

DIFFICULT MEMORIES: RECONCILING MEANING

Int | AR

Interventions

Adaptive Reuse

Vol. 04

Department of Interior Architecture, Rhode Island School of Design

CONTENTS

	04	EDITORIAL
MUSEOGRAPHY FOR TRAUMATIC MEMORIES	06	RE-ENACTING THE PAST Michela Bassanelli & Gennaro Postiglione
MANIFESTO FOR A POST-INDUSTRIAL CITY	14	Luis Sacristán Murga
EMERGING FROM AN INSALUBRIOUS PAST	24	TOUR BOIS-LE-PRÊTRE Samantha Rose
LIFE OF A SHELL	30	AND THE COLLECTIVE MEMORY OF A CITY Rafael Luna
COMATOSE AND RICORSO	36	REAWAKENING THE COVENANT CHURCH Adriana Ross
TOPOGRAPHY OF TRAUMA	40	AN ARCHIVE, BELICE VALLEY, SICILY Laura Cantarella & Lucia Giuliano
ANTERIOR SPACES AT S.21	48	TUOL SLENG MUSEUM OF GENOCIDE CRIMES Barbara Stehle
A CYCLE OF FRESCOES	58	A NARRATION OF MENTAL ILLNESS Tiziano Aglieri Rinella
VIEWS AND VOICES	64	ON MEMORY, MEMORIALS AND SLAVERY Julian Bonder & Krzysztof Wodiczko; Anthony Bogues
PREVENTING AMNESIA	70	NEGATION AND RECONCILIATION IN JAIL CONVERSION Melissa Stickl
THE REMEMBRANCE OF TIMES PAST	76	INTERVIEW WITH SERGIO SEBASTIÁN Liliane Wong
CROYDON'S TOWER	86	RECONCILING OLD TRAUMAS AND NEW HOPES Robert Schmidt III, Dan Sage, James Pinder, Charles Holland & Simon Austin
MALLEABLE REMEMBRANCE	94	AND THE RE-CONSOLIDATION OF FRAGMENTS Victor Serrano
MEMORY AND REVITALIZATION	98	OF AN HISTORIC RUIN, SANT PERE DE CORBERA CHURCH Mariana Esponda
MEMENTO MORI	108	AND THE PRIMACY OF RECOLLECTION IN ARCHITECTURAL MEANING Jodi Lynn La Coe
TRANSCENDING TIME	112	LA FABRIQUE Carole Aizenstark
	120	ENDNOTES AND BIBLIOGRAPHIES
	126	PROJECT INFO AND COLOPHON

MUSEOGRAPHY FOR TRAUMATIC MEMORIES¹

RE-ENACTING THE PAST

by MICHELA BASSANELLI + GENNARO POSTIGLIONE

In the debate on Contemporary Memory, there are two terms included constantly in the incipit of the major literary works on this topic: *obsession and hypertrophy* (Huyssen 2003, Agazzi and Fortunati 2007, Macdonald 2009). The theme of Memory has become a subject of discussion in different fields of knowledge: from social to biomedical sciences, from visual culture to media. In the last decade, critics (Caruth 1995, Antze and Lambek 1996, Edkins 2003) have focused more specifically on the aspect of Memory related to traumatic and painful events: "If the 1980s were the decade of a happy postmodern pluralism, the 1990s seemed to be haunted by trauma as the dark underside of neoliberal triumphalism" (Huyssen 2003, 8).

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 marked a decisive, cultural break in the manner in which we look back at the past, opening the season of commemoration: the *memento*—the renewed and strengthened remembrance urged by the death of the survivors of the Second World War—sets itself as the renewed imperative of "NEVER AGAIN," which is reflected in the numerous memorials and museums recently built in all Europe to commemorate those years of terror.

During the second half of the twentieth century and into the twenty first, visible markers of the past—plaques, information boards, museums, monuments—have come to populate more and more land and cityscapes. History has been gathered up and presented as heritage of a meaningful past

that should be remembered; and more and more buildings and other sites have been called on to act as witnesses of the past. (Macdonald 2009, 1)

The current society is "bulimic"—Pierre Nora speaks of the "commemorative bulimia of our era"—it preserves all sort of objects, writings or traces which can testify to and keep the memory of an event or a person. Andreas Huyssen—one of the first scholars to have dealt with the changes of Memory in the 20th century—identifies, in the nature of the major events which have characterized the so-called *short century*, the reasons that have led to the proliferation of studies on Memory.² The reasons for this "explosion" are both socio-economical and political, as clearly shown by the attitude adopted by many nations at the end of the Second World War—Germany and France in particular—that tried to redefine their identity through a reprocessing of their difficult and contradictory past. The tragic events of the 20th century have brought the emergence of numerous definitions of Memory; terms such as *oblivious memory* (Fussler 1975), *broken memory* (Assmann 1999) and *silent memory* (Tarpino 2008), an attempt to translate, in simple words, the horrors of what was endured.

Heritage of War: Ruins and Rubble

In Europe, the 20th century, more than any other, was characterized by a long period of wars of different forms, extension and intensity, from the Great World



Wars to local ethnic conflicts. Each conflict left its own inheritance; ruins and rubble, but also buildings and infrastructures that dot European cities and territories as visible reminders of a past that many would prefer to forget.

The residues of this architecture create uncertainties, reveal ambiguities and cause embarrassment: only with great difficulty (and just recently) museums have been created inside them to collect and tell the history and the meaning of these buildings.
(Pirazzoli 2010,138-139)

The Second World War in particular left material and immaterial traces all over the European territory; in Hitler's political strategy, there was the desire to build for eternity enormous buildings that would extend further than the Reich itself. Some of these constructions remained on paper while some of those built still dominate their original contexts as unwelcome guests. An example of these monumental buildings with their "superhuman dimensions" are the Flaktürme—the anti-aircraft gun blockhouse towers—constructed since 1940 by Architect Friedrich Tamms throughout Germany. These reinforced concrete towers were positioned strategically in cities like Berlin, Hamburg and Vienna in order to protect them from Allied attacks. In Vienna the

communication tower in Esterházy park was converted into an aquarium (Haus des Meeres). The success of this reuse is questionable, in terms of reconciliation between the populace and its wartime heritage,—mainly because it simply rejects and refuses any association with the painful memories and histories stored in the building. Another tower in search of an adaptive reuse is the fortress-shaped attack tower in Arenbergpark, which has served as the MAK Depot of Contemporary Art since 1995. For the past decade, MAK Director Peter Noever has promoted an ambitious plan to reuse the structure in its entirety for what he calls the Contemporary Art Tower (CAT).

Similarly, during the Great World Wars and later the Cold War, long lines of defence (with political consequences) were built as borders between neighbouring States; *Der Atlantikwall, The Maginot Line, The West Wall and The Salpa Line*. They were also used in local conflicts such as the ethnic wars of ex-Yugoslavia. These fortified systems wield an intrusive presence, sometimes across more than one country. Today, the Atlantikwall, the defence line which crosses all the States on the European Atlantic coast (from the French-Spanish border till North Cape in Norway), is one of the greatest expression of the *Archaeological Landscape of Wars*. Composed of a sequence of places dense with memo-





ries, bunkers, cemeteries and museums, this linear system presents itself as an immense commemorative open-air site.

How to hand down these Memories?

The slow disappearance of the direct witnesses of the Holocaust drama has led to the consideration of memory and the manner in which it is handed down. Reinhart Koselleck observes that there is currently a passage from an *historical present* of the survivors to a pure

past: "soon only the official documents will speak, integrated and enriched by photos, videos and biographies" (Koselleck 1994, 117).

The 20th century was the Witness' Century,³ the century of the survivor who demonstrated the truth of overwhelming facts and, at the same time, the absolute banality of evil in the 1960s. The Eichmann and Frankfurt trials emphasized the importance of the witness in the construction of a shared history. The body of the survivor became a sort of public body "mindful of many

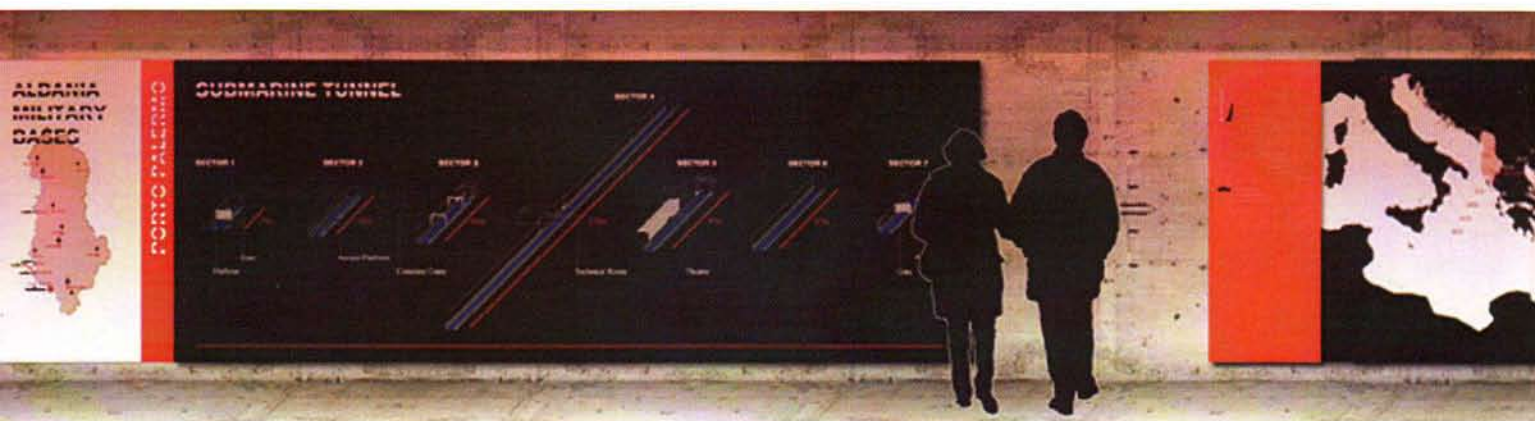
who cannot speak anymore, who have no eyes, ears, or numbers engraved on their skin anymore" (Tarpino 2008, 15). The flow of time and nature result in the disappearance of the last witnesses, leaving us the ethical task of passing on the stories to the new generations, giving them a *monito* (stern warning) of not forgetting and not repeating the tragedies of the past: "[...] as the witnesses to your life diminish, there is less corroboration, and therefore less certainty, as to what you are or what you have been" (Barnes, 2011).

In this context, the places of Memory could represent the new witnesses, called to tell the stories hidden in them with their traces, tangible or intangible. In addition, they can become the possible tools for overcoming trauma. Pierre Nora, in the 1980s, defines the concept of *lieux de memoire*, which is also the title of his impressive work in seven volumes (1984-1992) dedicated to the places of Memory found in France, as: "significant units, of either material or ideal order, which the will of men or the effect of time has turned into symbolic elements of the memorial patrimony of a community" (Nora, 1984). Therefore, a place of memory is a space, such as a museum, a monument, a particular territory or site which embodies traces of historical or traumatic events to a point of becoming a container of collective memory. More so, *places of trauma*,⁴ like memorials are characterized by multiple and different stratifications of memories linked to people who have actually lived those experiences. One such case is the "Topographie des Terrors,"⁵ headquarters of the three major totalitarian institutions of Nazi apparatus (Secret State Police, the SS and the Reich Security Main Office), a place loaded with atrocious memories and destroyed after the war. In 1985 an excavation brought forth the remains of a basement containing kitchens and guard posts. This discovery opened in the heart of Berlin a big wound, a memory that had been removed from the minds and eyes had re-emerged. Today, this place is home to the documentation centre "Topography of Terrors" which

includes historical documentation archives, a large public library and a permanent exhibition. The project was realised by a 2006 competition won by Ursula Wilms and the Landscape Architect Heinz W. Hallmann.

Different Strategies of Re-appropriation: Museography

Our position considers that material traces of conflicts may become, as already mentioned, new witnesses. They embody the multi functions of passing on difficult memories to new generations, imitating the indispensable process of re-appropriation needed to revise traumas and negotiating a new relationship between memory, place and daily life. Some ephemeral projects, which move in-between art and architecture, emphasize the symbolic value and meaning of "removed memory" in this painful heritage. Two artists, Magdalena Jetelova and Ejdrup Hansen, have designed some installations in specific sections of the Atlantikwall. In Jetelova's case, the project, performed for the 50th anniversary of the landing of Allied troops, consisted of the projection on the rough surface of the concrete bunkers excerpts from the book, "Bunker Archaeology" by Paul Virilio (1975). Ejdrup Hansen, instead, in the installation "*The Line – The Light*" (realized the 4th may 1995), projected a beam of light that connected a bunker to another along the west coast of Denmark. The project was switched on from 22:00 to 24:00 as a symbol for celebrating fifty years of peace. The light retraces the coastline of the invasion, from the syncopated and dazzling light of the bombs in the night to the steady light of calm, silence and reflection. It serves as a tool to recall past traces for the purpose of reflection and commemoration. Similarly, "*Tribute in Light*" by the artists Julian LaVerdiere and Paul Myoda, fills the void of the Twin Towers with a beam of light to recall the attack of 9-11. While the association "*Vivre le Rue*"⁶ continues to organize cultural events in the street of Saint Malo, commending its miraculous survival of the bombing that destroyed the city of Brest



during the Second World War. Within a participated process, the French group "Collectif Etc" has converted an unused space between two houses, completely reduced to ruins, to a theatre with the installation of temporary wooden structures. The theatre becomes a strategy of re-appropriation that brings life back into the ruins.

In recent years with lessons learned from the artistic experiences on war heritage, projects were born that use museography as a tool, a tool to recall and reconcile memories of the collective trauma and to promote actions of knowledge, conservation, and communication that valorize the traces, material and immaterial, that are layered in the landscapes and urban territories.

This objective involves, in particular, a real meeting of the people concerned with their own successive memories: a true reconciliation, in certain cases, between tangible and non-tangible heritage. To this end, architectural heritage, museums and all cultural areas must become places of life for the local populations. Synergies between past cultural heritage and contemporary creations, live arts and crafts should be promoted in order to encourage the dialogue between generations and the integration of cultural heritage in local daily life. (Euro Med 2007)

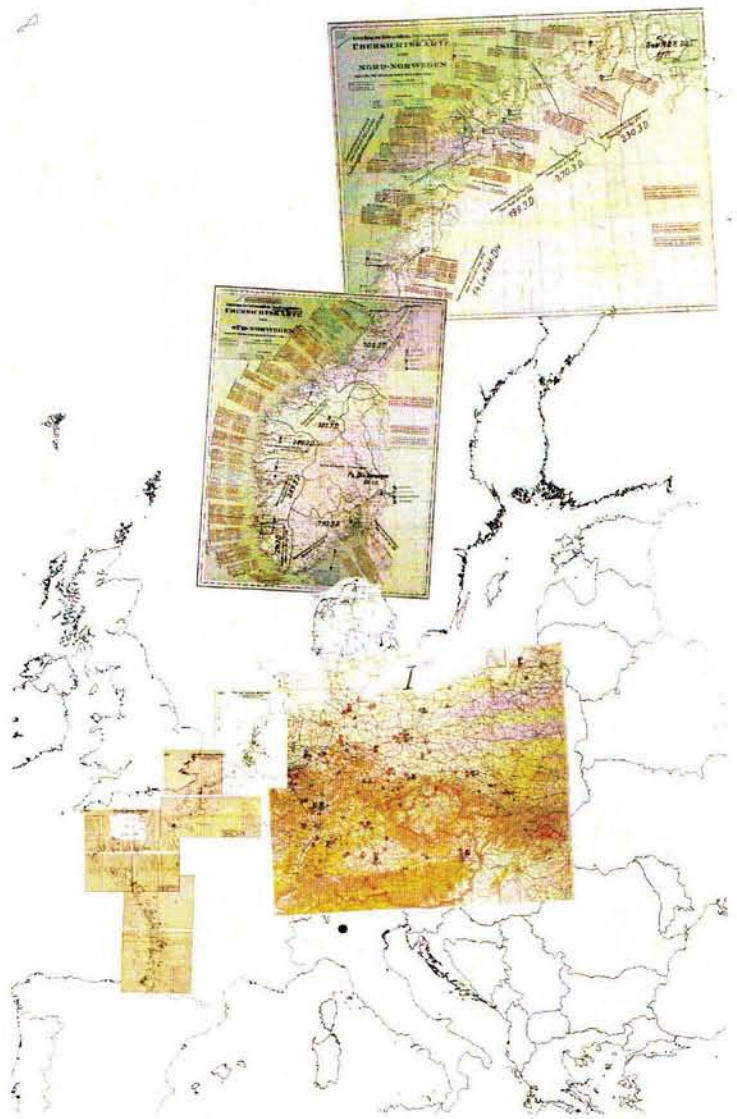
As Luca Basso Peressut affirms: "the landscape changes continually, it is a living and dynamic body [...]. The diffused museum involves polarities and underlines the textures of a material memory of a complexity which is subjected to change. This is, therefore, a contemporary condition of doing architecture [...]" (Drugman, Basso Peressut, and Brenna, 2002). The concept of the diffused museum extends its borders and presents itself as a real design action. On one hand, the museum aims to preserve memories while on the other to make them accessible to the community: "The museum into the places become a possible strategy of intervention and the catalyst of projects aiming to the valorisation of historical sediments existing in the territory" (Basso Peressut, 2007). Museography, in this way, promotes a reintegration of traces and rubbles into the life cycle of people and objects. The findings not only represent a redemption for the loss of memory but also a means to uncover other stories and to rediscover other suppressed memories.

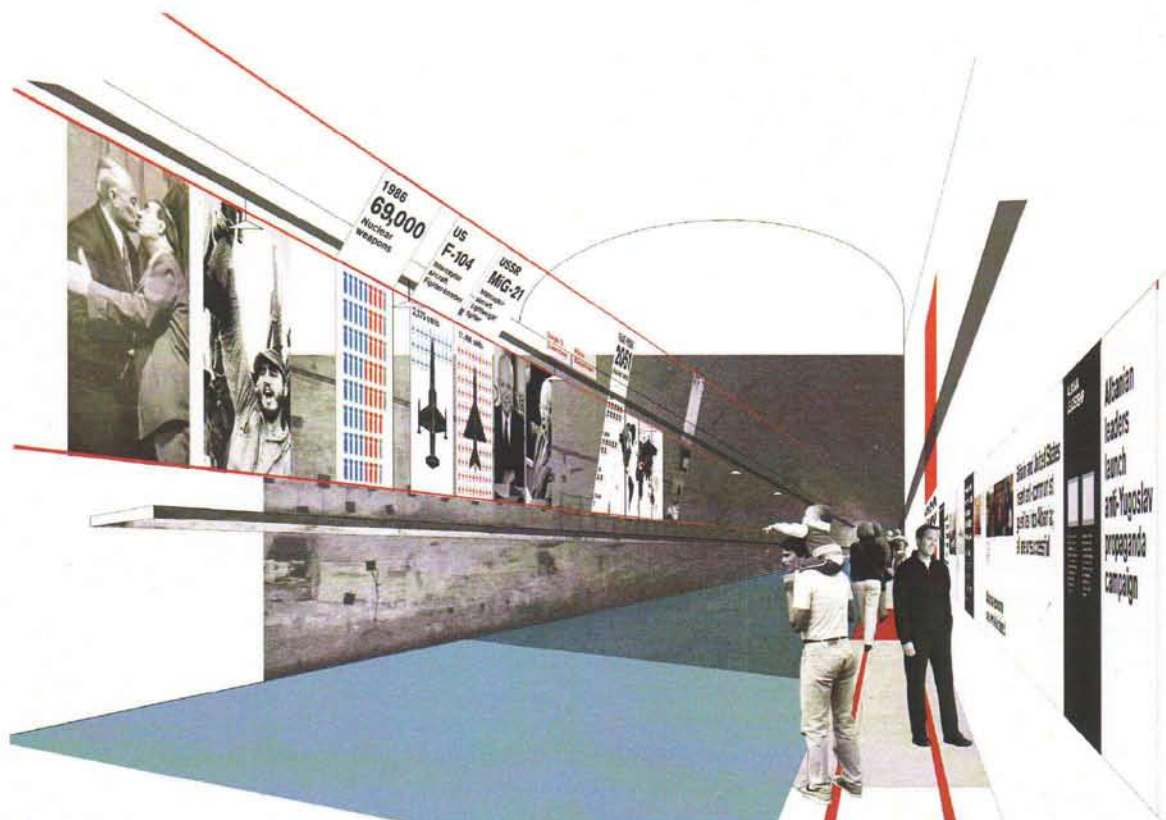
Case Study: Museum of Porto Palermo in Albania

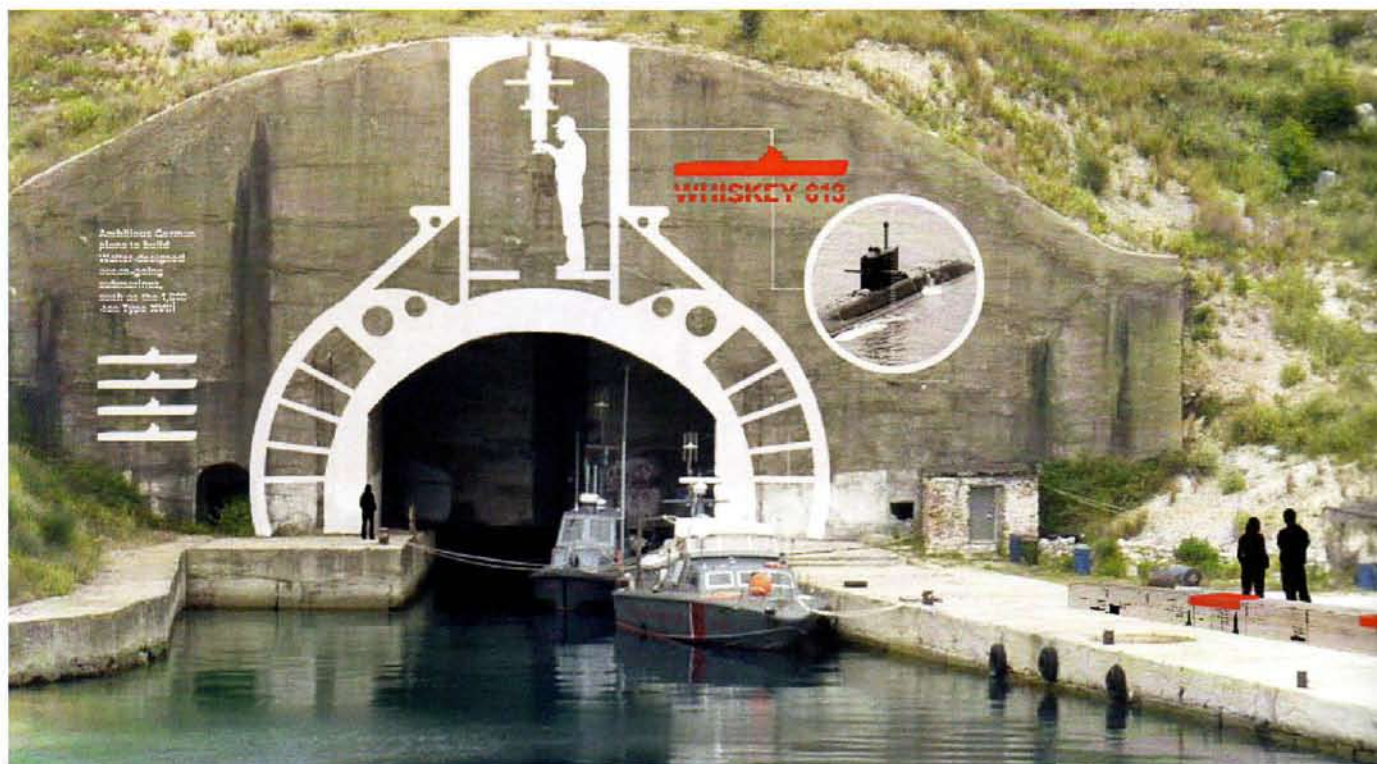
In support of the thesis that the Museography for "Conflict Heritage" can play an important role (in valorisation and recovery practices), in reconciling and overcoming trauma, and extending the concept of a memorial or a memorial museum, we present the project of a museum in the submarine base at Porto Palermo in Albania, developed by Studio Terragni in collaboration with Jeffrey Schnapp.

The submarine base of Porto Palermo (Gjiri i

Panormes) in Albania—160 km southwest of Tirana—was built during the Cold War by Enver Hoxha, the dictator of Albania from the end of the Second World War until his death in 1985. During the '60 and '70s, under the threat of enemy attack, more than 750.000 bunkers, the so-called "pillboxes" and 200 tunnels, used as guard posts and shelter of weapons were built across the country. The tunnel of Gjiri Panormes was built by 2000 people, most of them convicts, in order to accommodate four Russian submarines of 90 meters. Studio Terragni with the collaboration of Jeffrey Schnapp, was called to propose a project for converting the submarine base into a museum. Surely the Albanians had seen the design for the "Galleries of Piedicastello" in Trento, transformed to the Historic







Museum of Trentino, a space completely dedicated to history and memory.⁷ In an interview, published by Columbia University's "SLUM Lab" magazine, Elisabetta Terragni describes her sensations during the visit of such a complex structure, not only for its size—650 meters long by 12 high—but also for the painful values:

The excitement of walking for the first time through an abandoned tunnel (be it a civil or military infrastructure) speeds up your thinking: you realize that you cannot undo such a violent intervention into earth and rock, nor build in accord with it. The challenge lies in inventing another purpose, another future for a new useless condition. Your will is suspended by the overwhelming size and self-contained nature of tunnels. You're disinclined to add to or otherwise change the structure. (Terragni 2011, 50)

The history of the military base, a building full of meanings, sometimes difficult, is afflicted by the deaths of prisoners who died during its construction. It gains a new life as museum of the Cold War; a place where people can know and learn the past in its various expressions, overcoming a difficult history both locally and internationally. Terragni, with the collaboration of Daniele Ledda for graphic design, has created an exhibition conceived as a quasi trip in an underground world. The base becomes the scene in which the events which marked its history are the main characters. The exhibition unfolds a spatial sequence of seven environments

that deal with different themes: "The I and IV acts are transition ones which mark the passage from inside and outside [...]. The VII act concludes the track with a navigation toward the fortress of Ali Pasha. The acts II, III, V, instead, have a historical—documentary cut" (Terragni 2012, forthcoming).

The exhibition tells the Cold War from two perspectives in repartee on the walls: one dedicated to local history of Albania—from 1946, the year of the birth of the People's Republic, to 1992, the year of Democratic Party's assumption of power—and the other relating to the history of the world's superpowers. From the graphical point of view, a unique sign cuts at the centre each letter and word used in the exhibition. This choice is based on the association Albanians have made to the word Gjiri for four decades: "a concealed cut through the bay's promontory, a symbol of the erasures and wounds of the Hoxha period" (Foppiano 2011, 102).

The submarine base is now a place of memories and histories that re-emerge on the surface of the reinforced concrete walls. As Terragni said: "Our aim was never to restore, but rather to give a new life and meaning to a space that was respectful of its past" (Foppiano 2011, 103).¹⁵ This is why the proposal of Studio Terragni to house a Museum of the Cold War makes sense: it opens up a future in which people can finally achieve reconciliation with their past, and in which these pieces of war heritage can find their appropriate dimensions and place, neither visually removed nor presented as mausoleums of pain. □