



**«Una memoria fatta d'ombra e di pietra».
Conflitti, rovine, conservazione, processi sociali**

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La società contemporanea è stata segnata da numerosi eventi traumatici che, nel tempo, ne hanno modificato fortemente la nozione di memoria. Dalla Prima Guerra Mondiale alla Shoah, dalla bomba atomica ai genocidi delle guerre nei Balcani, passando attraverso i profondi mutamenti socio-politici della seconda metà del secolo scorso, la memoria collettiva ha infatti assunto la forma di un inevitabile conflitto tra "ricordo" e "oblio", tra commemorazione di un evento e cancellazione di un passato spesso controverso.

Tale conflittualità, in architettura, si rispecchia nel tema delle rovine: la società è infatti chiamata a interrogarsi sul destino delle ferite inflitte dalle guerre ed altri eventi traumatici, a luoghi, edifici e monumenti. Al di là dell'ampio ventaglio di opzioni operative, da sempre studiate nel campo del restauro architettonico, e che vanno dal ripristino, alla costruzione di nuove architetture, fino alla conservazione delle rovine in forma di memoriale, il saggio si sofferma sulle implicazioni sociali e politiche dei due termini del conflitto: l'accettazione o la rimozione del trauma subito.

Guardando ad alcuni esempi europei, il saggio indaga il rapporto tra memoria, luoghi e processi sociali, confrontando quelle esperienze rivolte a selezionare drasticamente le tracce di quegli eventi traumatici, con altre che, orientate a preservare tali segni, sperimentano ciò che l'autore definisce una "democrazia della memoria".

«A Memory of Shadows and of Stone».

Traumatic Ruins, Conservation, Social Processes

Nino Sulpharo

Like you, I too, tried to struggle with
all my might against forgetting.
Like you, I forgot. Like you, I desired
to have an inconsolable memory,
a memory of shadows and of stone.
Why deny the obvious necessity
of remembering?

Hiroshima Mon Amour (A. Resnais 1959)

In the famous *nouvelle vague* film, *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, by Alain Resnais, after the atrocious destruction of the city, caused by the atomic bombing in August 1945, the new Hiroshima appears as a city rebuilt with a totally normal face¹. However, as Michael S. Roth has observed, the presence of that traumatic event is constantly perceivable in the background of the film: «what kind of buildings could possibly cover the scars of the past without being scars themselves?»². Therefore, how to live under the burden of so terrible a trauma? The film seems to answer that it is only through the acceptance of the «power of forgetting» that it is possible «to live with (and with losing)» the past³.

This cinematographic suggestion introduces some features, which are particularly significant in the contemporary age. First of all, we should highlight how the controversy between remembering and

1. *Hiroshima Mon Amour* is a 1959 drama film directed by the French film director Alain Resnais, with the screenplay by Marguerite Duras. It concerns a series of conversations between a French-Japanese couple about memory and forgetfulness. The early part of the film recounts the effects of the atomic bomb on August 6, 1945, in the style of the documentary. Alain Resnais was not new to the theme of traumatic memory, as he had already directed *Nuit at Bouillard (Night and Fog)* in 1955, a film to mark the tenth anniversary of the liberation of the concentration camps; see ROTH 1995, pp. 91-101.

2. *Ivi*, p. 95.

3. *Ivi*, p. 99.

forgetting is a central issue on the contemporary socio-cultural scene. In the opinion of several scholars, the 20th century was the «century of memory»⁴, but the persistence of the theme of memory till today, is sufficient to define our society as being affected by a memory-mania⁵. However, as has been recently argued, the relationship of current society with its past seems more based on the “thought” of memory than on memory in itself⁶, suggesting how the contemporary age is characterized by both an amnesiac and hyperthymestic condition⁷. Considering the scars caused by many terrible traumatic events, such as the atomic bomb, the Holocaust, genocides, massacres, and also deep socio-economic transformations, the notion of memory in the contemporary age is nearly always the result of a conflict between the conservation of some elements of the past and the oblivion of others.

Coming back to *Hiroshima*, the film suggests the constant necessity to ponder the burden of these traumatic events by contemporary man, both at a tangible and intangible level. “Ruins” seems to be, in fact, the term that best describes the existential condition of places and people: a vast number of materially devastated places, and psychologically injured people by the horror of war, hanging in the balance of commemorating or removing, remembering or forgetting, past or future⁸. In a famous sequence in the film, the camera focuses on the ruin of *Hiroshima-ken Sangyo Shoreikan* (the Hiroshima Prefectural Industrial Promotional Hall), preserved exactly as it was after the devastation (figg. 1-3)⁹. The disaster was so terrible that there was no choice but to rebuild; however, the government decided to leave a physical trace of the devastation and to transform it into the *Genbaku Dome* (Hiroshima Peace Memorial), a memorial of that terrible trauma. Inevitably the ruin becomes the destination of the “Atomic tour”, and tourists move around it as in any vacation destination (figg. 4-6). This has an

4. GRANDE 2001, p. 68.

5. Andreas Huyssen uses the terms «hypertrophy of memory» and «culture of memory» to point out the obsessions with memory and the past of the latest *fin de siècle*; HUYSSSEN 2003, p. 3 and pp. 15-16. Jay M. Winter speaks about «memory boom», with regard to «the efflorescence of interest in the interest of memory inside the academy and beyond it – in terms of a wide array of collective meditations on war and on the victims of war»; WINTER 2006, p. 1.

6. VIOLI 2014, pp. 8-10.

7. Hyperthymesia is a syndrome consisting in maintaining an exceptional memory for events in their personal pasts. People who experience hyperthymesia have a superior ability to recall details of autobiographical events, and also to spend a large amount of time thinking about their personal pasts; see PARKER 2006, pp. 35-49. Although the syndrome was only described in 2006, Jorge Louis Borges’s short fiction *Funes the Memorious* tells the story of an Uruguayan peasant who cannot forget a single thing he sees or hears; BORGES 1961. See also ROSSI 1991.

8. ‘Ruins’ have recently been the subject of many studies, which have analyzed it in its varying tangible and intangible aspects and implications. Just to mention a few examples see OTERI 2009, TORTORA 2006, AUGÈ 2004, WOODWARD 2001, CASSANI 1996.

9. BEVAN 2006, p. 191; ERCOLINO 2006, pp. 151-152.



Clockwise from top left, figures 1-6. Some screenshots from the film *Hiroshima mon amour* (A. Resnais, 1959).

important meaning as it involves a traumatic event, ruin and collective memory: the ruin or the place of a tragedy is no longer merely a trace of a terrible past but, through a resemantization process, it becomes a sign, which is transmittable to the future. This introduces other questions to the issue of traumatic ruin: what are the social implications of “memorializing” the trauma? Who decides what kind of traces of the past to deliver to the future? What is the role of conservation and architectural restoration in these processes?

The present paper, obviously, has no intention of trying to give an answer to these questions. Its aim is only to reflect on them, as all the questions are strictly correlated to the issue of architectural and urban heritage and their conservation strategies. Thus, reflection focuses on possible practices in the processes of the representation of the past, with special regard to the relationship between places/buildings, memory and social processes. In particular, the paper deals with the consequences of practices involving a reinterpretation of the past and, practices aimed at leaving the signs of traumatic events visible on a building, a monument or a place: practices which, as they involve oblivion and remembrance, describe the contemporary condition of memory. A memory, as the protagonist of *Hiroshima Mon Amour* says, «of shadows and of stone»¹⁰.

Spatializing memory

Fundamentally, in a general and operative perspective, the main question posed after a traumatic event that results in violent destruction is “what to do with the ruins?”. The theme, it is true, has been part of the debate on post-war reconstructions in Europe since the First World War. However, it has focused prevalently on the coexistence of past and future, with regard to constructing new buildings within historical centres, and on the several options of curing the hurt caused by the bombings. These options include producing an exact replica of a damaged building, following the *com’era dov’era* (as it was, where it was) practice, or constructing a new building, either contemporary or “critical reconstruction” based, or – in very rare cases – preserving the “scars” of a traumatic event, letting the ruins and the signs be shown as memorials in themselves¹¹. Beyond a critical evaluation on each one of these practices, the options reflect, in themselves, the range of psychological ways of dealing with the signs or the effects of a traumatic event: remove the trauma either by forgetting it or facing it.

10. The quotations from the screenplay have been transcribed directly from the English version of the film by the author.

11. The bibliography regarding this argument, as is known, is very rich; just to mention the more recent studies, see CASIELLO 2011 and DE STEFANI 2011.

This psychological perspective only started in 1978, when Roberto Pane pointed out the relationship between architectural restoration and psychoanalysis. The scholar argued that “psychological instance” must be taken into consideration, along with Brandi’s aesthetic and historical instances, as psychological life is subordinate to the processes of sorting out past events¹².

After Pane’s theory, nothing but the concept of physical rebuilding as psychological compensation has been proposed in the field of architectural restoration, as a reflection on “traumatic ruins”¹³. On the other hand, since the 1990s, some studies in the field of social sciences (prevalently sociology and semiotics), have focused interest on analysis of the processes of “spatialization” of traumatic memories. These studies investigate the ways in which a trauma can be physically represented and externalized through a memorial or a monument (but also through collective events, script and arts), and the social implications of these practices¹⁴.

The spatializing processes of the collective memory by a society is usually carried out by the erection of monuments and war memorials after a dramatic event, with the aim to commemorate, for example, the war dead or victims of a massacre¹⁵. This is the most traditional, common way to remember a war or a traumatic event, and was introduced after the First World War¹⁶. This certainly represented the first real traumatic event of the contemporary age: because of the change in armaments, destruction began to take the form that only a natural disaster could generate up to that time. Thus, according to some scholars, such as the sociologist Alessandro Cavalli, the true origin of the question of memory, in a collective perspective, is recognized as being rooted in the aftermath of the Great War, when

12. PANE 1978; GALLI 1995. In that period, psychologists developed the idea that preserving the signs of the past could be an alternative way for people in “constructing future”; see OTERI 2009, p. 19 and CAROTENUTO 1978.

13. The social and psychoanalytic aspects of the theme end up being a sort of alibi for post-war reconstruction: the replica of a vanished past is legitimized and seen as a psychological compensation, due to the presence of a traumatized community. Paolo Marconi has underlined how, in this perspective, reconstruction becomes a sort of “mourning ceremony” aimed at removing sorrow; MARCONI 1999, p.127. About this argument see also BEVAN 2006, p. 176 and ERCOLINO 2006, pp. 155-156.

14. TOTA 2001, p. 32. Reflection on this theme became particularly accurate in that period because of the deep social and geopolitical changes which occurred, such as the fall of the Soviet bloc or the unification of Western European countries, but especially as a consequence of processing tragic, problematic memories, such as the Holocaust, the genocides during the Balkans wars and the victims of terrorism; GRANDE 2001, p.73; HUYSEN 2003, pp. 11-16.

15. VIOLI 2009, p. 4. In the rich bibliography on the theme of war memorials, see LABANCA 2010 and PIRAZZOLI 2010.

16. We may underline how interest in the theme of memory had already emerged in a general perspective at the end of the 19th century, when some great studies by Sigmund Freud and Henri Bergson appeared; we have to mention also Marcel Proust, James Joyce and Italo Svevo, that placed the theme of memory in the heart of their literary works. The emergence of interest in those years is attributable to the upheaval caused by the transition from traditional, rural and authoritarian societies, to modern, urban industrial and democratic societies; GRANDE 2001, pp. 68-69.

a problematic reflection on the way of remembering commenced¹⁷. This led to the first spatializing process of collective traumatic memory, represented by the erection of impressive war memorials, often having a clear political aim, and which continued until the Second World War.

Since 1945, after the horrors of the *Shoah* and the atomic bomb, these memory strategies were no longer sufficient given the complexity of the events, and, along with the transformation of the perception of memory, made the monumental form inadequate¹⁸. A monument, generally, does not establish a strong, direct relationship between a traumatic event, place and local community: as famously noted by Robert Musil, it ends up being invisible to the human eye. It happens, especially in an urban context, where the surrounding urban-scape absorbs the memorials, which become too “familiar” to the inhabitants. According to Peter Carrier, this aspect of “invisibility” of monuments depends also on the fact that the monumental genre has remained relatively unchanged over the ages, while human perception and communication have altered dramatically¹⁹.

In the meanwhile, the places of traumatic events had been transformed over time into “spatial metaphors of memory”, becoming the physical holders of collective memories. In the 1980s, the French historian Pierre Nora coined the term *lieux de mémoire* (realms of memory) to describe this phenomenon, based on the relationship between places and collective identities of a country²⁰. Because the members of a society cannot retain all memories on a daily basis, *lieux de mémoire* replace the disappearance of diverse memories and provide comfort to a society that needs to have its past represented in fixed symbols. Thus, a realm of memory can be a space, a monument or a specific place where historic events, including traumatic events, having left visible traces, are transformed into a symbol of collective memory. Traces of wars, represent the idea of *lieux de mémoire* well: a heritage that is difficult to deal with and to engage with, as it is related to controversial and traumatic memories and, at the same time, to the theme of the identity of a society²¹.

It is a field of studies that evidently touches the field of conservation and restoration, which, for its theoretical foundation, must deal with inheritance of the past, both in the case of positive or controversial memories. As Robert Bevan has observed, the «materiality of the trace» has become crucial to history and memory in the contemporary age, explaining why architecture – a material

17. TOTA 2001, pp. 30-31.

18. On this argument see PIRAZZOLI 2011 and CARRIER 2005.

19. CARRIER 2005, pp. 15-16.

20. NORA 1984.

21. PIRAZZOLI 2011.

reminder *sine qua non* – has become an ever more prevalent target of wars and internal conflict, but also why the destiny of post-war traumatic ruins is so significant²².

The sociologist Paolo Jedlowski has argued how restoration is the subject that best represents the relationship between people and its past, since the early 20th century²³. Practices generally connected with it (conservation, demolition, reconstruction *a l'identique*, etc.), are fully related to the relationship between remembrance and oblivion, and reveal the ways in which a society deals with its memory. For this reason, we can truly consider the field of architectural conservation and restoration as a fundamental instrument in the spatializing of memory processes.

Francesco Mazzucchelli, in a study on the “sense of the places” in the ex-Yugoslavian area, after the Balkans war, has argued that architectural restoration can be considered as a practice of «re-writing, manipulation and cancellation of spatial memory traces»²⁴. It is a process that always entails transformation of the identity of place, in the aim to “construct” a memory: conservation, reconstruction, demolition, restoration are seen as a re-writing practice of the urban “text”. Beyond the questionable idea of considering so varying practices as some options of the same subject, this semiotic perspective is interesting as it correlates traumatic ruins, conservation strategies and social processes. The intervention on a traumatic ruin acquires the impulse of a *mémoire volontaire* (intentional memory) of a society, as it is a selection of what elements to remember and what to forget²⁵.

We should underline that dealing with traumatic ruins and damaged buildings, does not necessarily imply a physical transformation. Salvatore Boscarino remarked on how the solution to managing traumatic event damages always had two perspectives²⁶. One foresees reconstruction, showing the history of what stood there, with both its finery and damage; it is based on conservation ideology and is strongly linked to respect for the authenticity of a building or an artefact, above everything else. The second option is more operative, as it is based on producing an exact replica of a damaged building. These circumstances are, in themselves, clear and widely investigated; however, Boscarino adds an important element to the discourse, when he is resigned to the fact that the first option is almost

22. BEVAN 2006, p. 16.

23. JEDLOWSKI 2001.

24. MAZZUCHELLI 2010, p. 46.

25. The term *mémoire volontaire* is by Jan Assmann; *ivi*, p. 56.

26. BOSCARINO 1992, p. 14. The scholar referred to interventions following a natural disaster; however, his reflections can assume general value in the field of traumatic ruins.

always a loser²⁷. This consideration underlines how the social implication of a traumatic event may have an inevitable impact on preservation of heritage strategies.

(Re)building the past

We can list a series of cases in which the initial intent to preserve traces of a disaster as a memorial has had to surrender to the will for the reconstruction of a vanished past²⁸. Just to mention a very recent example, we can refer to the Sarajevo National Library, built in 1896 as the Sarajevo City Hall, and shelled and burned on the night of 25 August 1992 by Serbian forces besieging the city. The building was left in ruins and a plaque reads «Don't forget: remember and warn!». However, a few years later, a reconstruction *a l'identique* project started and the *Vijecnica* – the original name of the city hall – was reopened in May 2014²⁹ (figg. 7-9). The opening ceremony marked the centenary of the First World War, which was triggered by the assassination of Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand³⁰. Quite a memory paradox: reconstruction of a building destroyed during the Bosnian war aimed at remembering a war which had taken place one hundred years before.

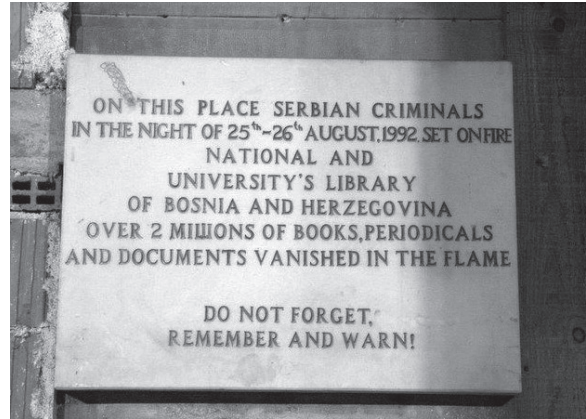
In this perspective, we can observe how, in some cases, the will to rebuild passes beyond the mere erasure of a traumatic event, going toward the elimination of an entire period. Recently, in Berlin, two cases lead us to reflect on this issue. Heavily damaged by Allied bombing in the Second World War, although possible to repair at great expense, the *Berliner Stadtschloss* (Berliner City Palace), a baroque style construction built between the 15th and 18th century, was demolished in 1950 by the German

27. *Ibidem*.

28. One of the most resonant examples is the proposed/supposed reconstruction of the Bamiyan's Buddhas in Afghanistan, destroyed by the Taliban in 2001. In the light of its statutory principles, based on respect of authenticity, UNESCO has always declared that any attempt to rebuild the two statues would be wrong and would cause the removal of the Bamiyan site from the World Heritage list. However, according to some press agencies, during 2014, a German archaeological team started to reconstruct one of the two Bhuddas; see: <http://in.reuters.com/article/2014/02/12/afghanistan-buddhas-idINDEEA1B0B620140212> and <http://www.theartnewspaper.com/articles/Unesco-stops-unauthorised-reconstruction-of-Bamiyan-Buddhas/31660> (online November 7, 2014). On the destruction and debate about the Bamiyan's Buddhas restoring or reconstruction see ERCOLINO 2006, p. 157; BEVAN 2006, pp. 161-163.

29. MAZZUCHELLI 2010, pp. 200-201.

30. Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne in Vienna, attended a reception at *Vijecnica* on June 28, 1914, after surviving a failed assassination attempt. Just after leaving, he and his wife were shot dead in their open car by Serb assassin Gavrilo Princip; see <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-27353635> (online November 7, 2014).



Clockwise from top left, figure 7. Sarajevo National Library after the Serbian forces bombing in 1992 (source: www.dw.de); figure 8. The plaque posed in the ruins of Library (source: www.offtodubrovnik.wordpress.com); figure 9. The invitation to the opening ceremony of the Sarajevo National Library after restoration in 2014 by United States Agency for International Development (source: www.sarajevotimes.com).



From left, figure 10. The Berliner *Schloss* after bombing in 1945 (source: www.laits.utexas.edu); figure 11. The Berliner *Schloss* after the reconstruction in 2015 (source: www.berlin-schloss.de).



From left, figure 12. *Garnisonkirche* in Potsdam after the Second World War (Bundesarchiv, Bild 170-410 /Max Baur / CC-BY-SA); figure 13. Recent rebuilt of a piece of *Garnisonkirche* in Potsdam (photo by F. Murè).

Democratic Republic authorities³¹. In 1976, a large modernist building was built, the *Palast der Republik* (Palace of the Republic), occupying most of the site of the former *Stadtschloss*. In 2003, the Federal Parliament took the decision to demolish the GDR building, as it was a symbol of a controversial and not well-accepted period of German history, followed by the idea to rebuild the baroque City Palace³². There were also many Germans who opposed this proposal: some advocated the retention of the *Palast der Republik* on the grounds that it was itself of historical significance, while others argued that the area should become a public park. Opponents of the project argued that a new building would be a pastiche of former architectural styles, would be an unwelcome symbol of Germany's imperial past, and would be unacceptably expensive for no definite economic benefit. They also argued that it would be impossible to accurately reconstruct the interior of the building, since neither detailed plans nor the necessary craft skills are available. Others disputed this, claiming that sufficient photographic documentation of the interior existed when it was converted to a museum, following 1918, and that nearly all detailed plans of its interior and exterior construction and decoration have survived. In view of the opposition, most importantly the psychological and political objections, but also the high cost, successive German governments declined to commit themselves to the project. In 2007, the *Bundestag* (the German parliament) made a definitive decision regarding the reconstruction, with a compromise: three façades of the palace were to be rebuilt, but the interior would be a postmodern structure to serve as a cultural-political forum³³ (figg. 10-11).

Another quite similar event, in which the will to rebuild “won” over the preservation of traumatic ruins, is represented by the *Garrison Kirche* (Garrison Church) in Potsdam. The church, an 18th-century baroque building (fig. 12), like the City Palace of Berlin, was damaged by British air raids in 1945 and demolished in 1968 by the German Democratic Republic, being considered a “Nazi” church³⁴. In March 1933, in fact, on the so-called “Day of Potsdam”, Garrison Church was the scene of Hitler's legitimization by the Prussian upper class in his rise to power. Thus, the demolition started by the war and completed by the communist regime, left a void, a “black hole” in which the past is represented by its physical absence³⁵. Eight decades on, the government, the Potsdam city government and Germany's Protestant

31. BORGESSE 2008; CIPOLLINI 2006.

32. On the will to reconstruct the Baroque German context, see the case of Dresda in PRETELLI 2011.

33. Works on the Huboldtforum, as the new building will be called, has been delayed until 2019 due to German government budget cuts; see <http://berliner-schloss.de/>.

34. See <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-29141925> (online November 7, 2014).

35. The term «black hole» has been used by Salvatore Boscarino to indicate a «negative spatial memory of a trauma»; BOSCARINO 1992. On this argument, see also TRIGG 2009, pp. 95-98.

Church have all thrown their weight behind the reconstruction. The new building is intended to help restore Potsdam's architectural integrity and become a symbol of reconciliation³⁶ (fig. 13).

These two cases show that issues regarding a controversial period, or a not totally shared vision of history, can imply some ideological or political choices: a selection – intentional or not – of what past to remember. Thus, as we have seen, managing the burden of a ruin, can lead to several options. But who is responsible for these options? Who decides what to do? Who decides the “moral” of the story?³⁷

Generally, there is rarely negotiation between the many actors (inhabitants, technicians, academics, government, sponsors, etc.) or a participatory planning process, as governments tend to consider the theme of collective memory and past in general, as a part of their cultural policies. Thus, government and cultural institutions – what is usually called the “international community” – tend to impose a model of representation of the past of a country³⁸.

Using memories of war by governments in order to preserve the Establishment is quite commonplace, both in Western and Middle Eastern countries. However, in the Middle East, national/territorial conflicts are often submitted to a rereading in terms of religious tradition, that transforms a war into a “Holy war” and, consequently, the war dead into martyrs. One of the most common strategies aimed at “spatializing” this practice consists in transforming battlefields and places involved in conflicts into realms of memory where national identity can be reconstructed through symbolic apparatus, which reinforce and incite individual memory and activate a questionable collective narrative³⁹.

As is well known, the Sarajevo's National Library, with Mostar bridge and the historical centre of Dubrovnik, represent only some of the most resonant cases of destruction/reconstruction operations in the Balkans after the 1990s wars⁴⁰. The conflicts in Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo destroyed nearly 75% of the heritage of the area and provoked a true cultural disaster for all the communities. Consequently, for the international community, heritage reconstruction has become a principle and a priority in managing post-war cultural policies in the Balkans⁴¹. Beyond operative

36. See <http://garnisonkirche-potsdam.de/>.

37. PRETELLI 2011 p. 21.

38. GRANDE 2001, p. 190.

39. On these arguments, see KHOSRONEJAD 2013 and HAUGBØLLE 2010. On the role of war spaces in collective memory producing processes, see PASTORI 2008.

40. On the case of Mostar see MAZZUCHELLI 2010, pp. 245-301; BEVAN 2006, pp. 25-26 and p. 177. On Dubrovnik, see MAZZUCHELLI pp. 307-310.

41. The uniqueness of the Balkans case study lies in the fact that policies on the reconstruction of collective memory of

procedures, aimed at rebuilding all the damaged monuments, the main intent of several organizations, such as the UN, UNESCO, EU and European Council, has been the creation of a collective memory shared by all the ethnic communities. The key concept of this cultural policy is to enhance the interpretation of Yugoslavian history as a multicultural history. Beyond the obviously positive purposes and the concrete peacemaker effects of the operation, this «invention of a tradition» – to mention a famous concept by Eric Hobsbawm⁴² – assumes the risk of being a dangerous instrument of propaganda in itself and, obviously, no longer a cultural strategy. In the Balkans, the reconstruction of mosques, churches and cathedrals became the first and main instrument in the international community's policies towards promotion of reconciliation of multiethnic communities in the area; however, the fact that leading Muslim countries like Turkey, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia and Jordan appeared as the main “political” sponsors of the restoration of mosques, while the reconstruction of churches was usually supported by European governments like Italy and Greece, triggered much speculation on politicization of the process and national governments' cultural diplomacy targeting purely political goals⁴³.

The Balkan example, is not, obviously an isolated case of political use of the past. The geographic spread of “culture of memory” is as wide as the political uses of memory are varied, ranging from a mobilization of mythic pasts to support aggressively chauvinist or fundamentalist politics to attempts to create public spheres of “real” memory that will counter the politics of forgetting, pursued by post dictatorship regimes also through reconciliation⁴⁴. We can mention, as examples, the *Program of recreation of Ukraine history and culture*, aimed at recovering the Cossack identity through the reconstruction of the most relevant national monuments, or the common reconstruction of orthodox churches in Russia, after their destruction during the Stalin regime⁴⁵.

In some cases, the new building option is preferable to the philological reconstruction one. In this case, the remains of a traumatic past can be incorporated into the new building, with the aim to retain the sense of palimpsest. However, this practice is not always effective in enhancing the sense of the memory. In Berlin, the construction of the *Sony Center Building* complex in *Potsdamer Platz* shows how remains are often a ‘constraint’ to design planning and a negative symbol for investors. Practically empty since the destruction of the Second World War, after the fall of the Wall, *Potsdamer*

multicultural coexistence were initiated and implemented by international rather than national actors; KOSTADINOVA 2011, p. 27. On the international community's intervention in protecting heritage, see MAINETTI 2007.

42. HOBBSAWM 1983.

43. KOSTADINOVA 2011, pp. 2-4.

44. HUYSEN 2003, p. 15.

45. ERCOLINO 2006, p. 148.



KAISERSAAL

KAISERSAAL
RESTAURANT & BAR



On the previous page, figure 14. Berlin.
Remains of the *Kaisersaal* incorporated in
Sony Center Complex Buildings
(photo by F. Murè).

On this page, figure 15. Berlin. The remains of
the *Kaisersaal* exposed as wares
(photo by F. Murè).

Platz became an attractive location for foreign investors⁴⁶. There were several remains of the Wall and of the ex Hotel Esplanade in the area; these ruins were protected by the law on monuments and so, when the Sony Group invested in a parcel of the area, their project had to incorporate these ruins into the new building⁴⁷. The hotel had been reduced to merely a few fragments during the bombing of the Second World War: only some halls, such as the *Kaisersaal*, remained in the square as an archaeological ruin until 1996, when the construction of the Sony Center Complex Buildings started. Initially, the designer Helmuth Jahn had opted for incorporating part of the ruins of the hotel under a glass façade and, at the same time, for the demolition of most of the rest; then, after the objection of public opinion, demolition was avoided but, as a “brilliant” compromise, the entire *Kaisersaal* was moved 75 meters away, on a track, using an expensive hydraulic system; other remains, including the Wall, were destroyed⁴⁸. Now these fragments, more than being on display, under glass, as an important archaeological find, seem to be exposed as wares behind a window shop (figg. 14-15).

46. The site, in the early 20th century, was a bustling city centre; most of the buildings were destroyed or damaged during the Second World War. From 1961 on, most of the area became part of the so called No Man’s Land of the Berlin Wall, resulting in the destruction of the remaining buildings; on this argument see DE MARTINO 2011 and KOSSEL 2006.

47. KOSSEL 2006, p. 197.

48. *Ivi*, pp. 208-210.



Figure 16. Oradour-sur-Glane (France).
A plaque at the entrance of the village
(source: www.oradour.info).

Preserving the present: toward a “democracy of memory”

The option of letting all the phases of a building be shown – including the effects of a traumatic event – is maybe a loser’s practice – to recall what Boscarino said – because of the objective difficulty in planning a “time after”, preserving also the signs of the destruction⁴⁹. As Christopher Woodward has noted, with a suggestive and evocative quotation by Thomas Stearns Eliot, it should be like «Dust in the air suspended/Marks the place where the story ended»⁵⁰.

This is an image that only a “premature ruin” can evoke⁵¹: an impression like the one evoked by visiting the French village of *Oradour-sur-Glane*, which has been maintained exactly in the “time after” the destruction by the Nazis during the Second World War⁵². At the entrance of the village, unlike at Sarajevo’s National Library, there are still several plaques and signs that exhort visitors to be silent and remember, as the site has become a monument against all wars and totalitarianism (fig. 16-17).

49. BOSCARINO 1992, p. 14.

50. WOODWARD 2001, pp. 188-189. The verse is taken from the poem *Little Gidding* by Thomas Stearns Eliot (1942).

51. OTERI 2009, p. 39. There are very few cases in which, in the aftermath of the war, traumatic ruins are preserved in their incompleteness; just to mention some examples, the Church of the Remembrance in Berlin or the Saint Michael Cathedral in Coventry, are single cases; RUSSO 2011, pp. 127-128. See also DE MARTINO 2011 and PANE 2011.

52. OTERI 2009, p. 44.



Figure 17. Oradour-sur-Glane (France). View of the village (photo by A. Hudghton, July 2007 - Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license).

In this perspective, the concept of monument, intentional or not, passes from remembrance of a single event to the celebration of a place permeated by all historical events which have happened over the time; a place that, in the sociological view, becomes a *lieux de mémoire*. This process can be assimilated to what modern conservation philosophy has searched for, for long time, in the field of stratification of physical and symbolic signs over a building: a place can be a palimpsest of signs and traces which testify the flow of time.

However, in operative terms, this orientation acquires the nature of a selection of memories, an accurate plan in which someone decides which signs can contribute to the palimpsest. In this sense, we should underline how, adopting the palimpsest form is not necessarily a *naïve* practice: like every practice regarding spatializing processes of memory, it entails voluntary activity and, generally, a compromise between remembrance and oblivion. It is a “project” to use a single word. However, it is only through complete respect for each phase, sign or trace, that it will be possible to guarantee a correct representation of the past. Then, collective memory processes will do the rest, choosing for remembrance or oblivion, or for interpretation of the past, which people best identify with.

Sometimes only a few elements are necessary to re-activate the collective memory of a community. The people of Nantes, in France, in this sense, since 1990s, have actively sought to face their unpleasant history regarding slavery, memorializing the *Quai de la Fosse*, a wharf that occupies the right bank of the Loire river, as the point of departure for slave trading expeditions, in the 18th century⁵³. The space had been in use as an open-air car park, a triangular-shaped structure of reinforced concrete, which covered the 18th century quay wall. In this case, there was no real traumatic ruin, but certainly the site in itself represented a place of shame for Nantes, given that a good part of the city’s wealth derived from this cruel activity, widely displayed in the sumptuous palaces constructed by families engaged in the trade. The community had the option to forget this practically hidden memory; however, the inhabitants decided for the transformation of the site into a *lieux de mémoire*, a space devoted to reflection on the history of slavery, commemoration of abolition and raising awareness of the ongoing struggles against present-day forms of slavery. Thus, in 2011, the project for the *Mémorial de l’abolition de l’esclavage* (Memorial to the Abolition of Slavery) was developed⁵⁴ (figg. 18-19). The open-air car park has been transformed into a riverside walkway, with plaques embedded in the paving reporting the names of the almost two thousand expeditions of French slaves. An enormous open-air stairway

53. See <http://memorial.nantes.fr/>.

54. The 2011 project is by Krzysztof Wodiczko and Julian Bonder; see <http://www.wodiczkobonder.com/>.



From top, figures 18-19. Nantes (France).
Internal views of the *Mémorial de l'abolition de l'esclavage*
(source: www.memorial.nantes.fr).



From top, figures 20-21. Berlin. Views of Topography of Terror (photo by F. Murè).

leads to the subterranean triangular shaped passageway from the former car-park, where visitors are welcomed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Another of the most recent, emblematic examples of this approach can be considered the open-air Topography of Terror exhibition, established within the ruins of the Gestapo and SS headquarters building in Berlin, in the 1990s. It represents exactly what Nora's "realms of memory" means. Furthermore, the peculiarity of this site, in comparison with other macabre places, such as the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum or Dachau Memorial Site, consists in its city centre location and, consequently, in its preserved stratified situation. The site includes the physical traces of the excavated remains of the former architecture, along with the former *Prinz-Albrecht-Straße* (today's *Niederkirchnerstraße*) and *Wilhelmstraße*, as well as the colonnade of the former *Prinz-Albrecht-Palais*; the cellar rooms of a former SS mess hut and the remains of a prison yard wall have also been preserved. The grounds also contain the foundation remains of the Gestapo headquarters' house prison that have not been excavated and which remain as a surface monument marked by gravel; and the Berlin Wall Monument, approximately 200 meters of the Berlin Wall, that has been preserved on *Niederkirchnerstraße*⁵⁵ (figg. 20-21).

We should underline how cases like *Memòrial de l'abolition de l'esclavage* and *Topography* represent a very marginal percent of sites in which a community decides to preserve the memory of a tragic past and, at the same time, do it with particular attention, letting all historical phases of the site be shown.

Bruno Pedretti has argued that heritage and culture of conservation is based on a general promise of survival. This is the «aesthetic democracy», pursued through an aesthetic use of history which transforms «each sign in a document, each trace in a work of art, each image in a museum icon»⁵⁶. That promise, however difficult to honour, is the only instrument we have to guarantee that our selection between remembering and forgetting will not be misunderstood in the future. Future generations may reinterpret the past but they must have the necessary physical elements to ensure that each period, however, will have the same opportunity to be represented. It is a sort of "democracy of memory", to reuse the notion by Pedretti: an approach aimed at documenting each phase of history without prejudice.

55. We may underline how only the opposition of a few young activists prevented the site from being cleared for a road scheme. The site is now a museum to the victims of fascism and a «site of contemplation»; BEVAN 2006, p. 192. See <http://www.topographie.de>.

56. PEDRETTI 1997, p. 11.



On the left and on the next page, figures 22-23. *Turó de la Rovira* - Barcelona. Views of *Els Canons* area after the restoration in 2011 (photo by F. Aiello - www.francescoaiellophotographer.com).

The restoration of the area of the peaks of *Turo de la Rovira*, in Barcelona, can be seen as an example of this kind of approach¹. During the Spanish Civil War, the fascist Italian Legionary Air Force used Barcelona as its first testing ground in the brutal tactic of “carpet bombing” which eventually became routine practice in the Second World War. Eight hundred people died in the indiscriminate attack, more than a thousand were wounded and about fifty buildings were destroyed. As its only defence, the city had an extensive network of underground air raid shelters constructed by the population, and a system of anti-aircraft gun emplacements that were installed by the Republican Government. The first of these was located on the top of the *Turó de la Rovira* which, with a height of 262 metres, is the highest peak in Barcelona’s urban fabric. In the early post-war period, the remains of the military infrastructure were used to build a squatter settlement known as *Els Canons* (The Guns). Over decades of large-scale immigration of workers from other parts of Spain, and owing to lack of housing, *Els Canons* ended up with more than a hundred self-built houses. Although the inhabitants had few material resources, their resourcefulness was great and they were well organised, struggling for better

1. The project was completed in 2011 by a group composed of Jansana de la Villa, de Paauw architectes SLP, AAUP and Jordi Romero I associates SLP; see <http://aaup.cat/>.





From top, figures 24-25. *Turó de la Rovira* - Barcelona. Views of *Els Canons* area after the restoration in 2011 (photo by F. Aiello - www.francescoaiellophotographer.com).



Figure 26. *Turó de la Rovira* - Barcelona. Views of *Els Canons* area after the restoration in 2011 (photo by F. Aiello - www.francescoaiellophotographer.com).

accommodation in the future while, at the same time, equipping and improving their everyday living space as best they could. The last of these shacks were demolished shortly before the 1992 Olympic Games, leaving behind on the hill's stony ground tiled floors, fragments of stairs and remnants of masonry walls. Over the next twenty years, the hilltop, marked by the overlapping of the significant fragments of history it had accumulated, surrendered its land to clumps of shrubs, rubbish dumping and graffiti. Recent intervention has aimed to minimise the impact on the existing features of the hilltop while bringing out its different layers of meaning. The place has been transformed into a true contemporary archaeological area, combining relics of war and of twentieth-century informal urban growth² (figg. 22-26).

2. BASILIO 2013, pp. 255-257.

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