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**Heritage Traces, Differences, and Futures: New Research Approaches to Heritage and Society<sup>1</sup>**

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Which and whose pasts are preserved as heritage and which are not tells us a good deal about any particular society. This is not only about how the past is seen but also concerns who is being valued in present-day society and what is being preserved for the future. These issues, and the controversies to which they may give rise, are highly relevant in the Central European context. In the article, I first provide a short overview of some of the developments within research on heritage and society that I find especially significant and that inform my own work, giving emphasis especially to the shift towards more socially-oriented research. I then provide introductions to three ongoing research projects in which I am involved, all of which are investigating how certain pasts are being addressed in the present, and the legacies that they may leave for the future. All involve large teams of researchers, each working with practitioners, albeit in different ways, in order to both give attention to practice and, to varying extents and in various ways, to help reshape that practice in the future. The projects – in the order in which they are introduced in the article – are: (1) “Heritage Futures” – for which I especially address the Profusion theme with its research on how museums of contemporary everyday life and

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This article is based on a keynote plenary lecture given at Heritage and Society – the 4<sup>th</sup> Heritage Forum of Central Europe, Krakow, 1 June 2017. I thank Dr Robert Kusek for his encouragement and organisational work, and Professor Jacek Purchla for his warm hosting at the International Cultural Centre in Krakow. I also thank the other participants in the conference for giving me so much to think about. My more specific thanks to colleagues whose research I discuss in the article, and to the funders of that research, is to be found in subsequent footnotes, as I introduce the relevant research.

also people in their own homes select what to keep for posterity; (2) “Making Differences” – in which I look at some of the recent disputes about Berlin and Germany’s heritage, including that of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), as they are being played out in the making of the Humboldt Forum; (3) “TRACES – Transmitting Contentious Cultural Heritage with the Arts” – for which I look especially at the challenges of dealing with vernacular Holocaust art.

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Which pasts are deemed sufficiently valuable to be worth remembering for the future – which deserve a commemorative plaque or a place in a museum – is a major social question, the answer to which tells much about a particular society. Clifford Geertz famously wrote about culture as “stories people tell themselves about themselves.”<sup>2</sup> Heritage might be seen as a specific version of this: stories that people tell themselves about their pasts, and that they aim to also preserve into the future – often seeking durable, material forms, such as museums and monuments, as their means of doing so. This activity reaches temporally both backwards and forwards and is, surely, one of the most important activities of any society. It is fundamentally about how societies – and to varying extents different groups within them – want or allow themselves to be seen, not only now but also in the future. No wonder, then, that heritage is often contested. Who should have control over this past-gathering and future-directed activity is a major social question; that is not to say, however, that it is a question that is always asked. Indeed, so often it is taken for granted which social group will decide on behalf of “society.” But from an academic point of view, that makes the question no less relevant, raising – as it still does – the fundamentally related question of which, and whose, pasts are *not* remembered, at least officially.

Heritage, however, is not simply the pasts that people make up in the here and now. Material remnants from the past, documents, and memories from direct experience

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Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Culture*, London 1975, p. 448.

or passed down the generations, can intrude upon the present in ways that may unsettle those living now. The stories from the past are not always the ones that people would prefer to tell themselves about themselves. Some heritage serves the ends of just some groups and not others. But some heritage poses challenges for all of those living today. Forgetting is sometimes an option but not always, not least because the past has a way of re-emerging through chance encounters and traces that persist, perhaps in material form, such as architectures or archives.

All of these themes are ones with resonance in Central Europe today. On the one hand we see numerous initiatives, often at local levels, by diverse groups who seek variously to uncover, recover, and preserve particular memories, sometimes of histories that complicate the usual national stories, perhaps by showing more diversity. On the other, we see a continuation and even strengthening of nationalist projects, some of which push strongly in the opposite direction. Poland itself provides clear examples of both. On the one hand, for instance, there has been a remarkable amount of work on recovering the memory of Jewish presence: Jonathan Webber's lifework, as shown in his Museum of the Galician Jews in Krakow, being a major contribution.<sup>3</sup> On the other, we also see cases such as the Museum of World War II in Gdansk, which experienced a nationalist-driven push to remove complexity in favour of a story that would more clearly uphold a positive Polish identity.<sup>4</sup>

Such contexts of complexity and counter-currents pose questions about the nature of society and the potentials of heritage to contribute to it. Research is needed not only to document some of these complexities but also to highlight fundamental issues and to offer new approaches and concepts. In what follows, I provide a brief introduction to three ongoing research projects in which I am currently involved, all of which seek to

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See <http://www.galiciajewishmuseum.org/en/traces-of-memory-a-contemporary-look-at-the-jewish-past-in-poland>,18 (access: 30 January 2018); Jonathan Webber and Chris Schwarz, *Rediscovering Traces of Memory: The Jewish Heritage of Polish Galicia*, Bloomington 2009.

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See e.g. Rachel Donadio, "A Museum Becomes a Battlefield over Poland's History," [in:] *New York Times*, 9 November 2016. For the former director's view of events see Pawel Machcewicz 2018 *Der Unkämpfte Kried. Das Museum des Zweiten Weltkriegs in Danzig. Entstehung und Streit*. Wiesbaden: Harassowitz Verlag.

tackle questions about heritage and its role in society, albeit in rather different ways. Two of them include research in Central Europe, tackling questions about some of the specific historical legacies to be found here. Before introducing these, however, let me make some more general brief remarks about my approach to heritage and how I see heritage studies today.

### **Heritage Studies**

In many ways, the growth of heritage as a field of study has been very remarkable. When I was a postgraduate, in the 1980s, few in the disciplines of social anthropology and sociology, in which I was working, talked in terms of heritage. We did, however, consider some of the issues, though under labels such as tradition, history, and identity.<sup>5</sup> The term “heritage,” however, was much more likely to be thought of in terms of built heritage and as something for conservationists, and primarily about national and worthy pasts. That in languages such as German the language was, until recently, primarily that of monument protection – Denkmalschutz and Denkmalpflege – is not just something specifically German, but reflects the way the topic was widely understood elsewhere too. Indeed, we can see shifting conceptions in UNESCO documentation.<sup>6</sup>

There is not time here to go through the reasons for the remarkable explosion of heritage as a field – but let me just note that the prompting came partly from a democratisation of the past in the present – that is, an idea that history could also come from below; that more parts of society could and should be remembered and have their pasts, their stories, also preserved for the future.<sup>7</sup> What this did was also to prompt more

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I have discussed this elsewhere, including in Sharon Macdonald, *Memorylands: Heritage and Identity in Europe Today*, London 2013; see also eadem, “Heritage,” [in:] *International Encyclopaedia of Anthropology*, Hilary Callan (ed.), New York 2018.

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This is discussed e.g. in Sharon Macdonald, “Heritage”, op. cit.; see also Mads Daugbjerg and Thomas Fibiger (eds.), *Globalized Heritage* (special issue of *History and Anthropology*), vol. 22 no. 2 (2011); Rodney Harrison, *Heritage: Critical Approaches*, London 2013; Christoph Brumann, “Shifting Tides of World-making in the UNESCO World Heritage Convention: Cosmopolitanisms Colliding,” [in:] *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 37 no. 12 (2014), pp. 2176–2192.

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I have discussed this previously in Sharon Macdonald, *Memorylands...*, op. cit.

realisation of the diversity of claims on the past – and often more contention over it. While Michael Rothberg, in his arguments about multidirectional memory is surely right that social memory isn't necessarily a zero sum game and that, indeed, one case can provide more impetus and even models for another, in practice, in situations of limited resources, things do not always work that way.<sup>8</sup> In one museum of World War II, for example, there might be reasons why not all of the possible ways of looking at it would be included and the actual resources available for more museums or more heritage sites are likely to be limited. Not all memories get to occupy the prime sites or get allocated equal space.

In the face of the fact that there is always more history, more past that can be kept – and kept alive in the sense of actively remembered – or kept as heritage – how are societies to decide which? This is a question that threads through all of the three research projects that I will discuss here – though it does so in very different ways. My hope is, however, that by tackling it in these diverse ways, and also by looking at problems involved in forgotten and awkward pasts and their reactivation, we can gain a better overall understanding and perhaps move towards improved ways of dealing with them.

### **Researching Heritage**

Although the projects that I describe here are rather different, they share some common features, two of which I wish to especially emphasise here. One of these is that they are all concerned with practice – with how heritage is actually done. This does not mean that they ignore theory – what we are dealing with here is not some old idea of theory versus practice. Rather, to attend to practice is part of the theoretical stance that they adopt, and their aim is to learn from practice in ways that will inform reinvigorated theorising. What this entails in terms of actual method is that all have at least some ethnographic component that allows for attention to making or maintaining processes and their diverse players and activities. This allows them to give attention to actors and factors that are often hidden or not perceived – perhaps because they are taken for granted or simply not

noticed, or that are perhaps ignored for political or public relations reasons. It also means that they are better able to understand the challenges for heritage professionals and heritage activists and others in the work that they do. These challenges are not necessarily just the “big” ones so often identified by heritage studies – namely, those of political agendas – but they can also be “smaller” ones that reveal themselves as “practicalities,” such as what to do with collections already there, or which decisions to make in the face of financial constraint. Such “smaller” challenges may well play into the larger ones – indeed they almost inevitably do so – and this is one reason why we need to give them attention. For it is often in the relatively quiet work of heritage practice that “things happen” that can leave traces and make a difference.

A second feature that these projects have in common is that they entail, at least to some extent, new constellations of research working practices that include some kind of collaboration with heritage professionals or institutions, non-governmental organisations, activists, and local initiatives of various sorts. Precisely how they do this varies, as we will see (and as is further evident from their websites and publications). But in all cases it speaks to their commitment to coupling the insights of critical heritage studies with some form of intervention – either directly as they go along or as outcomes of the research.

In effect this means that all are concerned with heritage and the future. Moreover, they are so both in terms of the future as a “cultural horizon” and as a “cultural fact,” to use a distinction made by Arjun Appadurai in his *The Future as Cultural Fact*.<sup>9</sup> By the future as cultural horizon, he refers to the way in which ideas about the future play into contemporary actions – certain futures are part of the overall picture or horizon within which those actions are undertaken. This might, for example, be a future imagined broadly as consonant with the present, supporting actions that are thus oriented to general maintenance of the status quo. The social sciences, he points out, have long given attention to the future in this sense. By the “future as a cultural fact” he points to a fuller realisation by societies or groups within them that the future can be crafted, that human beings can and do actively seek to influence it. While there has surely been attention to this in the past, not least from anthropologists looking at cargo cults and various other

rituals, he argues that they could do more to address how this is done, especially in contemporary contexts. Moreover, in what is perhaps the core of his argument, they could also do more to intervene. “The future is ours to design,” he writes.<sup>10</sup> The challenge is how to “constitute a powerful intervention.”<sup>11</sup>

This is undoubtedly a challenge for heritage-making and for heritage research too. Understanding what we might call existing “heritage-design-processes” – and especially the real-life challenges of those engaged in such work – is surely fundamental to being able to do this. Whether “intervention” is the right term for the kinds of constellations of research and collaboration is, however, a question, as we will see below.

In what follows, then, I provide a brief introduction to some aspects of the three major research projects in which I am currently involved and to some of the ways in which they are doing research relevant to understanding – and potentially even activating – the future as cultural fact.

I should note from the outset that none are yet complete and therefore only ambitions and interim results can be included here. Furthermore, all are large projects with many parts and I am, thus, only able to provide very small insights into some parts of them. I hope nevertheless that this will be sufficient to raise further interest in them, as well as in the approaches to heritage and society that they exemplify.

### **“Heritage Futures”**

This large multi-researcher project, which began in April 2015 and is due to run until March 2019, is funded by the United Kingdom Arts and Humanities Research Council under its programme “Caring for the Future: Thinking Forward through the Past.”<sup>12</sup> It

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Ibidem, p. 3.

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Ibidem, p. 286.

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“Heritage Futures” is funded by a UK Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) “Care for the Future: Thinking Forward through the Past” Theme Large Grant (AH/M004376/1), awarded to Rodney Harrison (Principal Investigator), Caitlin DeSilvey, Cornelius Holtorf, Sharon Macdonald (Co-Investigators), Antony Lyons (Senior Creative Fellow), Nadia Bartolini, Sarah May, Jennie Morgan, and Sefryn Penrose (named Research Associates), and assisted by Esther Breithoff and Harald Fredheim (Research Associates), Kyle Lee-Crossett and Hannah Williams. It receives generous additional support

identifies a series of “grand challenges” for heritage and looks at them through a rather eclectic set of cases, with a view to trying to get a handle on the various ways in which heritage-making is struggled over – and some of the adaptations and solutions that are assembled to try to meet these. So, for example, the theme “Uncertainty,” led by my colleague Cornelius Holtorf at Linnaeus University in Kalmar, Sweden,<sup>13</sup> includes looking at nuclear waste – a dangerous substance that will endure for many years into the future – which raises questions about how to mark sites and remember them over hundreds of thousands of years. It shows us, for this very challenging case, how problematic keeping things for long futures is – and how some at least have gone about trying to resolve them.

### *Profusion*

The theme that I lead, “Profusion,” is concerned with the question of how to select in the face of abundance. I work on this with researcher Jennie Morgan, in a project that is based at the University of York. The theme looks at the challenge of collecting – or deciding what to keep for the future – from the contemporary present, especially from mass-produced objects. To research this, we look at museums of the contemporary everyday to ask how museums make these decisions and how they put them into practice (perhaps remaking those decisions in the process) as well as at how people in their own homes end up keeping some things and not others.

Our research so far has shown us clearly that these are issues of great concern in both domains, with participants in both often articulating senses of “too muchness”<sup>14</sup> – that is, of an unruly profusion of things that threatens in some ways to be overwhelming.

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from its host universities and partner organisations. For further information see its website: <https://heritage-futures.org>.

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Sarah May works on the theme with Cornelius; and on the nuclear waste angle, so does Anders Högberg, partly in further research funded by the Swedish Nuclear Fuel and Waste management Company (SKB). See e.g. Cornelius Holtorf and Anders Högberg, “The Contemporary Archaeology of Nuclear Waste: Communicating with the Future,” *Arkaeologisk Forum* (2016), pp. 31–37.

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This term is used by Elisabeth Chin, *My Life with Things: The Consumer Diaries*, Durham, NC 2016.

This sense, we have come to argue, is not only a reaction to an actual proliferation of kinds of things (such as increased numbers of new models of products due to modern production techniques) or to dwindling resources with which to deal with them. These are relevant but equally or even more important are social and cultural changes – the democratisation of heritage mentioned above – that has made more pasts and individualised memory come to seem important to recall and preserve.<sup>15</sup> The widespread move to treat the pasts of “ordinary” people as well as the rich and famous as heritage, and to give heritage recognition to a wide diversity of groups, is, then, part of what is at issue in these struggles over what to keep for the future.

Looking at what is done in practice – how some things actually come to be kept and others do not – highlights serendipity and personal inclinations, even though we also see increased systematisation, though means such as collections policies and particular bureaucratic procedures in museums. While our project does not aim to specifically produce new versions of these policies and practices, it does hope that by providing examples of other ways of doing things – such as those from homes or from other themes in the Heritage Futures project – that it will be able to provide insight for productive contributions to ongoing practice. In part it does this through bringing practitioners and others, including ourselves as researchers, together in constellations that they would not otherwise find themselves in. As such, it could be said to move beyond an intervention model in the sense of a single directed act that seeks to change the status quo. Its practice is, rather, framed in terms of “knowledge exchange.”

By exchanging knowledge over tackling what are perceived as struggles in various domains of heritage practice, Heritage Futures addresses the future as cultural fact. It also helps expand horizons by making us – and involved practitioners – aware of overlaps, limits, and also new possibilities in relation to such issues as deciding what to

keep for the future. We see this too – though in a very different set of contexts again – in the next project that I wish to introduce.

### **“Making Differences” in Berlin: Transforming Museums and Heritage in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Beginning in October 2015 but with many researchers only beginning a year or more later, this five-year project is funded primarily by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation but with further major support from the Humboldt University, the Berlin Museum of Natural History and the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation.<sup>16</sup> At its heart is a multi-researcher ethnography of ongoing museum and heritage developments in Berlin. This is conducted in comparative perspective, looking at Berlin’s current transformations in relation to what is happening elsewhere in the country and the world. The most prominent of Berlin’s current developments is the making of the Humboldt Forum – a new cultural and museum space that is currently under construction, due to open in 2019. There is a lot of hype surrounding it, with it being talked about as Germany’s and even one of Europe’s most important 21<sup>st</sup>-century cultural developments, for example,<sup>17</sup> and there is much that could be said about it. The Humboldt Forum is only one dimension – though a central one – of our research project but it is a good illustration of some of the debates about heritage and society that are being played out in Berlin at present, and that have wider relevance for Central Europe and the legacy of socialism. For those reasons, let me provide a brief glimpse into some of those issues here.

#### ***The Humboldt Forum***

The Humboldt Forum is located in the historic centre of Berlin, and will form part of the city’s Museums Island complex, which was awarded UNESCO World Heritage status in

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Thanks are due to all of these organisations, none of which is responsible for the views here. Further information about the project is available at: <http://www.carmah.berlin/making-differences-in-berlin/>. The funding also allowed for the establishment of the Centre for Anthropological Research on Museums and Heritage (CARMAH): <http://www.carmah.berlin>.

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As in Hermann Parzinger, *Das Humboldt-Forum: “Soviel Welt mit sich verbinden als möglich,”* Berlin 2011, p. 15.

1990. The timing of that award was significant as that was the year of German reunification and the Museum Island – with its fabulous but seriously underfunded set of museums – lay in the former German Democratic Republic. The decision to create a new building within this complex was, however, and indeed remains, highly contested. The reasons lie in the past and its conjuncture with the present and future.

The new building will be a part reconstruction of the Berlin City Palace – the Stadtschloß – that previously stood on the same site. With its origins in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the Schloß was expanded and altered over the years – as is usual with such buildings. The reconstruction – which is primarily of the exterior only – will refer largely to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when a dome was added. The Schloß, therefore, immediately raises questions about reconstruction and authenticity that are so often considered in relation to heritage. Some of these, in relation to different architectural strategies and including this case are further discussed in this volume. Here, however, I want to give attention to the social and political implications of which pasts are referenced, and which muted, by this process of making new heritage.

The period chosen for the reconstruction can be said to include the time when Germany first united as a nation in 1872. This was an important part of the symbolism of choosing to build a reconstruction of that building within the newly reunited Germany. It was, however, also a period of elite rule, with the Schloß at its centre. Such associations were part of the reason for the GDR government deciding, after the Schloß was badly, but not irreparably, damaged in World War II, to demolish it. In its place they built their own central government building, the Palace of the Republic. This was in a very different – shiny, socialist modern – architectural style. It was not, however, only a space of government but also of leisure. Restaurants, a bowling alley, a theatre, concert hall and disco were some of its social offer – an offer that was, officially at least, open to all, as its popular moniker of “Volkspalast,” palace of the people, asserted.

After the reunification of Germany, what to do with this site – and with the Palace of the Republic – became a major public and political debate. At issue was the kind of heritage that would endure in this heart of the new nation – on the site of the earlier nation and within the former East Berlin. Finally, it was decided to demolish the Palace of the Republic and to create the partial reconstruction of the former Schloß. Central to

arguments in favour of the reconstruction was that this would complete an aesthetic ensemble that had previously existed in relation to the Museum Island buildings. Removing the heritage of the GDR was also undoubtedly a motive and this became ground for considerable opposition from those who felt that this history – often their own history – was being removed from the cityscape.<sup>18</sup>

The decision that the Schloß should become the Humboldt Forum and include, among other contents, displays from the city's Ethnological Museum and Museum of Asian Arts, needs to be seen at least partly in light of the opposition to the Schloß, that is, as a response to accusations over its potential elitism and ignoring of “other histories.” Setting itself up as a “space for dialogue between cultures,”<sup>19</sup> and as an opportunity to profile those who had not had the privilege of being included in the Museum Island institutions (at least, not recently), the Humboldt Forum provided new legitimation for the Schloß. At the same time, however, it also accentuated another highly fraught heritage debate: that over Germany's colonial past and, more specifically, over questions of ownership and restitution in relation to objects in the Ethnological Museum in particular.

### ***The Cross on the Schloß***

All of these debates are continuing and the “Making Differences” team is tracking and analysing them, in some cases from the perspective of specific fieldwork locations. As part of this, we look at various specific debates as they emerge. At the time of presenting an earlier version of this article in Krakow, a major controversy had recently erupted over whether a cross should crown the dome of the reconstructed Schloß. Those arguing for it claimed, among other things, that the cross was simply part of the original building – an accurate reconstruction – and, as such, not a religious or ideological assertion but merely an architectural feature. Those arguing against, pointed out that the cross, as a specific

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For accounts of some of the positions and debate, see Beate Binder, *Streitfall Stadtmitte: Der Berliner Schloßplatz*, Wien 2009; Jonathan Bach, *What Remains: Everyday Encounters with the Socialist Past in Germany*, New York 2017.

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Hermann Parzinger, *Das Humboldt-Forum...*, op. cit.; for a discussion of this and of decisions over the Humboldt Forum content, see Friedrich von Bose, *Das Humboldt-Forum: Eine Ethnographie seiner Planung*, Berlin 2016.

religious symbol, is at odds with the Humboldt Forum's claims to be promoting cultural diversity – to do so under the sign of the cross is contradictory or even a statement of religious supremacy; and that the authenticity arguments do not hold as the Schloß is only a partial reconstruction.<sup>20</sup> What we see here, then, are not only differing positions being taken with respect to issues of reconstruction and authenticity but also divergent arguments about the place of religious symbols in public space and their implications for cultural diversity. Specifically at issue is the question of the place of Christian heritage and whether it should be given pre-eminence in German society today.

Let me here mention one further twist of this particular debate as it takes us back again to the issue of GDR memory in contemporary – and future – Germany. In response to the conflict over the cross, one proposal was that a large artwork, comprised of the word *Zweifel* – doubt – should also be mounted onto the Schloß.<sup>21</sup> This received positive responses from various parties, including those supporting the cross, as it seemed to provide a way of allowing that still to continue. For some it acted to cast doubt on the cross, and Christianised heritage; others saw doubt being cast on the whole Schloß reconstruction and Humboldt Forum project. The founding directors of the Humboldt Forum, who argued for the cross, presented “doubt” as part of a particular philosophical disposition – one necessary for achieving greater knowledge and a “precondition for the Enlightenment.”<sup>22</sup> As artist Lars Ø Ramberg had created the art work for the Palast der Republik during the years when argument raged about what to do with it, the doubt could also be seen as referring, as did Ramberg himself, to escape from the socialist past: “collective doubt has brought Germany out of its totalitarian background.”<sup>23</sup> At the time

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See e.g. Andreas Kilb, “Eine neue Symboledebatte um das Humboldt Forum,” [in:] *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 24 May 2017.

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This was made by the founding directors as part of their defense of the cross. See Horst Bredekamp, Neil MacGregor, and Hermann Parzinger, “Giving the Cross the Benefit of the Doubt,” <https://www.humboldtforum.com/de-DE/storys/im-zweifel-fuer-das-kreuz/> (access: 30 January 2018).

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Ibidem.

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<http://www.larsramberg.de/1/viewentry/3890> (access: 30 January 2018).

of writing, whether *Zweifel* will be erected onto the Schloß remains a matter of doubt, as far as I am aware. The debates show clearly, however, the contested nature of the past, as well as innovative and sometimes multiply interpretable ways of addressing it.

### ***“Making Differences” Research***

In the case of this particular controversy, the work of Making Differences researchers has not included any direct involvement or advice. Some of us have, however, not only read about the debates in the press but also heard them being discussed in our own fieldwork settings, which allows us to see too how they intersect with other aspects of heritage-making on the ground. In my own case, this has meant with the Team creating an exhibition about Berlin for the new Humboldt Forum. As the Team have been actively seeking to create an exhibition that would give recognition to cultural and religious diversity, there was consternation from some of them about the cross proposals, which they saw as at odds with the directions that they were taking. Partly for this reason, they welcomed the proposal for the *Zweifel* artwork, though in fact they had already shown interest in this before it was discussed during the cross controversy. They had done so as part of their own wider attempt to give consideration to the GDR history of the site in their own exhibition about Berlin within the future Humboldt Forum.

In other parts of the “Making Differences” project, however, our work is more directly collaborative, involving, for example, playing roles in the making of exhibitions whilst simultaneously analysing these processes. There is no doubt that negotiating these various roles is sometimes complex but we welcome the opportunity in this research to adopt the multiple positions, sometimes being part of processes and at other times being more distanced observers, and often drawing analytical purchase from the movement between the two. This means that the range of our possible engagements is quite broadly drawn, allowing this to sometimes be fairly informal and ongoing and at others to be more directed and formalised. In the following project, however, the close collaborations between cultural institutions, researchers and, in this case, artists are more tightly framed as a key feature of the research, with the specific aim of changing practice in relation to contentious cultural heritage.

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## **“TRACES: Transmitting Contentious Cultural Heritages with the Arts: From Intervention to Collaborative Co-Production”**

“TRACES” is an EU Horizon 2020 project, which began in March 2016 and will run for 3 years.<sup>24</sup> It is specifically designed to explore artistic ways of dealing with contentious heritage but to do so by moving beyond the usual model of an artist coming in and making an intervention, such as by setting up an installation within a museum. Instead of such short-term engagements, “TRACES” sets up what we call CCPs – creative co-productions – a format developed by Tal Adler in which artists, and/or artist researchers, and/or researchers and cultural institutions work together over longer periods of time to collectively research certain cases of contentious cultural heritage in order to create various forms of productions for the public. Precisely what form these “co-productions” take is an outcome of the research process. So far they include, variously, exhibitions, artworks, databases, educational programmes, events, and websites, as well as various combinations of these.

I lead a work package called “Contentious Collections” in which we work specifically with museum collections of troublesome objects – collections made in other times and politics and that have been hidden away from public view for many years. One of these is a collection of more than 40,000 human skulls in the Museum of Natural History in Vienna. Another is a vast collection of death masks, mainly of political actors in socialist times, in Slovenia. A third, in Krakow, is a collection of vernacular holocaust art. More details about all of these, as well as other work in the “TRACES” project, can be found via its website.<sup>25</sup> For the purposes of this article, however, let me just say a little

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For further information about “TRACES” see <http://www.traces.polimi.it/about/>. Eleven partner institutions are funded through the project, with 46 researchers (including artists) directly involved. TRACES receives funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 693857. The views expressed here are the sole responsibility of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of other partners or of the European Union.

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The other two CCPs also contain some element of contentious collections, if not so centrally, but will, therefore, also be given consideration in Work Package 5. One of these is involved in turning an

more about the project based in Krakow as this is also the location of the conference on which this article is based.

### *Awkward Objects of Genocide*

The collection that has been the main focus of the “TRACES” CCP “Awkward Objects of Genocide” is based in the Ethnographic Museum – Muzeum Etnograficzne im. Seweryna Udzieli – in Krakow, though part of the project involves also researching in what other places such art is to be found.<sup>26</sup> The term “vernacular Holocaust art” refers here to art that is produced about the Holocaust by non-Jewish Poles. It includes examples such as Franciszek Skocz’s wooden sculptures of scenes from Auschwitz, such as an SS officer pointing a pistol, or prisoners working or being punished. Having seen these in Krakow’s Ethnographic Museum I have personally experienced the emotional disquiet that such objects so often arouse as well as understanding what a challenge they are to public representation.

They are, however, also a product of Holocaust history, and indeed, there was a lot of such art produced, as the “TRACES” colleagues whose work I am reporting here, and who work directly on this collection and others like it, point out. Those colleagues are Roma Sendyka, Director of the Research Centre for Memory Studies at the Jagiellonian University, where the CCP is officially based, Erica Lehrer, Director of the Curating and Public Scholarship Lab at Concordia University, Canada, Magdalena Zych at the Ethnographic Museum, Krakow, and photographer Wojciech Wilczyk. Erica Lehrer’s earlier work with “lucky Jew” figures – many examples of which are also held in the Ethnographic Museum and about which an earlier project and exhibition, with public feedback, was also run – is further input into relevant themes.<sup>27</sup>

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abandoned synagogue in Romania into an arts centre, and the other is concerned with transforming the prison in which political prisoners were held in Belfast during the Northern Ireland conflict.

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<http://www.traces.polimi.it/portfolio-posts/portfolio-02/> (access: 30 January 2018). See also Erica Lehrer et al., “Awkward Objects of Genocide,” [in:] *Anthropology News*, 27 February 2017.

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See Erica Lehrer, “Most Disturbing Souvenirs: Curative Museology in a Cultural Conflict Zone,” [in:] *Curatorial Dreams: Critics Imagine Exhibitions*, Shelley Ruth Butler and Erica Lehrer (eds.), Montreal 2016, pp. 46–63.

The motives for producing vernacular Holocaust art are not usually easy to ascertain. Sometimes, perhaps, it was from a desire or even perceived need to represent what the artists had witnessed, maybe as a way of helping themselves to deal with it. Whatever the motives, some of these objects were collected by the ethnographic museum as part of its collection of Folk Art. Even though at one level this label makes sense and maybe helps to usefully expand Folk Art from its usual remit – thus recognising a greater range of what the “folk” might produce – it also risks hiding its awkward specificity behind the general category, or presenting the works as somehow timeless, as those working on it point out.<sup>28</sup> The other problem with this classification, they argue, is that it removes these objects from being considered within the scope of Holocaust Studies and thus limits its capacity to expand our knowledge of how “ordinary non-Jewish” people, Poles in this case, witnessed the Holocaust.

At present, the creative co-production team working on this contentious heritage are preparing an exhibition about it – an exhibition that will engage the public in reflecting about modes of representing such objects. This will be shown in Krakow’s Ethnographic Museum.

In all of the contentious collections that we are examining within “TRACES,” the question of whether they should be brought out and displayed to the public is one that we have found ourselves addressing. Our project is premised on an idea that a first step towards people being able to live together with difficult histories is being open about them, and thus we argue that such collections can be important as means of raising these uncomfortable and troubling pasts. Some of our colleagues, namely, Klaus Schönberger and Marion Hamm, have been theorising this premise in relation to Chantal Mouffe’s ideas about agonism – the idea that a public sphere can, and indeed should, work with different perspectives. But the question of how to do this remains and this is where the diverse strategies being produced by the CCPs, and the accompanying research both on

the collections and on the CCPs themselves, is so important. So too, and also to be investigated during the research, is how the various strategies that are devised will be received by the public.

## **Conclusion**

In all of these projects, then, we see a struggle over the issue of which pasts to make in the present – and with them, to varying degrees of awareness, which futures. If museums of everyday life don't collect enough, will such museums in the future be unable to tell the stories of certain people? If the Schloß in the centre of Berlin misses out certain pasts or people, or side-lines them – or if it positions itself under a Christian symbol – will it create a hierarchy of the heritageable? Will some people's pasts be rendered less important in future? And if we just ignore those collections that seem too awkward or disruptive to display, are we shying away from certain pasts and, moreover, not bringing them to an awareness that could potentially be productive for collective interrelationships in the present – and future?

Here, I am raising these as questions rather than providing answers because none of these projects is finished. Nevertheless, from what we have seen so far, there is little doubt that heritage-making does often involve social side-lining and hierarchies of the heritageable. This is why projects such as those described in this article are important. They document what is going on, the struggles and the taken-for-granted assumptions and practices involved. They thus highlight what is being forgotten or marginalised, and also – as in the case of the “TRACES” project and the CCP here in Krakow – how they might potentially be resuscitated. By getting into the actual ongoing process of heritage making – rather than doing thin studies based only on representations or a few interviews – we can get a better handle on the difficulties and potentials, and the multiple interests and possible barriers – as those involved negotiate or battle their way into certain kinds of futures.

What we see in all of the projects, if in various ways, is not only documentation and analysis of what is happening, but also a hope to contribute to thinking about what to do – and how to do it better. And that, in my view, is another important feature of our contemporary moment in heritage studies. It speaks of a new kind of heritage studies that

goes beyond care for materials to contribute productively to the deepest concerns of heritage and society.