



Heritage out of Control: Introduction

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January, 2022



Stirring the debates on what is worth preserving, what is dismissible and what needs to be dismantled, heritage has become a hotspot for political discussions as well as academic debates. [The current debates](#) on [decolonization of space](#) highlight that heritage is not only a reference point for establishing or contesting shared understandings of the past and present. It also frames the possible futures that we dare to imagine. Those working in the field of heritage commonly share the understanding that heritagization operates as an upholder of distinctions that



are key to modern governmentality. [Rooted in imperial, colonial and national legacies](#), heritage regimes manage the codes of belonging (Butler, 2006) by reifying distinctions between the secular and the religious as well as the local and the global. While critical heritage studies are growing as a field, analyzing [the tension between the official and unofficial attributes to heritage sites](#), they mostly concentrate on spatiality and materiality of heritage.

Focusing on the absences, affective dissonances and the silent consensuses, the [Heritage out of Control: Waste, Spirits and Energies Workshop](#) held in May 2021 aimed at rethinking the place-oriented, static and secularized notions that abound in debates on heritage. This thematic thread emerged out of four overlapping questions that brought the three of us together: Under what circumstances does waste become heritage, and heritage becomes waste? How does the intimate relationship between spirits and energies operate in relation to the abstract public that heritage presupposes? Can spirits, rituals, energies be imagined as heritage? What unfolds from seeking answers to these questions in relation to the focus of heritage studies on materiality and spatiality? Engaging these questions, we aimed to explore the beyonds and the in-betweens of the tangible-intangible divide according to which heritage has predominantly been categorized and kept under control by heritage actors as well as scholars. The workshop proved to be a venue to disassemble the illusion of control by exploring the destabilizing power of what we call the 'undesirables' of the carefully curated heritage space, namely [waste](#), [spirits](#), and [energies](#). With a focus on the 'undesirables', we aim to see what happens when the narrative of control is destabilized. Turning our attention to the potency of non-humans and matter, we intend to offer a perspective on heritage beyond anthropocentric as well as Eurocentric mechanisms that create the illusion of control. While our main focus on these 'undesirables' allows us to destabilize the official genealogies and lineages that bolster our notion of inheritance, we also attend to [negative](#) and [difficult heritage](#) to deepen our understanding of the multiplicity of temporalities that inhabit material space.



Figure 1 Kınay Olcaytü, *Yenmeyen Miras*, book collage
150cm - 90cm, 2018. Courtesy of the artist.

We start the thematic thread with an experimental blogpost by artist Vibha Galhotra and writer Fouad Asfour, whose work blurs the boundaries between text, image and performance. Wrapped in a story of speculative fiction, they engage with the pressing issues of today's climate crisis and the endeavours of interplanetary escape. Their work revolves around the question of how today's waste turns into future heritage and monuments. In her post, Anne Berg asks uncomfortable questions about the legacies of the Nazi's obsession with waste recycling and the neglect of these legacies in current Holocaust remembrance in Germany. Berg examines how waste-recycling was crucial to enable and maintain the Nazi regime, highlighting the intimate connection between genocide and garbage. With a glance at today's zero-waste movements, Berg has two warnings for us: not to forget the (global) system's reliance on inhumane waste labour and not to fall for 'green fantasies' suggesting that recycling would suffice to counter the climate crisis instead of radical systemic changes. Regina Bendix turns to the



explosive legacies of World War II via unexploded bombs that continue to be found in today's Germany. Bendix examines how the temporal grounding of war-waste in the present defies its definition as heritage, rather than constituting an 'authentic' reminder of war and violence. She further explores how the unexploded ordnance disrupts the prevalent idea of having mastered and controlled the difficult heritage in challenging sanitized forms of remembrance. Katarzyna Kwapisz Williams reflects on the difficult experience of dealing with human bones in post-war Poland. Unsettling the notions of home and identity, such an unexpected and ambivalent encounter with the bones of the former enemy reminds not only of its lingering presence but also the blurry zone between waste and heritage. With an emphasis on the invisible death of people with disabilities, Leyla Safta Zecheria engages with the transformation of Orthodox Christian cemetery in Ruşi into a negative heritage site commemorating the crimes of state-socialism. Revealing the limitations of the critical engagement with the past, she puts forward the continuing haunted legacies of silencing certain layers of structural violence by making others visible.

Disturbing the conceptual dichotomies that form the notion of the museum, Birgit Meyer illustrates the proximities between heritage and waste. Analyzing how Christian heritage turned into waste and discarded objects became worth preserving as heritage objects in the Netherlands and Ghana respectively, Meyer asserts that as a container category, heritage absorbs sacred waste. Engaging further with contestations of secular representation regimes in museums, Çiçek İlengiz's post analyzes the intertwined relationship between processes of heritagization, culturalization and spiritualization of religious places through the case of the Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi's love pilgrimage. She reconstructs the link between inheritance and heritage by investigating the role of sensing in relating to intangible world heritage. She argues that focusing on energies that a material place inhabits assists us in conceptualizing models of inheritance that are not bound to shared geographical and historical references. Challenging further the regimes of musealization, Annika Kirbis traces the transition of pasts previously considered disposable to heritage. Along the example of the musealization of



migration (hi)stories in Vienna, she examines the emerging ethical concerns and dissonances among the various stakeholders. Highlighting the limitations of an additive approach that aims to *include* neglected pasts, Kirbis argues for the importance to simultaneously examine established heritage narratives that have rendered migration (hi)stories disposable in the first place. Engaging further with the non-human actors in heritage-making, Adeline Masquelier's post examines how even a refused past can be inherited. Focusing on the destruction of a pre-Islamic icon in Niger, she argues that our understanding of heritage must make room for the ways in which the past is alive.

Mirroring Masquelier's insistence on heritage to account for ways of making the past alive, Eva Ambos shows how gods are brought to life through what she calls "heritage-ritual". The ritual, which is organized, mediatized and consumed by Sri Lanka's State functionaries for the blessing of politicians, materializes the otherwise invisible gods by creating a temporary space for them in *kohombā kankāriya* ritual. Contrary to the assumption of states' standing interest in being ritually blessed, Mariam Goshadze's intervention demonstrates rejection by the state of similar rituals. She focuses on a 2009 presidential order that banned indigenous religious leaders from performing their usual libation and prayer during the national celebration of Ghana's Independence Day. Both essays demonstrate how a particular notion of state politics, religion, culture and history shape heritage (un)making. Nathalie Koenings and Paulina Kolata continue engaging with the non-human, albeit from a different angle. Here, indifference towards spirits and objects that were once revered sets heritage in motion. In Pemba (Zanzibar), jinns have become unruly free-floating spirits, yet are rooted in history and materiality. Instead of looking at jinns as merely intangible heritage, Koenings suggests understanding them as matter - or even archives if, as she argues, Pemba's history can be studied through jinns. In Japan, individuals in rural Hiroshima hand over their private inheritance to Buddhist temples and thereby transform the objects' meanings and status as heritage. Kolata illustrates that heritage takes on a new life where what is individual becomes communal. Looking at what is out of control in heritage-making, our thread initiates



theoretical, epistemological and methodological debates on materiality and spatiality that compels us to reconsider the boundaries of belonging that are reinforced by heritage.

Reference

Butler, B. 2006. "Heritage and the Present Past." In *Handbook of Material Culture*, edited by C. Tilley, W. Keane, S. Küchler, M. Rowlands, and P. Spyer, 463-479. London: Sage

Feature image Lodhi Gardens, New Delhi by Vedant Mehra.