



TRACES Final Exhibition

Contentious Objects/Ashamed Subjects

**Artistic research methods and strategies regarding images, objects, spaces,
and events of contentious cultural heritages**

18 January – 6 February 2019 | Galleria del Progetto, Politecnico di Milano, Milan

Curator: Suzana Milevska

The project 'Contentious Objects/Ashamed Subjects' is a research about research: it is based on a long-term cross-disciplinary curatorial exploration of art-based research and artistic research projects. However, the exhibition is not about just any kind of art and artistic research. Focusing particularly on various methodologies, artistic research methods and strategies that are employed by contemporary artists the exhibition features those artistic practices dedicated to durational and exhaustive cross-referential research of difficult tangible and intangible cultural heritages: reflected in images, objects, spaces, and events that had problematic pasts or inhabit present contentions.

In this respect, some of the pertinent questions that triggered the exhibition concern which objects, images and spaces are considered contentious cultural heritages (Sharon Macdonald), and how they are transmitted and reflected in the European 'culturescapes.' These issues are extrapolated regardless of whether the researched materials are included or displayed in collections of various European art and cultural institutions, or they are presented in public spaces or kept in other contexts. The exhibition therefore aims to map and critically reflect the state of art in both the field of artistic research methodologies and in research-based art practices that deal with the shame linked to contentious heritage and its associated images, objects, entire museum collections, monuments, architectural objects, or public spaces.

The stereotypical and racialised representations; institutional reluctance to acknowledge the questionable provenience of unlawfully required objects and unethical sponsorship; as well as propositions of how to deal with the repressed memory of the spaces once inhabited by conflict or are marked with contested monuments dedicated to disgraceful historic figures or events; the collective memory about commoning movements that contested the appropriation of public space; are just some of the researched topics addressed in the projects presented here.

Most importantly, in bringing these projects together, the exhibition addresses the possibility for catalysing social change and fighting recent hateful outbursts from the far right in Europe and elsewhere (e.g. anti-Semitic and anti-Roma sentiments, racism towards indigenous and black populations, and prejudice towards LGBTQ communities), in the context of current debates regarding the reciprocal relations between art, academia and political activism, at the intersection between institutions of art and civic society as well as socio-political structures. Therefore, the exhibition explores art practices that move towards inclusiveness, creativity, and innovation, while stressing the potentiality of various artistic research strategies for the production of new, specific and critical knowledges in various research and academic fields.

Starting with invisible heritages and contentious objects, images and spaces, the exhibition also addresses the need to acknowledge past wrong-doings in order to rethink, deconstruct and dismantle pre-existing regimes of representation and systemic malfunctions, while proposing alternative trajectories for future research.

Furthermore, the exhibition explores the application of various theoretical and research methodologies (already developed in art history, museology, anthropology, ethnology, sociology, pedagogy, political sciences, etc.) together with artistic research methods, artistic media, strategies and actions will be explored in terms of their specificity, appropriateness, applicability, and efficiency in accomplishing these challenging goals, on both ethical and conceptual levels.

Most of the artistic strategies stem from the legacy of postcolonial and feminist critique, and the research practices around various theoretical analyses and case studies have developed in the frame of the humanities and social sciences. The exhibited projects include, but are not limited to, the use of critical analysis of vernacular art, field trips, photography as research, lecture performances, interviews, focus groups, hybrid records, critical databases, video essays, curatorial forensics, militant image research, institutional critique, thought experiments, social intervention, participatory research of art made by prisoners, as well as elements of material culture, re-enactment, activist campaigns for naming and renaming, counter-monuments, social design, agonistic research, critical friend, creative co-production, petition, public apology, manifestos, critical and social advertising, advocating and lobbying for decolonisation, repatriation and restitution.

Instead of dwelling on negatively charged memories, the exhibition celebrates art that deals with shared or multidirectional memory (Michael Rothberg), and productive shame (Paul Gilroy) in a committed and catalytic way. Consisting of selected archival documents as well as photographic, audio and video documentation of academic and artistic research, the featured projects and practitioners focus on various relevant and often sensitive thematic clusters by employing various methodologies and theories, while proposing specific research methods and strategies capable of contending with their selected subjects.

'Contentious Objects/Ashamed Subjects' presents ten art-based and artistic research projects, a two-day conference, and several pop-up events. Politecnico di Milan's Hall will host the comprehensive archives of five projects realised by 'creative co-production' (CCP) teams created in the context of TRACES (or pre-existed the project): *Absence as Heritage*—Răzvan Anton, Julie Dawson, and Alexandra Toma; *Awkward Objects of Genocide*—Erica Lehrer, Roma Sendyka, Wojtek Wilczyk, Magdalena Zych; *Casting of Death*—Domestic Research Society (Damijan Kracina, Alenka Pirman, Jani Pirnat), Marko Jenko, Janez Polajnar, Marijan Rupert; *Dead Images*—Tal Adler, Linda Fibiger, John Harris, Joan Smith, Anna Szöke, Maria Teschler-Nicola; *Transforming Long Kesh/Maze*—Martin Krenn, Aisling O' Beirn; and several additional long-term research and/or participatory art projects: *Solidarity Day* (a campaign with CultureShutdown platform) and *Memory Matrix*—Azra Akšamija, *(T)RACE-ING LOUIS AGASSIZ: Artistic Renegotiations of Archive, Memory & Place*—a result of Sasha Huber's collaboration with the campaign *Demounting Louis Agassiz*; the initiative *World Communal Heritage*—Rena Rädle and Vladan Jeremić; *Research without Guarantees*—collective Urban Subjects: Sabine Bitter, Jeff Derksen, Helmut Weber; Alfred Ullrich's project *On the Move* including his campaign regarding the sign *LANDFAHRERPLATZ KEIN GEWERBE* (En. Site for Travellers: No Trading); and the research file *Monumentomachia*—Suzana Milevska. The projects are divided into four different chapters according the topics addressed and research strategies applied: 'Invisible Heritages,' 'Contentious Objects and Images,' 'Spaces without Bodies' and 'On Productive Shame.'

'Contentious Objects/Ashamed Subjects' stems from the long-term research of Suzana Milevska, Principal Investigator at the Politecnico di Milano and curator, whose focus is on the state of art in the realm of the current debates surrounding artistic research and on the results of the Horizon 2020 project *TRACES—Transmitting Contentious Cultural Heritages with the Arts: From Intervention to Co-Production*.

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Dr. Suzana Milevska is a visual culture theorist and curator from Macedonia. Currently she is Principal Investigator at the Politecnico di Milano (Horizon 2020, TRACES). Her theoretical and curatorial interests include postcolonial critique of the hegemonic power regimes of representation, gender theory and feminism, participatory, collaborative, and research-based art practices. From 2013 to 2015 she was the Endowed Professor for Central and South European Art Histories at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna and she taught at the Visual Culture Unite at the Technological University in Vienna. She was a professor of history and theory of art at the Faculty of Fine Arts—University Ss. Cyril and Methodius, Skopje and she initiated the Centre for Visual and Cultural Research at the Research Institute Euro-Balkan. Milevska was Fulbright Senior Research Scholar in Library of Congress (2004). She holds a PhD in Visual Cultures from Goldsmiths College. Her curatorial project *The Renaming Machine* (2008-2011) addressed the politics of renaming, rewriting histories, and the overwriting memory in art and visual culture. Milevska initiated *Call the Witness*, a project focusing on contemporary Roma artists (included Roma Media Archive, exhibitions at BAK Utrecht, and the *Roma Pavilion*, 54th Venice Biennial, 2011) and curated the *Roma Protocol* (Austrian Parliament, Vienna). Milevska's publications include *Gender Difference in the Balkans* (VDM Verlag, 2010), and the readers: *The Renaming Machine: The Book* (P.A.R.A.S.I.T.E. Institute, 2010), *On Productive Shame, Reconciliation, and Agency* (Sternberg Press, 2016), *Inside Out—Critical Discourses concerning Institutions* (co-edited with Alenka Gregorič). In 2012, Milevska won the Igor Zabel Award for Culture and Theory.

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TRACES – Transmitting Contentious Cultural Heritages with the Arts: From Intervention to Co-Production is a three-year project funded in 2016 by the European Commission as part of the Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme. Through an innovative research methodology, TRACES investigates the challenges and opportunities raised when transmitting complex pasts and the role of difficult heritage in contemporary Europe.

European cultural heritage is inherently complex and layered. In the past, conflicting or controversial perspectives on different historical memories and experiences have collided 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, the main assumption of TRACES is that, if transmitted sensitively, the sharing of these heritages 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. TRACES therefore involves multi-disciplinary teams that bring together established and emerging scholars, artists, and cultural workers to develop rigorous, creative and all-round investigations of contentious cultural heritages and experiment with innovative research methodologies.

TRACES researches the existing participatory methods and artistic practices and offers a critical analysis which aimed towards developing new models of innovative creative collaborations between artists, researchers, heritage agencies, and their stakeholders which motivated this exhibition. The focus of the research, which unravels theoretical and practical methods of approach, is put on the potential of participatory art practices for transmitting contentious heritages, in anthropological, ethnographic or historical institutions which hold and present collections, or present contentious heritages in contemporary art institutions, artist-run spaces, re-enactment festivals and other events, phenomena and activities related to heritage in public spaces. Many existing art practices have limited results due to short-term, interventionist and promotion-oriented strategies as well as the complex societal relations in which institutions and artists have to frame their collaborations. Although there have already been projects which successfully located points of conflict and contradiction within the institutions hosting the interventions and the ways of presenting contentious heritage, they could not resolve the general contradictions in contemporary society at large. This has encouraged the creation of sustainable

models to enable local stakeholders to continue the participatory research and production of contemporary art for new projects. The CCPs artists' role is to create artistic strategies which enable the usage of sensitive and self-critical approaches within institutions that own or host contentious cultural heritage (e.g. access to research material, relations with hosts and other institutes, building sustainable networks and solutions, ethical conduct, engagement with contentious heritage, etc.).

In order to achieve these objectives, TRACES initiated a series of five '**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 public interfaces. The teams are often cross-disciplinary and international and involve researchers and artists from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. CCPs are based on long-term research of contentious cultural heritage and its public interfaces. The setting up of five Creative Co-Productions (CCPs) and the analysis of participatory methods and models of transmitting contentious heritages through these innovative contemporary creative collaborations in the exhibition will be presented as case studies.

Venue

Politecnico di Milano
School of Architecture Urban Planning Construction Engineering
Galleria del Progetto, via Ampère 2, 20133 Milano

Opening hours

Monday – Friday, 10.00 am – 18.00 pm

Exhibition webpage:

<http://www.traces.polimi.it/2018/10/10/traces-final-exhibition-contentious-objects-ashamed-subjects/>



www.traces.polimi.it | infoTRACES@polimi.it

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