

JOURNAL

#02

TR

ACE

S

—
—
January 2017
Dialogue Issue

—
Europe and Contentious
Cultural Heritages
—

{ editorial }

This second issue of TRACES Journal has been designed as a dialogue among the scientific coordinators of some of the most recent European Union's flagship research projects focusing on museums and heritage studies, including some recently concluded programmes as well as some newer researches launched under the H2020 umbrella.

Despite obvious differences, all of these projects share a common attention on contemporary social and economic issues, and a view to developing instrumental cultural policy, advancing museum and heritage practice and, ultimately, ameliorating key contemporary problems. Our time, however, is one of upsetting changes. Some years after the commencement of the first research programmes included here, European socio-cultural and political reality has undergone dramatical shifts, connected to phenomena that were not entirely predictable at the time they were funded. The heightened profile and nature of terrorist threats signalled by the escalation of attacks and their violence, the refugee crisis and EU countries' different responses to it, the collapse of the Greek economy, BREXIT, the increasingly difficult relations with (and sometimes between) the historic 'Europe makers', Turkey and Russia, the entrenchment of nationalist movements and parties, the mobilization of exclusionary European identities, an entirely changed global situation connected to conflict in the Middle East... These are all factors that were (largely) beyond view in the first major tranche of EU-funded research into museums and heritage, and to which current projects must adapt.

Arguably the current economic and political crisis of Europe is also a crisis of values and identities; it is a cultural crisis. In such a context it is increasingly evident how social and political conflicts between and within European states are acted out also on the field of culture, including heritage institution and practices. We invited selected scholars who are currently or recently involved in major EU funded research programmes in the field to reflect on what this changed world means for our research and for museum and heritage practice. We called upon them to question what roles heritage can and should play to address social division and crisis in Europe. We asked them about the focus and the scope of their projects and their relevance in view of contemporary social, political and economic issues affecting Europe and its inhabitants; the expected impact of their research as well as the influence of EU political and

funding agendas on the framing of their programme, its lines of enquiry and methods.

Their work stresses the potential relevance of research programmes in critically confronting the multifarious, inherently complex and often contentious European heritages. The contributors address the drives to develop new approaches to the effective study, use and transmission of heritage and to identify practice that can productively acknowledge diversity, dissent, and event frictions. What emerges clearly from their words is the critical place of heritage within the public sphere as well as the need for developing discourses on heritage that go beyond instrumental political stances. They also recognize the unavoidable challenge of thinking through heritage in relation to questions about identity and society, nation and nationalism, and historical and contemporary understandings of Europe and being European. They believe—as we do—that these are the present and future challenges for museum and heritage studies in Europe, that they might be truly relevant, within and beyond the academic sphere.

— Francesca Lanz and Christopher Whitehead

Full texts of the interviews are available on TRACES
On-line Journal at www.traces.polimi.it/journal
Interviews by Francesca Lanz, Christopher
Whitehead and Michela Bassanelli.



Reappropriation | Interview with Gennaro Postiglione



By Gennaro Postiglione

February 3, 2017

For a long time your research has been questioning traces of pre-existing architecture seniority and how these objects and their related memories can be reactivated. You coordinated the projects 'Atlantik Wall Linear Museum' (2005) and 'REcall-European Conflict Archaeological Landscape Reappropriation' (2012) that particularly investigated the architectural and symbolic significance of the track while trying to identify different approaches to difficult heritage. Can you tell us what you mean by 'reappropriation' of these spaces/objects/places in order to create active rather than passive, mournful memories?

While developing different European projects I dealt with aspects usually ascribable to material culture in the territory at an European level: culture as the outcome of different elements that constitute heritage (artefacts, architecture, natural elements...) which are object of planning attention in a dynamic of transformations careful to the preservation and understanding of memories and to the awareness of their role in the making of a future structure that will be at the same time bearer of adequate and renewed ways of life and of use of spaces and places. In particular, the cultural and material heritage that was left behind, both in terms of physical presences and memories, represent a collective and shared memory that is very often considered 'difficult' because it is very similar to a scar inflicted on the soul of one's homeland. The concept of *adaptive reuse* ensues from the assumption that identities 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. Places traditionally are the crucibles of people's identity, the concrete background of people's actions and life, the prerequisite of the creation of cultures, skills and economies. Place-identity 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. The proposal embodies this aim as it waves memory and imagination together: we believe in action (reuse and reappropriation) as a therapy to overcome the never-healed trauma of difficult heritage. In our approach, the military ideology of boundary and control attached to war remains takes on a different meaning through a process of resamantization. By turning borders into occasions of exchange, we open our heritage to the reality of the current European territory, where national boundaries disappear and permeability is both geographical and political.

The project 'REcall-European Conflict Archaeological Landscape Reappropriation' (EC Culture Programme 2007-13) ended a few years ago and had as its main objective to stimulate the development of innovative practices for the re-use, valuation and disclosure of the heritage of twentieth century conflicts. Two years after the end of the project can you tell us what has been the most significant outcome?

Every conflict leaves its own legacy on the built environment. Ruins, rubbles, as well as buildings and infrastructures mark the European landscapes, and remind us of a past that most people would rather forget. REcall research project investigated possible forms of intervention on conflict heritage sites and territories, with the aim of overcoming the trauma connected with many places and stories charged of painful memories. Researchers based their strategies on the aim of acknowledging the history of these sites, without reducing or limiting their potential to that of a commemorative space and overcoming the tendency of forgetting and abandoning these places. Erasing the image, the presence, and the life of an urban space from the collective memory is a painful act. There are multiple reasons for such dissolutions: ideology, alteration, progress and, in general, change. Architects and designers have the mission to question this erasure. They can develop the capacity to turn it into a powerful source of creativity.

REcall seeks to formulate a new role of the architectural environment based on invigorated research on the cultural landscapes of World War I and World War II and strengthen the attention on the management, documentation, and preservation of this difficult heritage. The project regards heritage as a dynamic process, involving the declaration of our memory of past events and actions that have been refashioned for present day purposes such as identity, community, legalisation of power and authority. On the strength of this account, the project aims at developing sustainable and innovative practices for reuse, valorisation, and communication of the twentieth century european conflict heritage considered as Cultural Landscape. The strength of the project extends beyond the timeliness of its contents, as it establishes innovative investigation praxes for contemporary cultural researches. The project proposes a 'research by design' approach that joins a merely cognitive activity (the traditional theoretical research) and a purely operational one (the design practice). A 'thinking laboratory' is thus established with no pre-established method: each author defines the scope of his/her practice independently. Far from being merely experimental in itself, the practice-based approach is particularly suited to the research issue at stake. As a matter of fact, the project is not only an instrument of knowledge, conservation, and valorisation of difficult traces diffused on the territory. More importantly, it opens up a new propositional perspective capable of turning the painful heritage of WWI and WWII into a resource for European identity construction.

Interviù by Francesca Lanz, Chris Whitehead and Michela Bassanelli

****Gennaro Postiglione** is full professor of Interior Architecture and Exhibition Design at Politecnico di Milano and coordinator of the Master of the School of Architecture Urban Planning and Construction Engineering. He researches in the fields of museography and on preserving and diffusing collective memory and cultural identity. He carried out several research projects, among which the research project **REcall – European Conflict Archaeological Landscape Reappropriation** (September 2012-June 2014).*



tion needs to take the cue from the margins to identify innovative heritage practices. Reflexivity, i.e., social formats of re-assessing and challenging seemingly given normalities, is a crucial dimension in feeding a new European imagination. [...]

Historical conflicts that appear insurmountable on a national and institutional level are often more negotiable on a micro-level.

Europe's past and present is marked by conflict and difference as much as it is marked by rich and diverse cultural heritages. TRACES claims that Europe will be a combination (or concurrence) of many, sometimes contradictory voices, or it will not be at all. Its dynamic heritage holds the key to a reconfiguration of European imagination. Focussing on contentious aspects of heritage is expected to prepare the ground for solutions to the multiple crises we are facing today. Creative and practical, yet theoretically grounded heritage work is expected to open up new avenues in negotiating current conflicts.»

«Heritage is an important vehicle in building European imagination. It is constantly being constructed and reconstructed, according to different current needs in different local and regional settings. Performativity relates to this productive character of heritage work. Besides examining and re-producing already existing understandings of difficult pasts, **performative heritage** crucially aims to re-configure existing systems of meaning by developing new, interactive, and creative practices. Crucially, this process must be collective, so that different stakeholders can insert their often conflicting positions into the debate. TRACES claims that acknowledging the contentious aspects of

European heritage is crucial. TRACES envisages a new European imagination as an area where interaction between different, sometimes contradictory, perspectives and experiences of past and present learn to interact. By engaging with these proactively and collectively, heritage-work may become performative.»

Klaus Schönberger is professor of Cultural Anthropology and Chair of the Institut für Kulturanalyse at Universität Klagenfurt. He has published extensively on digital technologies and socio-cultural change. Since 1978, he has initiated and participated in several national and international research projects on cultural heritage and civic society. He is the project coordinator for the research project TRACES – *Transmitting Contentious Cultural Heritages with the Arts. From Intervention to Co-Production* (March 2016 – February 2019).



GENNARO POSTIGLIONE

«Every conflict leaves its own legacy on the built environment. Ruins, rubbles, but also entire buildings and infrastructures mark the European landscapes, reminding us of a past that most people would rather forget. The Recall research project investigated possible forms of intervention on conflict heritage sites and territories, with the aim of overcoming the trauma connected with many painful places and stories. The strategies explored by the researchers were based on the aim of acknowledging the history of these sites, without reducing or limiting their potential to that of a commemorative space and overcoming the tendency of forgetting, abandoning, these places. The erasure from the collective memory of the image, presence and vitality of an urban space is a painful act. Reasons for such dissolutions are multiple: ideology, alteration, progress and, in general, change. Architects and designers have the mission to properly question this erasure. They can develop the capacity to turn this erasure into a powerful source of creativity.

The project was thus based on the attempt to explore a possible shift from a 'simply' commemoration to a more active involvement and participation of people in/'with the places and stories, through an act of 'reappropriation'.»

Gennaro Postiglione is full professor of Interior Architecture and Exhibition Design at Politecnico di Milano and coordinator of the Master of the School of Architecture, Urban Planning and Construction Engineering. He researches in the fields of museography and on preserving and diffusing collective memory and cultural identity. He carried out several research projects, among which the research project REcall – *European Conflict Archaeological Landscape Reappropriation* (September 2012 – June 2014).



PATRIZIA VIOLI

«I believe one cannot speak of a general single cultural and symbolic process that can be applied to all so-called 'places of trauma', which are often very different based on their shape, layout, memory transmission mode, as well as political and sometimes ideological intent. In very general terms, we can say that all of these places include a value which is, generally speaking, the transmission of memory. But memory may be functional to different symbolic logics and underlying policies. The huge memorial site built in Nanjing dedicated to the victims of the devastation of the city by Chinese troops in 1937 for ex-

Patrizia Violi is professor of semiotics at University of Bologna, coordinator of the PhD programme in semiotics and director of TRAME, an interdisciplinary centre for the study of memories and cultural traumas. She investigates the processes people employ to attribute meanings to places and things surrounding them in particular in relation to traumatic events and practices of commemoration. She is currently the project coordinator for the research project MEMOSUR – *A Lesson for Europe: Memory, Trauma and Reconciliation in Chile and Argentina* (July 2014 – Juin 2017).

«The CoHERE project does not shirk from an awareness of the contested nature of the political, and indeed moral and philosophical, terrain to be explored, where there is a commonplace attachment of ethics to heritage that often manifests in tacit or overt prescription. This leads inevitably to axiological discussions about exactly which human and social values, if any, constitute absolute goods. Following this, other questions emerge: why, and (sometimes) where and when did such values develop, or through which historical processes and memory practices—for example through reflection on ‘never-again’ iniquities such as genocides? [...]

Along with (apparently) new divisions across the EU, fissures within the social fabric of individual states come into view, as political polarisation results in seemingly irreconcilable oppositions between groups.

These concern the valorisation of European heritages that enable: the development of identities based upon communitarian and egalitarian attitudes; non-prejudicial openness to difference; a commitment to peace; historical awareness; and equal opportunities for social and cultural participation. Alongside these, we must recognise that heritage can be and often is active within quite different ethical constructs—some classifiable as malign. While these rarely figure in authorised representations, we ignore them at our peril and it is necessary to find techniques to represent and understand them plurally, relationally, historically (even as they happen) and critically.»

Chris Whitehead is professor of Museology at Newcastle University and member of the University’s Cultural Affairs Steering Group and the Great North Museum’s Board. He researches in the fields of museum history, interpretation, knowledge construction, place and identity, memory and heritage studies and museums and migration. A major strand of activity relates to education and interpretation practices in art museums and galleries, and includes several government-funded and policy-relevant research among which the ongoing research project CoHERE – *Critical Heritages: performing and representing identities in Europe* (April 2016 – March 2019).

Map of the dialogue. Voices from EU research projects.

Ongoing Projects 2016-2019

UNREST – Unsettling Remembering and Social Cohesion in Europe
Stefan Berger > Ruhr University Bochum

TRACES – Transmitting Contentious Cultural Heritages with the Arts.
From Intervention to Co-Production
Klaus Shönberger > University of Klagenfurt

CoHERE – Critical Heritages: performing and representing identities in Europe
Chris Whitehead > Newcastle University

IC-ACCESS Accessing Campsites: Inclusive Strategies for Using European Conflicted Heritage
Rob van der Laarse > University of Amsterdam

Former Projects 2010-2017

EuNaMus – European National Museums: Identity Politics, the Uses of the Past and the European Citizen
Peter Aronsson > Linköping University

MeLA – European Museums in an Age of Migrations
Luca Basso Peressut > Politecnico di Milano

REcall – European Conflict Archaeological Landscape Reappropriation
Gennaro Postiglione > Politecnico di Milano

MEMOSUR – A Lesson for Europe: Memory, Trauma and Reconciliation in Chile and Argentina
Patrizia Violi > Università di Bologna



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.

Editor-in-Chief and Scientific Responsible

Prof. Luca Basso Peressut
Department of Architecture and Urban Studies
Politecnico di Milano

Associate Editor

Francesca Lanz

Editorial Board

Tal Adler, Julie Dawson, Marion Hamm,
John Harries, Martin Krenn, Erica Lehrer,
Sharon Macdonald, Suzana Milevska, Aisling
O'Beirn, Alenka Pirman, Regina Römhild, Arnd
Schneider, Karin Schneider, Klaus Schönberger,
Roma Sendyka

Editorial Staff

Michela Bassanelli
Cristina F. Colombo
Alessandra Galasso (editing)

Graphic Design

Zetalab – Milano

Contacts

Piazza Leonardo da Vinci 26
20133 Milano – Italy
www.traces.polimi.it
infoTRACES@polimi.it



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

The views expressed here are the sole responsibility
of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the
European Union.

ISSN 2531-4858
9 772531 485809

