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Storytelling

Campscapes as Narratives

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1

Winter 2017

ACCESSING CAMPSCAPES: INCLUSIVE STRATEGIES FOR USING EUROPEAN CONFLICTED HERITAGE

iC-ACCESS: Project /01
Presentation

Materiality: A Short /02
Theoretical Outline

Findings Trapped in a State /03
of In-Betweenness

Thinking Conflicted Heritage /04
Through Campscapes

STORYTELLING: CAMPSCAPES AS NARRATIVES

Our team assesses the dynamics of competing postwar memories of Nazi, state socialist and fascist terror at work in European spaces. This can potentially offer new perspectives, beyond the tools used in other disciplines, working towards a more inclusive way of storytelling that integrates different histories and divergent memories at our key sites. To achieve this, we will explore comparatively how 'heritage as narrative' is articulated by national, transnational and local experiences and by tropes of resistance, collaboration, occupation, victimhood and perpetration. Our focus is on the processes of signification and appropriation in dominant and counter-historical discourses and memory narratives, and how they might and, more often than not, do overshadow complementary or conflicted perspectives.

We do so through analyses of existing narratives relating to campscales (represented in testimonies, literature, historiography, juridical proceedings, public media, memorials and education), by examining of historical discourses and their specific biography in museum display, and through investigation of the sites' historical transformations in the context of post-1989 transnational and transcultural dynamics of memory. This concerns in particular commemorations of specific victim groups at campscales where conflicted histories are silenced (if not erased by monumental redesigns) or spatially appropriated by different memorial communities. We address both the competing memories and politics of identity relating to the legacy of the Second World War and the Holocaust as well as of Eastern European experiences of terror and repression. We also consider the competing use of tropes such as 'occupation' and 'genocide' after the 1990s Yugoslav Wars, as well as within the current context of the European Union's eastward enlargements. We also highlight the growing attention placed on long-silenced postcolonial war memories of camps and massacres, which has



Merorial at the site of the former extermination camp in Treblinka designed by Adam Haupt and Franciszek Duszeńko. Photo: C. Sturdy Colls.

resulted in an intensification of a series of memory wars on the issue of ‘the guilt of nations’. To understand how these narratives function within museum and media contexts, our team carries out interviews with stakeholders and curatorial and educational teams, conducts alternative historical research and a “data mining” of previous research (raw material and mediatized research outcomes), analyses visitors’ behavior, and, last but not least, investigates the ontological role of researchers working with such sensitive histories.

On a theoretical level, we adopt an integrated, interdisciplinary, relational and comparative approach to campsites, in order to capture the dynamics of their development while doing justice to their complex, layered ontologies. Through this approach, our team treats campsites as loci of conflict, competition and contestation articulated through representations, practices and materialities. We take narratives as inscribed into landscapes of terror (including campsites designed for hiding crimes and misleading victims) and perpetuated by their discursive, visual, spatial and material organization as memorial sites. Our research is focused on the nodes of conflicted histories, contested heritage and competing memories, where mediated representations of the past relate to (or collide with) the spatially-framed experiences of visitors.

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