



'Transforming Long Kesh/Maze' in Contentious Objects/Ashamed Subjects

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Krenn & O'Beirn Transforming Long Kesh/Maze postcards in *Contentious Objects/Ashamed Subjects*
Photo Suzana Milevska

'Transforming Long Kesh/Maze' Martin Krenn and Aisling O'Beirn in

Contentious Objects/Ashamed Subjects: Artistic research methods and strategies regarding images, objects, spaces, and events of contentious cultural heritages

TRACES Final Exhibition 18 January – 6 February 2019 | Galleria del Progetto, Politecnico di Milano, Milan
Curator: Suzana Milevska

'Transforming Long Kesh/Maze' is a collaborative social sculpture by artists Martin Krenn and Aisling O'Beirn, exploring the future of the Maze/Long Kesh site beyond its current state of limbo. The former prison has both a physical presence and conceptual importance. Indecision about its future at government level says much about the political climate of a 'post-conflict' society. Given this, the artists are interested in how one can think beyond the site's legacy and to its future.

Krenn and O'Beirn worked with participants who had 1st hand experience of the prison, such as ex-prisoners, former visitors, ex-prison staff and community museums from across the political spectrum to partake in the project. The artists worked with them to collaboratively photograph existing prison artefacts or to co-create unique small sculptural objects to reflect their personal experiences of this site.

Three principal dialogical methods for working with diverse participants were devised specifically for this project: *restaging* (whilst occasionally repairing), *reappropriation* and *retelling*. The aim was to avoid negatively dwelling on the past or the reiteration of previously rehearsed and ideologically overdetermined narratives.

For the exhibition *Contentious Objects/Ashamed Subjects*, the final event in the TRACES project which Milevska curated to present the research processes employed by the different Creative Co Production teams in TRACES, Krenn & O'Beirn exhibited 32 postcards from their set of 64 cards along with documentation outlining their research process. The Traces Final Conference "Transmitting Contentious Cultural Heritages With The Arts" took place in parallel with the exhibition.

As a result of our ongoing dialogues about process and methodologies with the curator Suzana Milevska she included a discussion of our methodology discussed in "Artistic Research" organised by Michelle Teran (one of the artists included in the project *Microhistories*) who organised the seminar at Trondheim Academy of Fine Arts, Trondheim, November 26-28, 2011.

The project is part of Traces, a three-year project funded in 2016 by the European Commission as part of the Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme. Ulster University is a partner in the TRACES project. The published book received funding from the Art and Design Research Unit at Ulster University.. <http://www.traces.polimi.it>
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Opening night of *Contentious Objects/Ashamed Subjects*, visitors reading and taking postcards from Transforming Long Kesh/Maze. Photo Suzana Mileskva TRACES



Contentious Objects/Ashamed Subjects

Contentious Objects/Ashamed Subjects is a research about research. However, the exhibition is not about just any kind of art and artistic research methodologies and methods. It is based on a long-term cross-disciplinary exploration of scientific-art based research and artistic research projects and focuses on various methodologies, artistic research methods and strategies that are employed by contemporary artists who dedicate their artistic practices to durational and exhaustive cross-referential research of difficult, tangible and intangible cultural heritages. *Contentious Objects/Ashamed Subjects* presents long-term projects that explore how objects, images, ideas and knowledge about difficult events from the past are transmitted, mediated, translated or mis-translated between various cultures in or outside institutional contexts. History of art and architecture, visual cultures, anthropology, ethnography, sociology, psychology, memory studies, etc. have already developed different theoretical methodological and proposed some adequate quantitative and qualitative research methods for investigating the reasons behind and implications of contentious cultural heritages. What makes artistic research different from that deployed in the humanities and social sciences? The main paradox and often vicious circle of artistic research arises from the implication that artistic practice is an essential component of both the research process and research results. Any claim that artistic research is a completely new and unique kind of research, would seem to suffer in a dangerous essentialisation of artistic research.

One of the main dilemmas is whether one could (re)negotiate specific methodologies, research methodological roles and formats that might be more appropriate and constructive for pondering such complex topics than the usual ones applied in art/science. However, once one embarks on a research project, many newly uncovered specific data and interpretations might lead to different conclusions regarding the importance of cross-referential research practices and collaborate interestingly of various expertise and skills both sides of the research camp: the scientific and artistic.

Sketches, sketches, drawings, grids, social maps, diachronal and collective close-reading sessions, site-interviews, militant image research, autoethnographic and other autoethnographies, exhibition visits, casting models and geotypes, field work, critical walk, small acts, long road trips, thoughts, participatory projects and informal conversations, lecture-performances, even failed experiments and wasting time on the internet, are common attributes related to artistic research activities.

The interesting and unlearning of traditional and homogeneous definitions of cultural heritage side by side with the exposing, extracting and de-colonisation of uniquely and unskillfully acquired cultural heritages, museum collections and other museum projects, are some of the ways that present artistic research projects from becoming yet another kind of 'art pour l'art' practice. The projects presented here refuse to overthink urgent societal issues: the artist call for 'paying attention' (Isabelle Stengers) to question that cannot be resolved merely through artistic research, but imply the responsibility and engagement of the artist as citizen and political subject. Emphasising the gradual obligation to work through the grain details of imperial and colonial history in Paul Gilroy suggested in his *Postcolonial Melancholia*, this exhibition also draws attention to collective 'productive shame' as agency—capable of advancing an affective multicultural and decolonised society.



Opening night of *Contentious Objects/Ashamed Subjects* Wall Text (left) Visitor reading and taking postcards from Transforming Long Kesh/Maze cards (right). Photos Suzana Mileskva TRACES