subsequent decades, is only just beginning to be considered, prompted by new scholarly attention to the East European ‘Bloodlands’, the ‘Holocaust by Bullets’, the proliferation of smaller ghettos and camps, and the excruciatingly intimate relations of betrayal, killing, expropriation, and rescue. It can be assumed that every community produced artistic responses to that traumatic memory, but Holocaust scholarship’s new Eastward and grassroots turns have yet to attend seriously to vernacular arts of witness. In the field of Holocaust artistic production, local, naïve artists may actually have been the most prolific group attempting to represent the events they witnessed. Their works, however, remain scattered in folk museum collections, often awkwardly categorised due to disciplinary taxonomies that treat folk art as ‘timeless’ rather than historical, and the reluctance of curators to touch uncomfortable subjects.

The objects themselves are uncanny: at times deeply moving, at others grotesque, they can also be disturbing for the ways they up-end accepted roles of victim, perpetrator, and bystander; impose Catholic idioms on Jewish suffering via symbolic forms like a *Pietà* or a Nazi crematorium recalling a nativity crèche; and incorporate desecrated Jewish sacred texts—as well as for the erroneous mythologies that may be projected onto them as memorial objects in the present.

Our goal is to re-frame and draw new attention to this fascinating, under-recognised category of objects in order to broaden understanding of ‘Holocaust art’, expand the field of Holocaust memory studies to include a range of ‘bystander’ perspectives and challenge traditional approaches to folk art and ethnographic museology.

TEDENSKE SLIKE

(01)

PRILOGA

DOMOVINI (02)

Leto V.

V Ljubljani, dne 4. julija 1929

27. štev.

Ob mrtvaškem odru (03)



Posmrtna maska (04)



zadnjič v svoji delovni sobi (05)



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The casting of death masks went hand in hand with the secularisation and affirmation of the bourgeois society in the 19th century. Today the custom seems to be dying out. Death masks are omitted from memorial rooms and stored in museum depots. Why do we consider this particular technique of representation obsolete? Which social and cultural changes put an end to this art practice? Has the role of the artist changed or can the death mask tradition still be traced in contemporary art?

Casting of Death

- (01) this week in pictures
- (02) homeland supplement
- (03) by the catafalque
- (04) death mask
- (05) in his workroom for the last time

Reflexive Europeanisation and Contentious Cultural Heritage

1 > [eastartmap.org](#)

2 > Irina
Sandomirskaja,
“East Art Map:
Contemporary Art
and Eastern Europe
(Review)”, *ARTMargins*
March (2007).

‘History is not given. Please help to construct it.’ This provocative encouragement was promoted by IRWIN, the art group part of the collective Neue Slowenische Kunst, in their project *East Art Map*.¹ Seen from the post-Cold War perspective that the artists engaged, an East European history of arts and modernism is missing on the contemporary map of European cultural heritage: it thus needs to be created. IRWIN called for contributions to fill this no-man’s land on their map of ‘Eurasia with the former East block territories, from the pacific to the Baltic shores [...]: a zone of unknown, unwritten, un-interpreted histories.’²

Such perspectives from the unfocused margins of apparently pristine European epistemologies and genealogies are highly enlightening. They point to forgotten and contested border zones of commemoration and belonging that are, nevertheless, essential for an enlarged, deepened self-conception of what Europe is not yet, but might hopefully become. They also reveal too that Europe itself is not given, but that it is instead a volatile product of diverse and continuously negotiated projects of Europeanisation. And they show that such projects of Europeanisation are not only imposed from above and from the inside but are, moreover, reflected and redesigned from below and beyond. As with unknown or displaced Eastern histories of Europe, forgotten genealogies of post/colonial entanglements also increasingly make claims for inclusion, thus better enabling the prospect of a post-postcolonial Europe. By way of intellectual, artistic, political counter-movements, and by way of practical movements of migration and refuge, these neglected essentials of European histories and presences intrude and decentre dominant occiden-

talist self-constructions.

Such processes of reclaiming 'Other Europes' from the margins productively engage in processes of 'reflexive Europeanisation'. They not only criticise dominant European histories on the basis of themselves having been pushed back and othered but also go beyond such criticism, in that they call for and already practice other possible European futures.³

Attempts to forge European futures,

it is full of heritage that can remind of enmity, cruelty and power differentials between peoples. Some of this heritage takes durable material form: as buildings and landscapes; monuments and graveyards; and in the numerous collections held by museums and related institutions. Sometimes such heritage is hidden away, scarcely marked in the present or even forgotten. But it is there, nonetheless, potentially capable of



IRWIN, Map of Eastern Modernism, 1990

however, easily become caught up in struggles over difficult pasts and contentious cultural heritage. Although history is not given, different versions of the past and troubled memories can intrude into present-day and future social relationships in disruptive ways. Europe is full of legacies of past—and sometimes continuing—atrocities, conflicts and inequalities;

making trouble for peaceful future-making.

Cultural heritage does not, of course, only run counter to more cosmopolitan future-making. Collections may, for example, speak of past greater diversity and cooperation between peoples; they may show areas to have long been characterised by migration and heterogeneity.

³ > See also Regina Römheld, "Reflexive Europäisierung. Tourismus, Migration und die Mediterranisierung Europas," in *Projekte der Europäisierung*, ed. Gisela Welz u.a. (Frankfurt a.M.: Kulturanthropologie Notizen, 2009); Regina Römheld, "Other Europes/Europe's Others," in *State of Emergence. A Documentation of the First NSK Citizens' Congress*, ed. Alexei Monroe (Leipzig: Poison Cabinet Press, 2011), 24-63; Regina Römheld and Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, "The Post-Other as Avantgarde," in *We Roma. A Critical Reader in Contemporary Art*, eds. Daniel Baker and Maria Hlavajova (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2013).



1 › Image from the Mediaş Synagogue Archive, Romania. Photo by Michael Nork.

2 › The Skull Cabinet (detail) Natural History Museum Vienna. Photo by Tal Adler, 2012.

3 › Sculptures by Jan Staszak posed in front of the Auschwitz Concentration Camp (sculptures dated 1971; postcard dated 1995). Sculptures from the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum Collection. Photo by Ryszard Kozłowski.

4 › The death mask of Ivan Grohar, a painter (1867–1911) from the depot of the Museum of Modern Art, Ljubljana. Photo by Dejan Habicht, courtesy of Museum of Modern Art, Ljubljana.

5 › *History Now*, plaster cast objects made in Long Kesh Maze as part of Prison Arts Foundation Residency. Aisling O'Beirn, 1999.

When we talk of contentious cultural heritage we always need to ask: 'Contentious for whom?' and 'contentious in what ways?' Some cultural heritage is regarded as wholly unproblematic by some people and hotly disputed by others. Sometimes it is questions of provenance and ownership that are contentious; sometimes facts and interpretations of these; sometimes the traumatic memory load and emotional charge—and often it is a combination of these.

Contentious with what effects? Like history, these are not given.

Contestable memories do not have to lead to social contest in the present; contentious cultural heritage does not have to lead to disruptive contention and fraught futures. Rather, these can themselves be used to prompt reflexive Europeanisation.

How to do so is, however, the challenge. And this is the task that TRACES has set itself.

— Regina Römhild and Sharon Macdonald

Artistic Research: Creative Co-Production Beyond Intervention and Individual Institutional Critique

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There are various artistic research methods and models that strive towards re-examining and transmitting contentious cultural heritages. However, the potentials of participatory art and its research methods as well as the potentials of creative collaborations urge us to look closer into the development of cross-disciplinary relations between artists, researchers, and curators in institutions concerned with cultural heritage.

Such relations eventually are to overcome the limits of the short-term artistic interventions known from the previous generations of institutional critique art and participatory art. The interventions with different art media in existing displays and collections of contentious heritage (a sticker on a vitrine, a performance, a guided tour or an installation, or a video art projection) are almost always installed temporarily and, due to the short-term promotion-oriented strategies, do not procure a significant, sustainable systemic change. Although they do locate the points of conflicting and contradictory meanings and effects of the hosting institutions' displays, many hindrances to creating rooted networks and structures introducing effective changes emerge in the process, such as the limited time span, funding, and lack of personal and institutional commitment. Therefore, they often result with *ad hoc* and one-off polarised relations between the host and the guest (artist). As a consequence, the public effect of such interventions is restricted to the visitors who came especially or happened to be there at that time.


In order to enquire the potentials of the cross-disciplinary participatory research and collaborative production methods of different artistic practices, the project *Transmitting Contentious Heritages with the Arts: From Intervention to Co-Production* proposes the model of Creative Co-Productions. Five Creative Co-Productions have been set up, where during the forthcoming three years, teams consisting of artists, humanist and social sciences researchers, and curators collaborate on long-term action research on contentious heritage and its public interfaces.



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This is not a snapshot. Dead Images

When George Eastman put easy-to-use Kodak Brownies into the hands of the masses and encouraged them to capture everyday life, his aim was ‘to make the camera as convenient as the pencil’.

The snapshot was born.

The snapshot grabs its subjects, swiftly, and directly. It captures a fleeting moment and holds it still. A 19th century hunting term, ‘snapshot’ referred to shooting from the hip without careful aim: something instantaneous, unplanned, unconcerned.

But photography does more than simply grab reality: it can reflect, draw our attention and invite contemplation, even when documenting events which may, themselves, be transitory. It is a composed and considered process, which aims to produce certain affects and make possible certain modes of enquiry and engagement.

In *Dead Images*, photography is used to capture, appraise, challenge and transgress, and so create narratives that transcend the limitations of history and science and offer new perspectives on contentious cultural heritage.

So, although this is a brief introduction to *Dead Images*, this is not a snapshot.

Skull Cabinet, Natural History Museum, Vienna.
Detail of the 30 metre life-size panoramic photograph.

Photo by Tal Adler, 2012.



TRACES is an independent four-monthly refereed journal that brings together original contributions to explore emerging issues in the field of heritage and museum studies.

Selected papers—collected into sixteen-pages thematic signatures, custom designed and printed offset in a limited edition—will investigate a common topic from different perspectives with a focus on practices, innovative approaches and experimental research actions.

Three issues per year: 'Snapshots', with graphic-based contributions raising questions and investigating practices; 'Dialogues', in which the topic will unfold through a semi-structured interview; and 'Insights', that will expand the field of inquiry by means of theoretical and empirical critical thoughts.

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TRACES Journal ensues from the research project
*Transmitting Contentious Cultural Heritages with the Arts:
From Intervention to Co-Production* which has received
funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and
innovation programme under grant agreement No 693857.

For further information please visit www.tracesproject.eu

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European Union.

ISSN 2531-4858



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