



# Heritage and Society



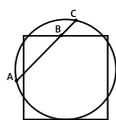
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# Heritage and Society

Edited by Robert Kusek and Jacek Purchla

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International Cultural Centre

Rynek Główny 25, 31-008 Krakow, Poland

tel.: +48 12 42 42 811, fax: +48 12 42 17 844

e-mail: [sekretariat@mck.krakow.pl](mailto:sekretariat@mck.krakow.pl)

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# Adaptive Reuse and Heritage Making<sup>1</sup>

Francesca Lanz

Politecnico di Milano, Department of Architecture  
and Urban Studies (Italy)

Heritage is heritage because it is subjected to the management and preservation/conservation process, not because it simply “is.” This process does not just “find” sites and places to manage and protect. It is itself a constitutive cultural process that identifies those things and places that can be given meaning and value as “heritage,” reflecting contemporary and cultural social values, debates and aspirations.  
(Laurajane Smith)<sup>2</sup>

Since the 1990s onward a growing corpus of studies has been delving into heritage and heritage practices from manifold and widened perspectives. Going beyond the idea of heritage as a *patrimoine* (i.e. related to the Latin idea of *patres*, holding an inner value and inherited from previous generations with a duty to preserve it), they have been looking at heritage as multifarious and multi-layered, mostly contingent, imbricated in society, open to several critical readings and quite often holding a contentious dimension. Neither static nor fixed, heritage thus has been investigated and theorised as a “constitutive cultural process,” shaped by contemporary social, cultural, and political instances and inherently intertwined with memory, identity, owning and disowning, remembering and forgetting practices. On the wake of these studies new promising lines of inquiry have

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1 This paper ensues from the research project “TRACES – Transmitting Contentious Cultural Heritages with the Arts: From Intervention to Co-production,” which has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement no. 693857.

2 Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, Abigdon 2006, p. 3.

been emerging and taking root, expanding the field of study to include contributions from different disciplines and opening up to important theoretical and methodological opportunities to investigate different “types” of heritage for the potentially diverse meanings that may gather around them.

As an architect researching on heritage and museums, I have found myself increasingly reflecting on the possible implications of this understanding of heritage on architectural theory and practice, as well as wondering what in turn might be the contribution of architectural studies to such a debate. If we assume that heritage is constructed and produced in relation to the “cultural work” it can do in the present and because of “management and preservation/conservation”<sup>3</sup> processes to which it is subjected, what is the role of urban planning, urban policy design, and architectural preservation practices in “heritage making?” And, on the other hand, how can such an approach to heritage help us reflect on architectural practice today? What does it entail for architectural interventions on the pre-existing built environment? How may it affect the design process?

This article aims to bring forward some preliminary thoughts on such issues with a focus on contentious heritage and emerging questions within the ongoing research programme TRACES.<sup>4</sup> “TRACES – Transmitting Contentious Cultural Heritages with the Arts” is a three-year project funded in 2016 by the European Commission as part of the Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme with the main objective to investigate the challenges and opportunities raised when transmitting complex pasts and the role of difficult heritage in contemporary Europe. TRACES is based on the acknowledgement that European cultural heritage is inherently complex and layered. In the past, conflicting or controversial perspectives on different historical memories and experiences have been colliding in the rich cultural landscape of Europe and continue to do so in the present. These contentious heritages are often particularly difficult to convey to a wide public and can impede inclusivity as well as prevent the development of convivial relations. Nevertheless, if transmitted sensitively, they can contribute to a process of reflexive Europeanisation, in which the European imagination is shaped by self-awareness, ongoing critical reflection, and dialogue across different positions. For

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3 Ibidem.

4 [www.tracesproject.eu](http://www.tracesproject.eu) (access: 17 September 2018).

this reason, TRACES involves a multi-disciplinary team that brings together established and emerging scholars, artists, and cultural workers in order to develop a rigorous, creative, and all-round investigation on contentious cultural heritages, and to experiment with innovative research methodologies. To do so, TRACES has initiated a series of “Creative Co-productions” in which artists, researchers, heritage agencies, and stakeholders collaborate on long-term projects researching selected cases of contentious heritage and developing new participatory public interfaces. Theoretical investigations pertaining to different research fields and disciplines support and complement these art-based research actions, analysing and expanding their outcomes.

This article, ensuing from such a research framework, seeks first to outline possible interrelations between recent theories on adaptive reuse and heritage thinking. Then, by focusing on the case of the repurposing of former historical prisons in Italy, it relates the above-mentioned general questions to issues pertaining to architectural difficult, neglected and contentious heritage in urban contexts with the aim to identify possible strategies for its transmission. My argument is that this way of thinking about heritage that sets the focus on “interactions” and “relations” rather than on the physical architecture per se can provide a promising framework for critically thinking of adaptive reuse. At the same time, as I will demonstrate, adaptive reuse theory and practice can provide insights on strategies and tools for heritage preservation, valorisation, and communication.

### **Thinking Adaptive Reuse Through Heritage**

Today one of the most important research and professional areas of architectural studies and practice is the reuse of abandoned pre-existing buildings; mostly known as adaptive intervention or adaptive reuse. Indeed, even though the relationship with pre-existing buildings has always been a crucial issue for design theory and practice within the European architectural debate, the interest on the topic of reuse has been raising since the 1970s, resulting in scientific publications and, above all, an increasing number of projects. The European architectural culture actually features a long and often outstanding tradition in building on the built environment, which relies on an evolving critical, theoretical, and design attitude toward the historical architectural pre-existences. Examples span over time from Renaissance buildings erected on Roman remains, up to post-war interventions including, among others, projects

by Italian masters such as Carlo Scarpa, the BBPR group, Franco Albini, Ignazio Gardella and, most recently, Giorgio Grassi, Gabriella Ioli, and Massimo Carmassi, as well as Andrea Bruno and Guido Canali, whose work still represents a reference point for a forward-looking approach toward a critical-design-based restoration aimed at the preservation and valorisation of historical buildings through their reuse.<sup>5</sup> Though what we call “adaptive reuse” is not an unprecedented contemporary phenomenon, nowadays it is widely believed that working on the built environment is *the* predominant condition for contemporary architectural practice.<sup>6</sup> This has been related to different factors, notably the decreasing capacity of urban territories to accommodate new buildings in a full urban fabric, as well as a new approach toward an environmental, economic, and social sustainable development.

A current buzzword in today’s architectural debate is “adaptive reuse.” Sometimes too narrowly referred only to the reuse of former industrial buildings and industrial heritage and to contemporary instances and design practice, adaptive reuse has been recently widely explored by several researchers and professionals from different perspectives and under different names: reusing, rereading, remodelling, rewriting, recycling, layering, etc. Their work is contributing to the development of a growing corpus of studies on the subject with a significant contribution from the field of interior studies, architecture, and design.<sup>7</sup>

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5 Imma Forino, “Cultura del Recupero e Cultura dello Sviluppo,” [in:] *Op. cit. Selezione della critica d’arte contemporanea*, no. 114 (2002), pp. 31–38; Antonella Huber, *Il Museo Italiano*, Milan 1997.

6 See Bie Plevoets and Koenraad Van Cleempoel, “Adaptive Reuse as a Strategy Towards Conservation of Cultural Heritage: A Literature Review,” [in:] *Structural Studies, Repairs and Maintenance of Heritage Architecture XII*, C.A. Brebbia and Luigia Binda (eds.), Southampton 2011, pp. 155–164; eadem, “Adaptive Reuse as an Emerging Discipline: An Historic Survey,” [in:] *Reinventing Architecture and Interiors: A Socio-political View on Building Adaptation*, Graham Cairns (ed.), London 2013, pp. 13–32; Fred Scott, *On Altering Architecture*, London and New York 2008; Johannes Cramer and Stefan Breitling, *Architecture in Existing Fabric: Planning, Design, Building*, Basel 2007; Martina Baum and Kees Christiaanse (eds.), *City as Loft: Adaptive Reuse as a Resource for Sustainable Urban Development*, Zurich 2012; Graeme Brooker and Sally Stone, *Re-readings: Interior Architecture and the Design Principles of Remodelling Existing Buildings*, London 2004.

7 E.g. Graham Cairns (ed.), *Reinventing Architecture and Interiors: A Socio-Political View on Building Adaptation*, London 2013; Graeme Brooker and Sally Stone, *Re-readings: Interior Architecture...*, op. cit.; Graeme Brooker, “Interior Matter(s): Proximities, Inhabitation, Identities,” [in:] *Journal of Interior Design*, no. 41 (2016), pp 5–12; idem and

Some authors, among whom Graeme Brooker and Sally Stone (scholars and teachers who have been investigating this topic for a number of years and extensively published on the subject) even suggest that working on pre-existing buildings is the distinguishing nature and the specific realm of interior architecture as such. “Interior architecture, interior design, interior decoration, and building reuse,” state Brooker and Stone, “are very closely linked subjects, all of which deal, in varying degrees, with the transformation of a given space.”<sup>8</sup> They propose a kind of methodology for adaptive reuse projects, defined as “rereading” or “adaptation,” which is based on different spatial strategies and “tactics.”<sup>9</sup> As Brooker and Stone, most of the above-mentioned scholars, despite different critical approaches, have been researching and theorising on adaptive reuse by looking at the relationship between the new intervention and the existing building mostly focusing on its spatial and material features, and its architectural outcome. Up to now, what has mostly been overlooked in these studies is an epistemological reflection on adaptive reuse that seeks to explore its actual or potential cultural impact on a city’s cultural and social life. To contribute to filling this gap, this article aims to appropriate thoughts prompted by most recent studies on critical heritage and position adaptive reuse in relation to them.

Whatever we choose to call it, adaptive reuse may be basically defined as a design-based intervention aimed at *repurposing* a building (usually abandoned, under- or disused, and often in decay) which, for any reason (historical, artistic, cultural, as well as economic) has been considered worth preservation. This decision actually, in some way, attributes a certain value to the building itself, whether this ensues from a conservation restriction imposed from above, as well as when it is somehow a programmatic design choice. By virtue of the adaptive reuse itself, this supposed “value” is made manifest, reaffirmed and even reinforced because

Sally Stone, *What Is Interior Design?*, Mies 2010; Adriano Cornoldi (ed.), *Gli interni nel progetto sull’esistente*, Padoa 2007; Antonella Huber, *Il Museo Italiano*, Milan 1997; Bie Plevoets and Koenraad Van Cleempoel, “Aemulatio and the Interior Approach of Adaptive Reuse,” [in:] *Interiors: Design, Architecture, Culture*, vol. 5 no. 1 (2014), pp. 71–88.

8 Graeme Brooker and Sally Stone, *What Is Interior Design?*, op. cit., p. 46.

9 Eidem, *Re-readings: Interior Architecture...*, op. cit.; eidem, *Context and Environment: Site and Ideas*, Lausanne 2008; eidem, *Elements and Objects: Occupying Space*, Lausanne 2009; Graeme Brooker, *Adaptation Strategies for Interior Architecture and Design*, London 2016.

it is (or at least should be) the reason why the building is reused rather than demolished, despite its condition of disuse and decay. However, differently from a mere restoration, a reuse project usually consists in an intervention that, albeit meant to preserve the building to some extent, is primarily aimed at turning it into something new, repurposing and re-activating it in relation to current instances and a new function, allowing a *re-appropriation* of its empty spaces with a desirable social, cultural, and/or economic benefit for its present source communities and context. This reactivation, which is the ultimate goal of any adaptive intervention, may be based on the design of a new functional programme for the building, a temporary asset, as well as on an art-based action. Often, it implies an upgrade of the existing structure from a functional, technological, and spatial point view. In most cases, it results in a new interior spatial layout for the pre-existing spaces achieved through architectural interventions. The impact of such an intervention on the pre-existing building and its spaces widely varies and mostly depends on the designer's choices and his/her poetic and architectural approach. The architectural intervention thus largely selects what to preserve and how; what to emphasise and what to restore, reinstate, or delete.

In a recent essay widely exploring reuse, Julia Hegewald defines it as rooted in the past but creating “something distinct and novel in the present;” contributing to the “further establishment of tradition” while looking at the future and characterised by “continuity” and “agency.”<sup>10</sup> According to her,

Re-use is a conscious and selective process in which existing elements are borrowed or salvaged [...] in order to be applied to a new context or they get manipulated and react to new external influences. [...] [Re-use] involves an active deed; there needs to be a reason for why something is re-used and based on this motivation or aims, people make strategic choices about what to re-use and what to simply deprive of any use and value. Those items which are re-used have to be filled with a new significance, with novel functions.<sup>11</sup>

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10 Julia A.B. Hegewald, *Towards a Theory of Re-Use: Desecration, Retro and Fake Versus Improvement, Innovation and Integration*, [in:] *Re-Use-The Art and Politics of Integration and Anxiety*, Julia A.B. Hegewald and Subrata K. Mitra (eds.), Los Angeles 2012, passim.

11 *Ibidem*, p. 48.

In 1976 Rodolfo Machado writing on “remodelling” already proposed that theorising and doing an architectural intervention on pre-existing buildings should not be limited to a matter of design (spatial and/or functional), but shall rather focus on the “meaning” of this architectural pre-existence and the way the architect deals with it. He thus defined “remodelling” as a “formal intervention upon existing form” where “the past takes on a greater significance because it, itself, is the material to be altered and reshaped. [...] Thus, the past becomes a ‘package of sense,’ of built-up meaning to be accepted (maintained), transformed, or suppressed (refused).”<sup>12</sup>

These definitions echo back to those of heritage mentioned before, defining cultural heritage as a “mode of cultural production in the present that has recourse to the past.”<sup>13</sup> Indeed, my assumption is that by looking at adaptive reuse from such a perspective we might view it as a heritage practice. This has important consequences also for architectural interventions, eventually shifting the focus of the question from design strategies of adaptive intervention to its socio-cultural and political agency. Another overlap between adaptive reuse theory and heritage thinking lies in the acknowledged relationship between heritage and identity making in relation to place-related theories. Allan Pred reminds us that “place [...] always involves re-appropriation and transformation of space and nature that is inseparable from the reproduction and transformation of society in time and space. [...] It also is [...] what contributes to history in a specific context through the creation and utilization of a physical setting.”<sup>14</sup> The definition and theory of place is itself contested terrain; a unified perspective is likely always to be out of reach and largely falls beyond

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12 Rodolfo Machado, “Old Buildings as Palimpsest: Towards a Theory of Remodeling,” [in:] *Progressive Architecture*, no. 11 (1976), pp. 46–49.

13 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “Theorizing Heritage,” [in:] *Ethnomusicology*, vol. 39 no. 3 (1995), p. 369 (367–380). See also Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, op. cit.; eadem, “Affect and Registers of Engagement: Navigating Emotional Responses to Dissonant Heritage,” [in:] *Representing Enslavement and Abolition in Museums: Ambiguous Engagements*, eadem et al. (eds.), New York 2011, pp. 260–303; Brian Graham, Gregory J. Ashworth, and John E. Tunbridge, *A Geography of Heritage: Power, Culture and Economy*, New York 2000; David Lowenthal, *Possessed by the Past: The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*, New York 1998.

14 Allan Pred, “Place as Historically Contingent Process: Structuration and the Time-Geography of Becoming Places,” [in:] *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, vol. 74 no. 2 (1984), p. 279 (279–297).

the scope of this article. Different critical traditions see place, variously, as a process, historically contingent and inherently multi-layered, social, relational, and concerned with memory and identity; as significant space or identified portion of space, a “fragment of the world”<sup>15</sup> imbued with human experience, a manifold experience, a “way of understanding.” Its multifarious characteristics include (but are not limited to) multiscalarity, openness, and particularity. Lest we over-determine place as merely mind-matter, or nothing more than an object for a subject, we also attend to material dimensions as they are present in the morphology, built environment, and air of the named places. To avoid getting bogged down in genealogical and definitional discussions of “place” as a concept, I borrow from Low, among others, the idea to posit place not so much as an *a priori* reality but rather as a “space that is *inhabited* and *appropriated* through the attribution of personal and group meanings, feelings, sensory perceptions, and understandings.”<sup>16</sup> Such a view on place echoes in the already given critical definition of adaptive reuse and provides a link with heritage theories. Postiglione and Bassanelli point this out by saying that

[a]daptive reuse ensues from the assumption that identities are formed in the correlation and interdependence between places and people(s). Once the interrelations break, a place loses its meaning and people lose their sense of belonging to that place. [...] [A]daptive reuse thus refers to the construction of identity for and by the people(s), through the reference to a place, as well as the construction of identity for a place, through the reference to its materiality: morphology, architectural forms, spaces, objects, artefacts, namely the material heritage that is stratified on the territory.<sup>17</sup>

Such an approach allows thinking about adaptive reuse not as occupation or re-functionalisation of a given space through different strategies and approaches, but as a process of “re-inhabiting,” understanding this in

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15 Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, London 1976.

16 Setha Low, *Spatializing Culture: The Ethnography of Space and Place*, London 2017, p. 32. Italics added.

17 Michela Bassanelli and Gennaro Postiglione, “Active-Actions Strategies: Adaptive Reuse come processo di riattivazioni sostenibili,” [in:] *Re-Cycle 03 - Viaggio in Italia*, Sara Marini and Vincenza Santangelo (eds.), Rome 2013, p. 155 (155–159).

its complex meaning and implications related with its etymological origin. The verb “to inhabit,” in fact, comes from the Latin *habitare*, frequentative form of the verb *habere*, which means: to hold, to have, to possess. In Italian, *abito* is the first singular person of the verb *abitare*, namely: I dwell, a concept that, in its turn, relates to Heidegger thinking of dwelling as “being in the world,” as “building” and “preserving.” *Abito* as a noun means “dress,” and as an adjective it stands for “habit, way of being, a living behaviour.” Hence, in-habiting signifies not only to dwell but to live a space, experiencing it, making it one’s own, by enjoying the essential social dimension of doing so. “Where space is not assumed as pre-existing but produced,” Attiwill says. “[...] Occupation becomes a process of transformation, of making relations.”<sup>18</sup> It becomes an interpretation, a “constitutive cultural process,” shaped by contemporary social, cultural, and political instances and inherently intertwined with memory, identity, owning and disowning, remembering and forgetting practices.

### **Reusing Former Prisons: The Challenge to Transmit a Difficult Heritage**

Dynamics of memory are far from linear; they are full of complexities, and strongly related to processes of appropriation of national heritage, as well as the owning and disowning of memory sites, in particular those where the spatialisation of memory has created strong indexical links to past traumatic events.

(Rob van der Laarse)<sup>19</sup>

Urban built environment, especially in European cities, is inherently layered and complex; a “palimpsest,” as it has been defined, of historical traces and memories, some of which are manifest, some other hidden, forgotten, and barely visible.<sup>20</sup>

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18 Suzie Attiwill, “Working Space: Interiors as Provisional Compositions,” [in:] *Occupation: Negotiations with Constructed Space*, Brighton 2009, p. 2.

19 Rob van der Laarse, “Interview,” [in:] *Traces Journal*, no. 2 (2016), [www.traces.polimi.it/journal](http://www.traces.polimi.it/journal) (access: 15 October 2017).

20 Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*, Stanford 2003.

Our cities abound with arguably difficult heritages that are indeed often neglected, abandoned also because of their awkwardness and despite the rich “cultural work” they might perform in the present. European landscapes and cities are studded with large buildings and wide infrastructures, often abandoned after recent traumatic events. They recall a past deemed to be forgotten, therefore ignored in order to be removed, at least metaphorically, whenever preservation laws, economical consideration, or architectural and urban context do not physically permit it. Traces of recent past conflicts are the one that most immediately come to mind, nonetheless there are many others. Former prisons are another example.

Developed as a public architecture of confinement since the Renaissance by Vitruvio, Alberti, Palladio, and Milizia, through the Baroque Period until the Enlightenment and the renowned projects by Claude Nicolas Ledoux and Jeremy and Samuel Bentham, prisons are places of discipline and punishment, total institutions, in between radical humanness and social deterioration. These are places of contradiction, highly layered and complex from a social, historical, and architectural point of view. Their spaces talk about confinement, punishment, incarceration, and an often inhumane system. However, at the same time they often bear memory of past events, of the changing position about what is legal and what is not, freedom and power relations.<sup>21</sup>

Their complexity is not only related to their memory but also to their physical features. They are a kind of micro-towns whose boundaries are physically marked by containment walls and controller accesses that enclose completely introverted and very compact spaces organised into rigid layouts. Their extension and their nature as out-and-out micro-towns is characteristic of their design. In most cases, these extraordinary large complexes constitute even today impressive architectural structures in the landscape in which they are located. On the other hand, when they were built close to a city, either near the urban walls or inside them, they considerably affected the urban development and often continue to do so. Their size, in fact, was usually equal or even bigger than the major public buildings located in the city, such as the cathedral or the city hall, while their architectural characterisation and decoration was purposely

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21 Marella Santangelo, *In prigione: Architettura e tempo della detenzione*, Syracuse 2017; Nikolaus Pevsner, *A History of Building Types*, Princeton 1976.

“hermetic,” monumental, and heavy and their dimension and architectural closure has often influenced the urban growth around them.

The difficulty of dealing with these architectural complexes becomes evident once they are closed. Today in Europe and overseas the problem of the reuse of former prisons is a quite urgent one. Many prisons are too old to be kept in use and they cannot be upgraded anymore, thus they must be closed. Once closed, most of them remain where they were and as they were, as unsettling traces of a past deemed to be forgotten – being often completely or partially abandoned, misused, and subject to negligence: eerie ruins, ruled out of the urban and social life that buzzes around them, largely contributing to urban decay. When they undergo adaptive interventions, they are no less problematic, as reuse interventions span from luxury hotels to entertainment parks, up to museums and tourist places.<sup>22</sup> Today in Italy 20 percent of all prisons have been built before the 20th century and host more than 10 percent of the total number of inmates. Many of them are located in cities. The need to dispose of older jails cyclically comes up, and recently the state agency that owns these structures (Demanio) has opened the first construction site to realise a series of public offices in some dismantled buildings including some former prison facilities.<sup>23</sup> There are already many historical disused, abandoned prisons in Italy, some of them of inestimable political, military, and architectural value. There is no exact estimate, but according to the prison observatory of the Antigone association<sup>24</sup> they are at least 14 of these. These are nationally important buildings, some of which are even internationally relevant for the events that took place in them, their architectural

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22 Jacqueline Z. Wilson, *Prison: Cultural Memory and Dark Tourism*, New York 2008; Sarah Hodgkinson and Diane Urquhart, “Prison Tourism: Exploring the Spectacle of Punishment in the UK,” [in:] *Dark Tourism: Practice and Interpretation*, Glenn Hooper and John J. Lennon (eds.), London 2016, pp. 40–53; Sarah Hodgkinson and Diane Urquhart, “Ghost Hunting in Prison: Contemplating Death Through Sites of Incarceration and the Co-modification of the Penal Past,” [in:] Jacqueline Z. Wilson et al. (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Prison Tourism*, London 2017, pp. 559–582; Alana Barton and Alyson Brown, “Show Me the Prison! The Development of Prison Tourism in the UK,” [in:] *Crime Media Culture*, vol. 11 no. 3 (2015), pp. 237–258.

23 See <https://www.wired.it/attualita/politica/2017/01/10/carceri-cittadelle-pubblica-amministrazione/> (access: 15 October 2017).

24 See <http://www.associazioneantigone.it/tredicesimo-rapporto-sulle-condizioni-di-detenzione/02-architettura/> (access: 15 October 2017).

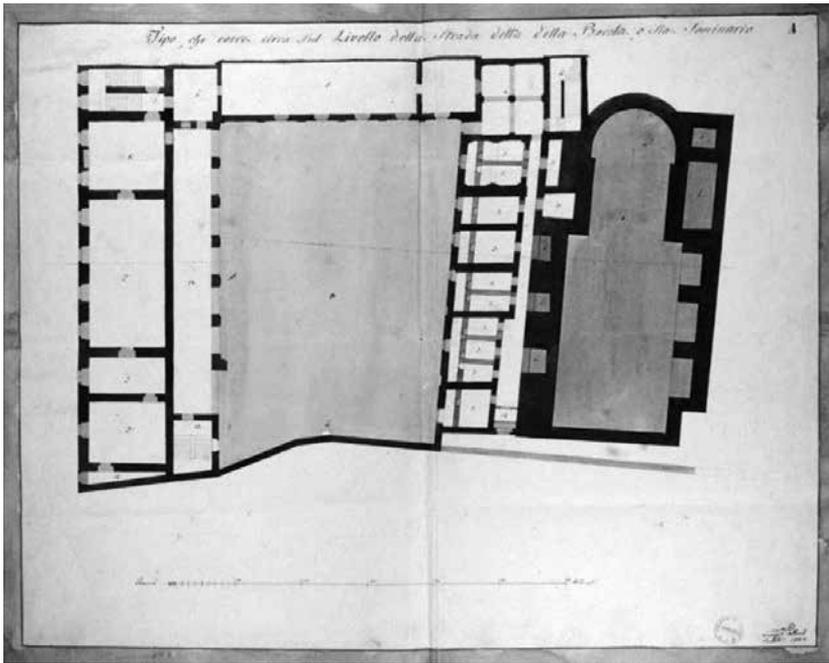


Image 1: Adaptive reuse of the former Santa Agata cloister as a prison, Bergamo, Italy; project by Leopold Pollack, 1802  
© Archivio di Stato di Bergamo

and environmental historical value, and the iconic strength of their structures such as the Pianosa penal colony<sup>25</sup> or the prison on the island of Santo Stefano (Ventotene). The latter is a historical Bourbon jail, which became a prison for political dissidents from the Risorgimento until Fascism; it was there that the famous Ventotene Manifesto was written in 1941. The horseshoe structure is a cross between a Panopticon and an inverted theatre laid down like a crown on the rocks of the island. It has been abandoned since its closure in 1965, although recently the Ministry of Cultural Heritage has promised funding for its restoration.

Besides such significant buildings there are other constructions which are less known on a national scale but very significant locally and

<sup>25</sup> See [http://www.repubblica.it/viaggi/2015/09/09/news/quelle\\_oasi\\_isole\\_carceri-122524134/](http://www.repubblica.it/viaggi/2015/09/09/news/quelle_oasi_isole_carceri-122524134/) (access: 15 October 2017).



Image 2: Le Murate Florence, view of one of the inner plazas with bow windows of the apartments  
© Le Murate PAC

represent a substantial inactive heritage in our territory. One example is the former prison of Santa Agata in the historic centre of Bergamo. A former convent, built on the ruins of an ancient Roman aqueduct, it was transformed by Austrian-born Italian architect Leopoldo Pollack into a prison in the 18th century. Abandoned in the 1970s after various alterations, it is now in disuse and waiting for reuse. Alongside these disposed assets there are some virtuous examples of regeneration, such as the Carcere delle Nuove in Turin, transformed into a museum, and above all the complex of Le Murate in Florence. A cloistered convent until 1424, then used as a monastery, closed in 1808 following the suppression of the monastic orders operated by Napoleon, it was transformed into a male prison in 1845 and stayed in use until the opening of the new prison in Sollicciano in the early 1980s. Le Murate was completely restructured and renewed in the early 2000s thanks to a project led by the architect Renzo Piano. Today Le Murate hosts many residential and public subsidised units, associations working on issues of justice, human



Image 3: Le Murate prison in Florence, Italy; view of the cell gallery before the renovation  
© Le Murate PAC

rights and social projects, a library, a literary café, commercial spaces, art galleries, and some old cells that have been turned into a museum, making it one of the most popular entertainment and meeting venues in Florence. It is a great example of reuse that looks to the future and of re-appropriating and returning a once neglected space to the whole city - an example of “inhabited heritage.”

## Conclusions

The relationship between a new architectural intervention and already existing architecture is a phenomenon that changes in relation to the cultural values attributed both to the meaning of historic architecture and the intentions of the new intervention. Hence, it is an enormous mistake to think that one can lay down a permanent doctrine or at least a scientific definition of architectural intervention. [...] The design of a new work of architecture comes physically close to the existing one, generating a visual and spatial relation as well as a genuine interpretation of the historical material it is confronted with. As a result, this material becomes the object of a true



Image 4: Pianosa, Italian penal colony, 2017  
© Marta Lironi



Image 5: An empty cell at Santa Agata former prison, 2017  
© Giovanni Emilio Galanello

interpretation which explicitly or implicitly accompanies the new intervention in its overall significance.

(De Sola Morales)<sup>26</sup>

To draw a tentative conclusion from such an exploratory introduction about potential overlaps between heritage and adaptive reuse thinking and practices it can be said that this manner of thinking of adaptive reuse and architectural interventions on the built environment involves meeting the people concerned with the negotiation of their own (sometimes difficult) memories and using tangible architectural traces as heritage. To this end, not only museums, libraries, archives, and collections, but also thus far unrecognised sites of historical interest, in urban as well as rural areas, become places of cultural production and co-production. Hence, the urban built environment might substantially contribute to urban cultural life and its improvement, not so much through a “heritage-led urban regeneration” mainly based on “economic benefits” ensuing from an improved “attractiveness of historic cities” – which often results in triggering gentrification phenomena – but rather by contributing to promoting an evolving and progressive sense of belonging and civic connoisseurship. This process might play an important role in promoting an idea of “citizenship” that is not based on political, ethnic, or birth origin, but on a sense of belonging understood, at its simplest, as “emotional attachments that lead to feelings of being at home.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ignasi de Solà Morales, “From Contrast to Analogy: Developments in the Concept of Architectural Intervention,” [in:] *Lotus International*, no. 46 (1985), pp. 37–45.

<sup>27</sup> [www.mela-archive.polimi.it](http://www.mela-archive.polimi.it) (access: 17 September 2018). See “Belonging.”