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Adaptive Reuse and Heritage Making

“Heritage is heritage because it is subjected to the management and preservation/conservation process, not because it simply ‘is’. This process does not just ‘find’ sites and places to manage and protect. It is itself a constitutive cultural process that identifies those things and places that can be given meaning and value as ‘heritage’, reflecting contemporary and cultural social values, debates and aspirations.”

(Laurajane Smith, 2006)¹

Since the 1990s onward a growing corpus of studies has been delving into heritage and heritage practices from manifold and widened perspectives. Going beyond an idea of heritage as a *patrimoine* (i.e. related to the Latin idea of *patres*, holding an inner value and inherited from previous generations with a duty to preserve it), they have been looking at heritage as multifarious and multilayered, mostly contingent, imbricated in society, open to several critical readings and quite often holding a somehow contentious dimension. Nor static neither a fixed entity already in existence, heritage thus has been investigated and theorised as a “constitutive cultural process,” shaped by contemporary social, cultural and political instances and inherently intertwined with memory, identity, owning and disowning, remembering and forgetting practices. On the wake of these studies new promising lines of inquiry have been emerging and taking roots, expanding the field of study to include contributions from different disciplines and opening up to important

¹ Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, Abigdon 2006, p. 3.

theoretical and methodological opportunities to investigate different “types” of heritage for the potentially diverse meanings that may gather around them.

As an architect researching on heritage and museums, I have found myself increasingly reflecting on the possible implications of this understanding of heritage on architectural theory and practice, as well as wondering which conversely might be the contribution of architectural studies to such a debate. If we assume that heritage is constructed and produced in relation to the “cultural work” it can do in the present and because of “management and preservation/conservation”² processes to which it is subjected, what is the role of urban planning, urban policy design, and architectural preservation practices in “heritage making”? And, on the other hand, how can such an approach to heritage help thinking through architectural practice today? What does it entail for architectural interventions on the pre-existing built environment? How may it affect the design process?

This exploratory paper aims to bring forward some preliminary thoughts on such issues with a focus on contentious heritage and emerging questions within the ongoing research programme TRACES.³ TRACES – *Transmitting Contentious Cultural Heritages with the Arts*, is a three-year project funded in 2016 by the European Commission as part of the Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme with the main objective to investigate the challenges and opportunities raised when transmitting complex pasts and the role of difficult heritage in contemporary Europe. TRACES is based on the acknowledgement that European cultural heritage is inherently complex and layered. In the past, conflicting or controversial perspectives on different historical memories and experiences have been colliding in the rich cultural landscape of Europe and continue to do so in the present. These 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, ongoing critical reflection, and dialogue across different positions. For this reason, TRACES involves a multi-disciplinary team that brings together established and emerging scholars, artists, and cultural workers in order to develop a rigorous, creative and all-round investigation on contentious cultural heritages, and to experiment with innovative research methodologies. To do so, TRACES has initiated a series of “Creative Co-Productions” in which artists, researchers, heritage agencies, and stakeholders collaborate on long-term projects researching selected cases of contentious heritage and developing new participatory

² ibidem

³ www.tracesproject.eu

public interfaces. Theoretical investigations pertaining to different research fields and disciplines support and complement these art-based research actions, analysing and expanding their outcomes. This paper ensues from such a research framework; in its first part it seeks to outline possible interrelations between recent theories on adaptive reuse and heritage thinking. Then, by focusing on the case of the repurposing of former historical prisons in Italy, it relates the above mentioned general questions to issues pertaining architectural difficult, neglected and contentious heritage in urban contexts with the aim to identify possible strategies for its transmission. My argument is that this way of thinking heritage that sets the focus on "interactions" and "relations" rather than on the physical architectures per se can provide a promising framework for critically thinking of adaptive reuse. At the same time, I will demonstrate, adaptive reuse theory and practice can provide insights on strategies and tools for heritage preservation, valorisation, and communication.

Thinking Adaptive Reuse through Heritage

Today one of the most important research and professional strand for architectural studies and practice lies on the reuse of abandoned pre-existing buildings; mostly known as adaptive intervention or adaptive reuse. Indeed, even though the relationship with pre-existing buildings has always been a crucial issue for design theory and practice within the European architectural debate, the interest on the topic of reuse has been raising since the 1970s resulting in scientific publications and, above all, in an increasing number of projects. The European architectural culture actually features a long and often outstanding tradition in building on the built environment, which relies on an evolving critical, theoretical, and design attitude toward the historical architectural pre-existences. Examples span over time from Renaissance buildings on Roman remains, up to post-war interventions including, amongst others, projects by Italian masters such as Carlo Scarpa, the BBPR group, Franco Albini, Ignazio Gardella and, most recently, Giorgio Grassi, Gabriella Ioli and Massimo Carmassi, Andrea Bruno and Guido Canali, whose work still represents a reference point for a forward-looking approach toward a critical-design-based restoration aimed at the preservation and valorisation of historical buildings through their reuse.⁴ Though what we call "adaptive reuse" is not an unprecedented contemporary phenomenon, nowadays it is widely believed that working on

⁴ Imma Forino, "Cultura del Recupero e Cultura dello Sviluppo," [in] *Op. cit. Selezione della critica d'arte contemporanea*, no. 114 (2002), p. 31–38; Antonella Huber, *Il Museo Italiano*, Milan 1997.

the built environment is *the* predominant condition for contemporary architectural practice.⁵ This has been related to different factors, notably the decreased capacity of urban territories to accommodate new buildings in a full urban fabric, as well as a new approach toward an environmental, economic and social, sustainable development.

A current buzzword in today's architectural debate is "adaptive reuse." Sometimes too narrowly referred only to the reuse of former industrial buildings and industrial heritage and to contemporary instances and design practice, adaptive reuse has been recently widely explored by several researchers and professionals from different perspectives and under different names: reusing, rereading, remodelling, rewriting, recycling, layering, etc. Their work is contributing to the development of a growing corpus of studies on this subject matter with a significant contribution from the field of interior studies, architecture and design.⁶

Some authors, among which Graeme Brooker and Sally Stone (scholars and teachers who have been investigating this topic for a number of years and widely publishing on the subject) even suggest that working on pre-existing buildings is the distinguishing nature and the specific realm of interior architecture as such. "Interior architecture, interior design, interior decoration, and building

⁵ See: Bie Plevoets and Koenraad Van Cleempoel, "Adaptive Reuse as a Strategy towards Conservation of Cultural Heritage: A Literature Review," [in] *Structural Studies, Repairs and Maintenance of Heritage Architecture XII*, C. A. Brebbia and Luigia Binda (eds.), Southampton (UK) 2011, pp. 155–164; Bie Plevoets and Koenraad Van Cleempoel, "Adaptive Reuse as an Emerging Discipline: An Historic Survey," [in] *Reinventing architecture and interiors: a socio-political view on building adaptation*, Graham Cairns (ed), London 2013, pp. 13–32; Fred Scott, *On Altering Architecture*. London & New York 2008; Johannes Cramer and Stefan Breitling, *Architecture in Existing Fabric: Planning, Design, Building*, Basel 2007; Martina Baum and Kees Christiaanse (eds.), *City as Loft: Adaptive Reuse as a Resource for Sustainable Urban Development*, Zurich 2012; Graeme Brooker and Sally Stone, *Re-Readings-Interior Architecture and the Design Principles of Remodeling Existing Buildings*, London 2004.

⁶ E.g. Graham Cairns (ed), *Reinventing Architecture and Interiors: A Socio-Political View on Building Adaptation*, London 2013; Graeme Brooker and Sally Stone, *Re-Readings-Interior Architecture and the Design Principles of Remodeling Existing Buildings*, London 2004; Graeme Brooker, *Interior Matter(s): Proximities, Inhabitation, Identities*, [in] *Journal of Interior Design*, no. 41 (2016), pp 5–12; Graeme Brooker and Sally Stone, *What is Interior Design?* Mies (Switzerland) 2010; Adriano Cornoldi (ed), *Gli interni nel progetto sull'esistente*, Padoa 2007; Antonella Huber, *Il Museo Italiano*. Milan: 1997; Bie Plevoets and Koenraad Van Cleempoel, "Aemulatio and the Interior Approach of Adaptive Reuse," [in] *Interiors: design, architecture, culture*, vol. 5, no.1 (2014), pp. 71–88.

reuse,” state Brooker and Stone, “are very closely linked subjects, all of which deal, in varying degrees, with the transformation of a given space.”⁷ They propose a kind of methodology for adaptive reuse projects, defined as “rereading” or “adaptation,” which is based on different spatial strategies and “tactics.”⁸ As Brooker and Stone, most of the above mentioned scholars, despite different critical approaches, have been researching and theorising on adaptive reuse by looking at the relationship between the new intervention and the existing building mostly focusing on its spatial and material features, and its architectural outcome. Up to now, what has mostly been overlooked in these studies is an epistemological reflection on adaptive reuse that seeks to scope its actual or potential cultural impact on city cultural and social life. To contribute in filling this gap, this essay seeks to appropriate thoughts prompted by most recent studies on critical heritage and position adaptive-reuse in relation to them.

Whatever we choose to call it, adaptive reuse may be basically defined as a design-based intervention aimed at *repurposing* a building (usually abandoned, under- or dis- used and often in decay) which, for any reason (historical, artistic, cultural as well as economic) has been considered worth not to be demolished. This decision actually, in some way, recognises a certain value to the building itself whether it ensues from a conservation restriction imposed from above, as well as when it is somehow a programmatic design choice. By virtue of the adaptive reuse itself, this supposed "value" is made manifest, reaffirmed and even reinforced because it is (or at least should be) the reason why the building is reused rather than demolished, despite its condition of disuse and decay. However, differently from a mere restoration, a reuse project usually consists in an intervention that, albeit meant to preserve the building at some extent, is primarily aimed at turning it into something new, repurposing and re-activating it in relation to current instances and a new function, allowing a *re-appropriation* of its empty spaces with a desirable social, cultural, and/or economic benefit for its present source communities and context. This reactivation, that is the actual goal of any adaptive intervention, may be based on the design of a new functional programme for the building, a temporary asset, as well as on an art-based action. Often, it implies an upgrade of the existing structure from a functional, technological, and spatial point view. In most cases, it results

⁷ Brooker and Sally Stone, *What is Interior Design?* Mies (Switzerland) 2010, p. 46.

⁸ Graeme Brooker and Sally Stone, *Re-Readings-Interior Architecture and the Design Principles of Remodeling Existing Buildings*, London 2004; Graeme Brooker and Sally Stone, *Context and Environment: Site and Ideas*, Lausanne 2008; Graeme Brooker and Sally Stone, *Elements and Objects: Occupying Space*, Lausanne, 2009; Graeme Brooker, *Adaptation Strategies for Interior Architecture and Design*, London 2016.

into a new interior spatial layout for the pre-existing spaces achieved through architectural interventions. The impact of such an intervention on the pre-existing building and its spaces widely varies and mostly depends on the designer's choices and his/her poetic and architectural approach. The architectural intervention thus largely selects what to preserve and how; what to emphasise and what to restore, reinstate or delete.

In a recent essay widely exploring reuse, Julia Hegewald defines it as rooted in the past but creating “something distinct and novel in the present;” contributing to the “further establishment of tradition” while looking at the future and characterised by “continuity” and “agency.”⁹ “Re-use,” she says, “is a conscious and selective process in which existing elements are borrowed or salvaged [...] in order to be applied to a new context or they get manipulated and react to new external influences. [...] [Re-use] involves an active deed; there needs to be a reason for why something is re-used and based on this motivation or aims, people make strategic choices about what to re-use and what to simply deprive of any use and value. Those items which are re-used have to be filled with a new significance, with novel functions.”¹⁰

In 1976 Rodolfo Machado writing on “remodelling” already proposed that theorising and doing an architectural intervention on pre-existing buildings should not be limited to a matter of design (spatial and or functional), but shall rather focus on the “meaning” of this architectural pre-existence and the way the architect deals with it. He thus defined “remodelling” as a “formal intervention upon existing form” where “the past takes on a greater significance because it, itself, is the material to be altered and reshaped. [...] Thus, the past becomes a “package of sense,” of built-up meaning to be accepted (maintained), transformed, or suppressed (refused).”¹¹

These definitions echoes back to those of heritage mentioned before, defining cultural heritage as a “mode of cultural production in the present that has recourse to the past.”¹² Indeed, my assumption

⁹ Julia A B Hegewald, *Towards a Theory of Re-Use: Desecration, Retro and Fake Versus Improvement, Innovation and Integration*, [in] *Re-Use-The Art and Politics of Integration and Anxiety*, Julia A. B. Hegewald and Subrata K Mitra (eds), Los Angeles 2012.

¹⁰ Ibidem, p. 48.

¹¹ Rodolfo Machado, “Old buildings as Palimpsest: Towards a Theory of Remodeling,” [in] *Progressive Architecture*, no. 11 (1976), pp. 46–49.

¹² Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “Theorizing Heritage,” [in] *Ethnomusicology*, Vol 39, no. 3 (1995), p. 369 (367–380). See also: Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, Abigdon 2006; Laurajane Smith, “Affect and registers of engagement: navigating emotional responses to dissonant heritage,” [in] *Representing Enslavement and Abolition in Museums: ambiguous engagements*, L. Smith, G. Cubitt, R. Wilson, and K.

is that by looking at adaptive reuse from such a perspective it might be posit as a heritage practices. This has important consequences also on the architectural intervention, eventually shifting the focus of the question from design strategies of adaptive intervention, to its socio-cultural and political agency.

Another overlap between adaptive reuse theory and heritage thinking lies in the acknowledged relationship between heritage and identity making in relation to place related theories. Allan Pred reminds us that “place [...] always involves re-appropriation and transformation of space and nature that is inseparable from the reproduction and transformation of society in time and space.[...] It also is [...] what contributes to history in a specific context through the creation and utilization of a physical setting.”¹³ The definition and theory of place is itself contested terrain and a unified perspective is likely always to be out of reach and largely falls beyond the scope of this paper. Different critical traditions see place, variously, as a process, historically contingent and inherently multi-layered, social, relational and concerned with memory and identity; as significant space or identified portion of space, a “fragment of the world”¹⁴ imbued with human experience, a manifold experience, a “way of understanding.” Its multifarious characteristics include (but are not limited to) multiscalarity, openness, and particularity. Lest we over-determine place as merely mind-matter, or nothing more than an object for a subject, we also attend to material dimensions as they are present in the morphology, built environment, and air of named places. To avoid getting bogged down in genealogical and definitional discussions of “place” as a concept, I borrow from Low, among others to posit place not so much as an *a priori* reality but rather as a “space that is *inhabited* and *appropriated* through the attribution of personal and group meanings, feelings, sensory perceptions, and understandings.”¹⁵ Such a view on place echoes in the already given critical definition of adaptive reuse and provide a link with heritage theories. Postiglione and Bassanelli already pointed this out by saying that, “[a]daptive reuse ensues from the assumption that identities

Fouseki (eds), New York 2011, pp. 260–303; Brian Graham, Greg Ashworth and John Tunbridge, *A Geography of Heritage: Power, Culture and Economy*. New York 2000; David Lowenthal, *Possessed by the Past: The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*, New York 1998.

¹³ Allan Pred, "Place as Historically Contingent Process: Structuration and the Time-Geography of Becoming Places," [in] *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, vol. 74, no. 2(1984), p. 279 (279–297).

¹⁴ Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, London 1976.

¹⁵ Setha Low, *Spatializing Culture: The Ethnography of Space and Place*, London 2017, p 32. Italics added.

are formed in the correlation and interdependence between places and people(s). Once the interrelations break, a place loses its meaning and people lose their sense of belonging to that place. [...] [Adaptive reuse thus refers to the construction of identity for and by the people(s), through the reference to a place, as well as the construction of identity for a place, through the reference to its materiality: morphology, architectural forms, spaces, objects, artefacts, namely the material heritage that is stratified on the territory.]”¹⁶

Such an approach allows thinking about adaptive reuse not as occupation or re-functionalisation of a given space through different strategies and approaches, but as a process of “re-inhabiting,” understanding this in its complex meaning and implications related with its etymological origin. The verb “to inhabit,” in fact, comes from the Latin *habitare*, frequentative form of the verb *habere*, that means: to hold, to have, to possess. In Italian, *abito* is the first singular person of the verb *abitare*, namely: I dwell, a concept that, at its turn, relates to Heidegger thinking of dwelling as “being in the world,” as “building” and “preserving.” *Abito* as a noun, means “dress,” while, as an adjective, it stands for “habit, way of being, a living behaviour”. Hence, in-habiting signifies not only to dwell but to live a space, experiencing it, making it one’s own, by enjoying the essential social dimension of doing so. “Where space is not assumed as pre-existing but produced — says Attiwill — [...] Occupation becomes a process of transformation, of making relations.”¹⁷ It becomes an interpretation, a “constitutive cultural process,” shaped by contemporary social, cultural, and political instances and inherently intertwined with memory, identity, owning and disowning, remembering and forgetting practices.

Reusing Former Prisons: The Challenge to Transmit a Difficult Heritage

“Dynamics of memory are far from linear; they are full of complexities, and strongly related to processes of appropriation of national heritage, as well as the owning and disowning of memory

¹⁶ Michela Bassanelli and Gennaro Postiglione, “Active-Actions Strategies. Adaptive Reuse come processo di riattivazioni sostenibili,” [in] *Re-Cycle 03 - Viaggio in Italia*, Sara Marini and Vincenza Santangelo (eds), Rome 2013, p. 155 (155–159).

¹⁷ Suzie Attiwill, “Working Space: Interiors as provisional compositions,” [in] *Occupation: Negotiations with Constructed Space*, Brighton 2009, p. 2.

sites, in particular those where the spatialisation of memory has created strong indexical links to past traumatic events.”

(Rob van der Laarse 2016)¹⁸

Urban built environment, especially in European cities, is inherently layered and complex; a “palimpsest,” as it has been defined, of historical traces and memories some of which are manifest some other hidden, forgotten and barely visible.¹⁹

Our cities abound with somehow difficult heritages that are indeed often neglected, abandoned also because of their awkwardness and despite the rich “cultural work” they might perform in the present. European landscapes and cities are studded with large buildings and wide infrastructures, often left behind by recent traumatic events. They recall a past deemed to be forgotten, therefore ignored in order to be removed, at least metaphorically, whenever preservation laws, economical consideration or architectural and urban context do not physically permit it. Traces of recent past conflicts are the one that most immediately come to our mind, nonetheless there are many others. Former prisons are another example.

Developed as a public architecture of confinement since the Renaissance by Vitruvio, Alberti, Palladio, and Milizia, through the Baroque Period until the Enlightenment and the renown projects by Claude Nicolas Ledoux and Jeremy and Samuel Bentham, prisons are places of discipline and punishment, total institutions, in between radical humanness and social deterioration. These are places of contradiction, highly layered and complex from a social historical and architectural point of view. Their spaces talk about confinement, punishment, incarceration, and an often inhumane system. However, at the same time they often bear memory of past events, the changing position about what is legal and what is not, freedom and power relations.²⁰

Their complexity is not only related to their memory but also to their physical features. They are a kind of micro-towns, whose boundaries are physically marked by containment walls and controller accesses that enclose completely introverted and very compact spaces organised into rigid layouts. Their extension and their nature as out-and-out micro-towns is peculiar of their design. In most

¹⁸ Rob van der Laarse, [in] *Traces Journal*, no.2 (2016). www.traces.polimi.it/journal (accessed October 2017)

¹⁹ Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*, Stanford 2003.

²⁰ Marella Santangelo, *In prigione. Architettura e tempo della detenzione*, Syracuse (Italy) 2017; Nikolaus Pevsner, *A History of Building Types*, Princeton (NJ) 1976.

cases, these extraordinary large complexes constitute up to today impressive architectural structures in the landscape in which they are located. On the other hand, when they were built close to a city, either near the urban walls or inside them, they considerably affected the urban development and often continue to do so. Their size, in fact, was equal or even bigger than the major public buildings located in the city, such as the cathedral or the city hall, while their architectural characterisation and decoration was purposely “hermetic,” monumental, and heavy and their dimension and architectural closure has often been impeding and influencing the urban growth around them. The difficulty of dealing with these architectural complexes, becomes evident once they are closed. Today in Europe and overseas the problem of the reuse of former prisons is a quite urgent one. Several prisons are too old. Therefore, for many reasons they cannot be upgraded and must be closed. Many remain as unsettling traces of a past deemed to be forgotten. These architectures are often completely or partially abandoned, misused, and subject to negligence. Eerie ruins, ruled out of the urban and social life that passes off around them, and largely contributing to the urban decay. When they undergo adaptive interventions, they are not less problematic as reuse interventions span from luxury hotels to entertainment parks, up to museums and tourist places.²¹

Today in Italy 20 percent of all prisons have been built before the 20th century and host more than 10 percent of the total inmates. Many of them are located in cities. The need to dispose of older jails cyclically comes up, and recently the State agency that owns these structures (Demanio) has opened the first construction sites to realise a series of public offices in some dismantled buildings including some former prison facilities.²² There are already many historical disused prisons, abandoned in the Italian territory, some of them of inestimable political, military and architectural value. There is no exact estimate, but according to the prison observatory of the Antigone

²¹ Wilson, Jacqueline Z, *Prison: Cultural Memory and Dark Tourism*, New York 2008; Sarah Hodgkinson and Diane Urquhart, “Prison Tourism: Exploring the spectacle of punishment in the UK,” [in] G. Hooper and J. Lennon (Eds) *Dark Tourism: Practice and Interpretation* London 2016, pp. 40–53; Sarah Hodgkinson and Diane Urquhart “Ghost hunting in prison: Contemplating death through sites of incarceration and the commodification of the penal past,” [in] J.Z. Wilson, S. Hodgkinson, J. Piché and K. Walby (Eds), *The Palgrave Handbook of Prison Tourism*, London. 2017, pp. 559–582; Alana Barton and Alyson Brown, “Show me the prison! The development of prison tourism in the UK,” [in] *Crime Media Culture*, Vol. 11, no. 3 (2015), pp. 237–258.

²² See <https://www.wired.it/attualita/politica/2017/01/10/carceri-cittadelle-pubblica-amministrazione/> (Accessed October 2017).

association²³ they are at least 14. These are nationally important buildings, some of which are even internationally relevant for the events that took place, their architectural and naturalistic historical value, and the iconic strength of their structures such as the Pianosa penal colony²⁴ or the prison on the island of Santo Stefano (Ventotene). The latter is a historical Bourbon jail, which became a prison for political dissidents from the Risorgimento until Fascism and where the famous Ventotene Manifesto was written in 1941. The horseshoe structure is a cross between a Panopticon and an inverted theatre laid down like a crown on the rocks of the island. It has long been abandoned since its closure in 1965, although recently the Ministry of Cultural Heritage has promised funding for a restoration. Besides such significant buildings there are other constructions which are less known on a national scale but very significant to local stories and represent a substantial inactive heritage in our territories. Among them, for example, the former prison of Santa Agata in the historic centre of Bergamo. A former convent, built on the ruins of an ancient Roman aqueduct, the premises was transformed by Austrian-born Italian architect Leopoldo Pollack into a prison in the 18th century. Discontinued after various alterations in the 1970s it is now in disuse and waiting for reuse. Alongside these disposed assets there are some virtuous examples of regeneration, such as the *Carcere delle Nuove* in Turin, transformed into a museum, and above all the complex of *Le Murate* in Florence. A cloistered convent until 1424, then used as a monastery, closed in 1808 following the suppression of the monastic orders operated by Napoleon, it was transformed into a male prison in 1845 and stayed in use until the opening of the new prison in Sollicciano in the early 1980s. *Le Murate* have been completely restructured and renewed in the early 2000s through a project lead by the architect Renzo Piano. Today *Le Murate* hosts many residential and public subsidised units, associations working on issues of justice, human rights and social projects, a library, a literary cafe, commercial spaces, art galleries and some old cells that have been turned into a museum, making it one of the most popular entertainment and meeting venues in Florence. An example of reuse that looks to the future and to an idea of re-appropriating and returning a space, once neglected, to the whole city: an example of “inhabited-heritage.”

²³ See <http://www.associazioneantigone.it/tredicesimo-rapporto-sulle-condizioni-di-detenzione/02-architettura/> (Accessed October 2017).

²⁴ See http://www.repubblica.it/viaggi/2015/09/09/news/quelle_oasi_isole_carceri-122524134/ (accessed October 2017).

Conclusions

The relationship between a new architectural intervention and an already existing architecture is a phenomenon that changes in relation to the cultural values attributed both to the meaning of historic architecture and the intentions of the new intervention. Hence, it is an enormous mistake to think that one can lay down a permanent doctrine or at least a scientific definition of architectural intervention. [...] The design of a new work of architecture comes physically close to the existing one, generating a visual and spatial relation as well as a genuine interpretation of the historical material it is confronted with. As a result, this material becomes the object of a true interpretation which explicitly or implicitly accompanies the new intervention in its overall significance.”²⁵

To draw a tentative conclusion from such an exploratory introduction about potential overlaps between heritage and adaptive reuse thinking and practices we might say that this manner of thinking of adaptive reuse and architectural interventions on the built environment involves meeting the people concerned with the negotiations of their own (sometimes difficult) memories and using tangible architectural traces as heritage. To this end, not only museums, libraries, archives and collections, but also thus far unrecognised sites of historical interest, in urban as well as rural areas, become places of cultural production and co-production. Hence, the urban built environment might highly contribute to urban cultural life and its improvement, not much through a “heritage-led urban regeneration” mainly based on “economic benefits” ensuing from an improved “attractiveness of historic cities” — which often results in triggering gentrification phenomena — but rather by contributing to promote an evolving and progressive sense of belonging and civic connoisseurship. This process might play an important role in promoting an idea of ‘citizenship’ that is not based on political, ethnic or birth origin, but on a sense of belonging understood, at its simplest, as “emotional attachments that lead to feelings of being at home.”²⁶

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²⁵ Ignasi de Solà Morales, “From Contrast to Analogy: Developments in the Concept of Architectural Intervention.” [in] *Lotus International*, no. 46 (1985). Pp. 37-45

²⁶ www.mela-archive.polimi.it. See “Belonging”.

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