



Transforming Maze / Long Kesh Conference

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Transforming Maze / Long Kesh International Conference

The MAC, Belfast, March 15th 2017



Transforming Maze / Long Kesh was a one-day conference about the challenges of dealing with contentious heritage, with focus on the former prison Maze / Long Kesh. The conference addresses the possibilities Arts and Architecture can offer to productive debate and new forms of engagement with such a site. Local and International speakers will discuss artistic, archaeological and ethnographic approaches from a broader perspective that could be used to investigate contentious heritage such as the Maze / Long Kesh site.

The conference and the art project concerning the Maze / Long Kesh site, are both part of TRACES (Transforming Contentious Cultural Heritage Through the Arts), a three-year research project funded in 2016 by the European Commission as part of Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation.

www.traces.polimi.it

With thanks to Development Arts and Culture, Ulster University

PROJECT BACKGROUND

'Transforming Long Kesh/Maze' is a collaborative social sculpture exploring the future of the Maze/Long Kesh site beyond its current state of limbo, that Belfast based artist Aisling O'Beirn and I developed together. The former prison located outside Belfast, is internationally known for jailing most of the political prisoners, both republican and loyalist, during the recent period of conflict in Northern Ireland.

The former prison site has both a physical presence and conceptual importance. There is currently no access to the site for the general public, this even includes artists like us. Although we wrote several applications to the authorities to visit the site we got no response which is telling. Given this, Krenn and O'Beirn interested in how one can think beyond the site's legacy and to its future. As a result, they developed a project based on work with individuals and community museums who have had first-hand experience of the prison, such as ex-prisoners, former visitors and prison staff to collaboratively photograph existing prison artefacts and to record their personal statements related to the objects. Additionally, they co-created unique small sculptural objects with some of the participants. Techniques for creating the new objects include methods traditionally used for making prison art. The result was an exhibition of the newly created objects, a travelling exhibition of postcards and an artist book, launching next month.

CONFERENCE BACKGROUND

Much of the early part of the project was spent developing dialogical methods for working with participants who had a first-hand experience of the site as well as making contacts with potential participants across the political spectrum. In the course of an intense year of initial research, they took a lead from archaeologist Laura McAtackney's work on the material culture of the prison, most especially her concept of the "distributed self" (2014, 244-265). This allowed them to consider the inaccessible prison's presence beyond its physical architectural manifestation. In conversations with McAtackney, they found similarities between her practice as an archaeologist their our own practice as artists both concerned with the relationship between materiality and testimony.

The international conference, 'Transforming Maze / Long Kesh' was organised by the artists as a project kick off, which took place the MAC Belfast in March 2017. The conference addressed the local political context of the prison as well as ways people have engaged internationally with difficult or contentious heritages. Up until the point of the conference there were no confirmed project participants. The conference set out to situate this localised situation in an international context and attracted a wide ranging audience where discussion and discourse were integral to the proceedings. In openly discussing the possibilities of agonistic approaches to contested cultural heritages the conference directly lead to many participants, who were in the audience, confirming their participation.





Transforming Maze/ Long Kesh Prison

The vital role of contemporary dialogical
art and architecture in dealing with
contentious heritage



15/03/2017

10 am - 6 pm

— **MAC Belfast | Metropolitan Arts Centre**
10 Exchange St, Belfast BT1 2LS

— One-day conference about the difficulties
in dealing with contentious heritage by
focusing on the Maze / Long Kesh former
prison site.

— Conference organised by Aisling O'Beirn
and Martin Krenn
Ulster University
with TRACES

With thanks to Development Arts and Culture, Ulster University

Speakers involved:

Fred Caulfield
Martin Krenn
Aisling O'Beirn
Laura McAtackney
Klaus Schönberger
Marion Hamm
Tal Adler
Suzana Milevska
Christina Varvia
Mary Jane Jacob (Keynote)

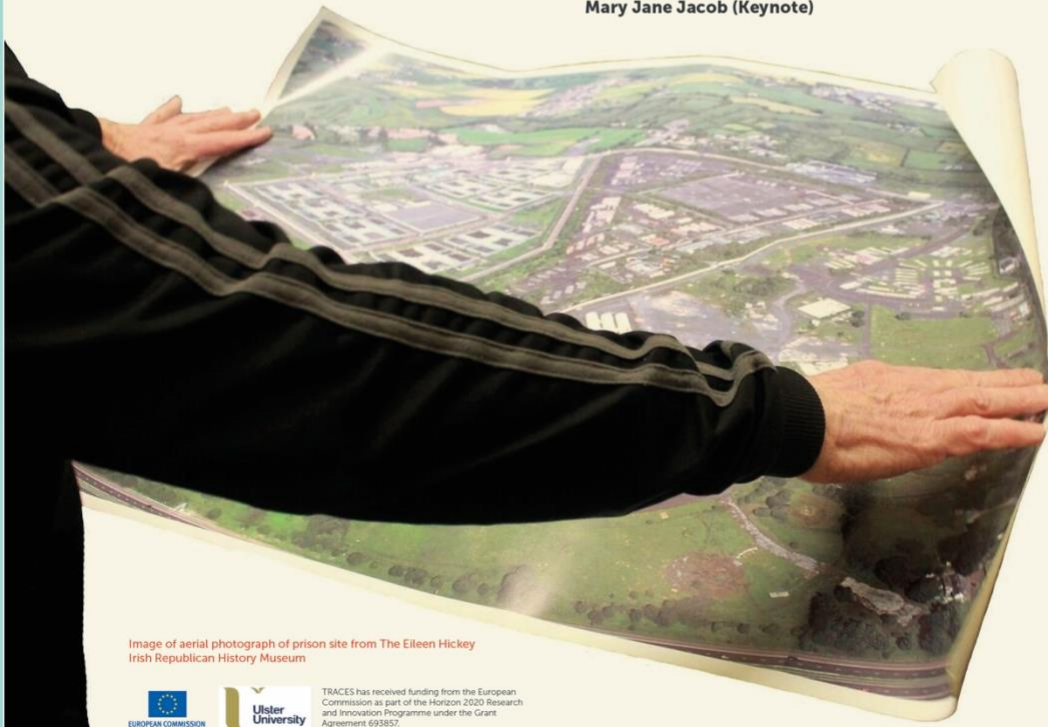


Image of aerial photograph of prison site from The Eileen Hickey
Irish Republican History Museum



TRACES has received funding from the European
Commission as part of the Horizon 2020 Research
and Innovation Programme under the Grant
Agreement 693857.

Programme 9:30 am Registration

Part 1 – AGONISM AND COLLABORATION

10:00 am | “TRACES: An Agonistic Approach to Contentious Cultural Heritage”, Marion Hamm, Klaus Schönberger

11:00 am | Questions, comments 11.10 am – 11.20 am | BREAK

Part 2 – MAZE / LONG KESH

11:20 am | “Transforming Maze / Long Kesh”, Martin Krenn & Aisling O’Beirn

12:00 Pm | “Some thoughts on the material culture of imprisonment at Long Kesh / Maze”, Laura McAtackney

12:40 pm | Questions / Comments

12:50 pm | Panel discussion moderated by Laura McAtackney with Tom Hartley, Karen Logan and Aisling O’ Beirn

1:30 pm – 3.20 pm | LUNCH

Part 3 – ARTISTIC PRACTICES AND DIALOGUE

3:20 pm | “The Architecture of Memory”, Christina Varvia

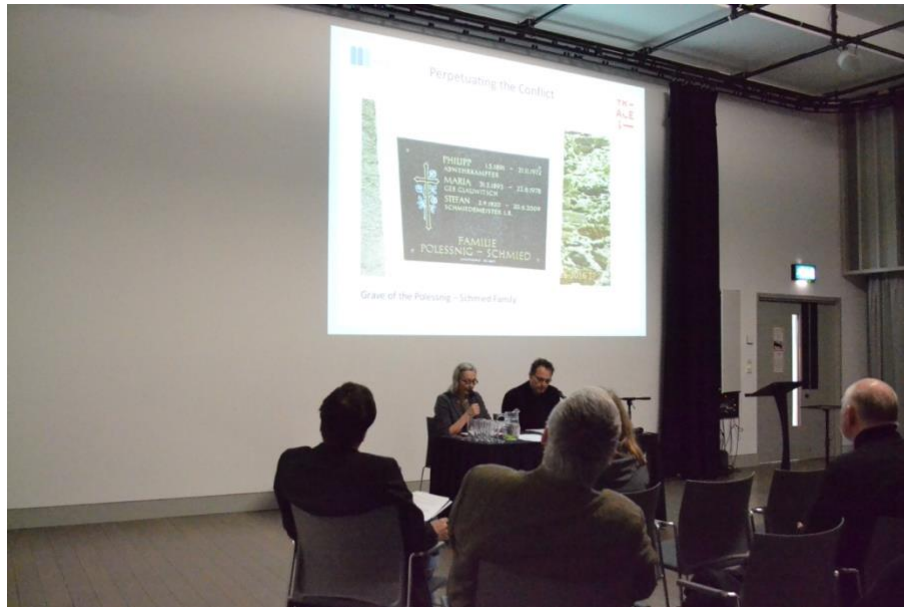
4:20 pm 4.30 pm | Questions, comments

4:30 pm 4:50 pm | BREAK

4:50 pm | Keynote: “The Social Value of Art: Drawing from Dewey”, Mary Jane Jacob

5:50 pm | Questions, comments 6:30 pm | End of conference

Transmitting Contentious Cultural Heritages with the Arts
www.traces.polimi.it



Marion Hamm / Klaus Schönberger

TRACES: An Agonistic Approach to Contentious Cultural Heritage

Heritage is widely regarded as a vehicle for building unified identities. However, often heritage is in itself contentious. It carries contradictory memories of historical trauma, and often extrapolates political conflicts of the past into the present. The uncertain future of the site of Maze / Long Kesh prison illustrates this process. Are there ways out of the impasse? Drawing on political theorist Chantal Mouffe, TRACES proposes an agonistic approach to contentious cultural heritage. Taking an artistic perspective, the project seeks to enable communication between opposing groups by opening an agonistic space, where different positions can be acknowledged with respect for divergent experiences, emotions and political backgrounds. This proposal does not equal an end to conflict. Rather, an agonistic approach to contentious heritage allows for respectful awareness of all positions involved, and opens up the possibility not to overcome contention, but to deal with it in bearable, even positive ways. Could this open a new way of communicating and memorizing also in the case of Maze / Long Kesh?

Marion Hamm is a cultural anthropologist, sociologist and ethnographer at the Universitaet Klagenfurt and a fellow at the Centre of Digital Anthropology at University College London. As TRACES Principal Investigator she works on contentious heritage practices in the Alps-Adriatic and London.

Klaus Schönberger is Professor of Cultural Anthropology and Chair of the Institut für Kulturanalyse at Universitaet Klagenfurt. He is TRACES Project Coordinator and scholar responsible for the research field "Performing Heritage: Creative everyday practices in popular culture".



Martin Krenn, Aisling O'Beirn
Transforming Maze / Long Kesh

This conference takes place at the mid-point of the three-year art project Transforming Maze / Long Kesh. The project artistically investigates the material culture of this site, based on collaboration and dialogue. The artists Aisling O' Beirn and Martin Krenn will work with participants such as ex-prisoners, ex-prison employees and ex-visitors from Maze / Long Kesh prison to produce an art project, which opens up new perspectives from key individuals who have had direct contact with the site. The artists will conduct a series of conversations in which the participants' experience of the physical reality of the prison is central. The participants will be invited to present, discuss and create objects related to their personal experience and memory of the site using various materials and techniques that would have been used by prisoners making objects whilst in jail. Examples of techniques could include, string and panel pin art, images on handkerchiefs, objects made from lollipop sticks etc. The aim is to give insights into everyday aspects of the prison. The project will result in a traveling exhibition, displayed in various public locations, as well as a publication. The exhibition and book will feature images of artefacts from the jail, alongside any new objects created through the project. The project will reveal physical traces of the material culture of Maze / Long Kesh.

Martin Krenn, born 1970, is an artist, filmmaker and lecturer at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna, Austria. He graduated in Electronic Music at the University of Music and Performing Arts, Vienna, in 1996 and holds a M.A. from the University of Applied Arts, Vienna, since 1997. He was awarded a Ph.D. by Ulster University in 2016. Krenn has had numerous international exhibitions. His work is represented by Gallery Zimmermann Kratochwill, Graz. www.martinkrenn.net

Aisling O' Beirn's sculptural work explores space as a physical structure and political entity by making and animating objects relating to observed and theoretical structures being studied by contemporary astronomers and physicists. Much of her recent research, facilitated by Armagh Observatory is an extension of previous work on the relationship between the politics of place uncovering the tensions between disparate forms of official and of unofficial information. Documentation can be seen on www.aislingobeirn.com



Laura McAtackney

Some thoughts on the material culture of imprisonment at Long Kesh / Maze

Studies of the material culture of political imprisonment during the Northern Irish Troubles, where they exist, have hitherto concentrated on prisoner self-expression – especially through the creation of contraband and handicrafts or prison art - or the presencing of prison protests in external communities through wall murals. Of less aesthetic value, but highly significant as a both a signifier of compliance / dissent and criminal / political status, are the relationships between prisoners and prison-issue artefacts. From mattresses and blankets, to bed frames, chairs and desks, contemporary prison records and photographs - as well as later oral testimonies - reveal the relationship between prisoner and official material culture was complicated, context- specific and often contested. This paper will discuss various forms of creativity in prisons during the Troubles: the relationship between prison art and the creative reuse of prison-issue artefacts. It will explore how the use, treatment, acceptance and / or rejection of these artefacts have important stories to tell and are central to understanding the often overlooked roles of materials in prison power relations. Lastly, this paper will suggest these materials need to be considered for retention to ensure our narratives of the Troubles contain nuances that documentary traces often fail to reveal.

Laura McAtackney is an Associate Professor in Sustainable Heritage Management at Aarhus University in Denmark. An archaeologist by training she has a specialism in exploring prisons as archaeological and heritage sites, especially experiences of political imprisonment in Ireland.

Panellist Tom Hartley is a historian and Irish Republican politician interested in archiving artefacts from the past.

Panellist Karen Logan is Project Curator for 'Collecting the Troubles and Beyond', Ulster Museum, Belfast.



Christina Varvia
The Architecture of Memory

In April 2016, Amnesty International and Forensic Architecture travelled to Istanbul to meet five survivors from Saydnaya Prison, of Syria. In recent years, no journalists or monitoring groups which report publicly have been able to visit the prison or speak with prisoners. As there are no images of Saydnaya the researchers were dependent on the memories of survivors to recreate what is happening inside. Using architectural and acoustic modelling, the researchers helped witnesses reconstruct the architecture of the prison and their experiences of detention. The former detainees described the cells and other areas of the prison, including stairwells, corridors, moving doors and windows, to an architect working with 3D modelling software. The witnesses added objects they remembered, from torture tools to blankets and furniture, to areas where they recalled them being used. The recollections sparked more memories as the model developed and the architecture of the building became a mnemonic device through which further testimony could be retrieved. With next to no daylight, in particular in the solitary cells underground, and a violent regime of silence, the prisoners in Saydnaya develop an acute experience of sound. To capture these auditory memories, researchers also developed techniques to solicit “ear-witness testimony” and reconstruct the prison’s architecture through sound.

This presentation will focus on the methodologies developed by Forensic Architecture for the Saydnaya project, as well as other architectural techniques used to shed lights in conflicts throughout the world. Forensic Architecture is a research agency, based at Goldsmiths University of London, that undertakes research, gathers and presents spatial analysis in legal and political forums.

Christina Varvia is an architect, researcher and the research coordinator at Forensic Architecture. She has previously worked for architecture and construction practices and been a member of the AA School of Architecture and the Unknown Fields Division. Christina joined the Forensic Architecture team in 2014, and is currently developing methodologies and undertakes analysis through architecture and time based media.



Mary Jane Jacob

The Social Value of Art: Drawing from Dewey

In this talk Mary Jane Jacob will examine the value of art as a social practice. Drawing upon ideas expressed a century ago by American philosopher John Dewey, she will reveal how art plays a role in both individual and social development that is necessary for a democratic society to exist. And like Dewey, for whom theory and practice knew no separation, Jacob will ground this point in the work of artists and her own curatorial practice, exposing the nuanced way in which art is both created and experienced, and how it can contribute to social change. In doing so, this presentation aims to offer some insights into the potential that awaits Krenn's and O'Beirn's Maze / Long Kesh project.

In the early nineties Mary Jane Jacob pioneered public, site-specific, and socially engaged art, followed by five anthologies over the last dozen years, ranging from Buddha Mind in Contemporary Art to the Chicago Social Practice History Series. Her new book, Dewey for Artists, will be published by the University of Chicago Press in 2018. Professor at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, she also directs the School's Institute for Curatorial Research and Practice.