

European Conference
Cities and Urban Spaces: Chances for Cultural and Citizenship Education

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Input

Workshop I City and the Past: Cultural and Citizenship Education at the interface of remembrance policy

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Introduction

William Morris founded the SPAB in 1877, and wrote the Manifesto which sets out the core concerns of SPAB philosophy:

1. Old buildings tell us about, who we were. As the Manifesto states, we should “protect our ancient buildings, and hand them down instructive and venerable to those that come after us.”
2. All parts of a building’s history are of interest, not just its original appearance. And it follows that buildings should not be restored. If a building is restored: “there is no laying to rest the suspicion in the spectator of what may have been lost; and in short a feeble and lifeless forgery is the result of all the wasted labour.”
3. If it isn’t broken, then don’t mend it.
‘Authenticity’ means the patina of age, not just the original idea. “Resist all tampering with either the fabric or ornament of the building as it stands.”
4. Old buildings should be properly cared for, with vigilant maintenance and the use of traditional materials. “Put Protection in place of Restoration.... stave off decay by daily care.”
5. New parts should reflect modern design. “The change of necessity (should be) wrought in the unmistakable fashion of the time.”
6. Because SPAB likes old buildings, it doesn’t mean we think new buildings should look like old buildings.

Some suggestions for the Workshop discussion

1. Try to understand what you’ve got. It can be more complex than you first thought.
There is a church in London’s Spitalfields, which was built in 1743-44 as a Huguenot Chapel; because of the changing immigrant population in that area, it has subsequently become a Synagogue, and, since 1975, it has been a Mosque. It is the same building. It is now difficult to say what has been the most important period for the building; particularly when it is the cumulative history that is so remarkable.

2. It is sometimes difficult to put back what is missing, and indeed it may be inappropriate to do so. In Accra, a statue of Kwame Nkrumah was blown up during the coup against him in 1966, and it lost its head. Since 1975, it has been on public display, without its head, in a Memorial Park. The bronze head has recently been recovered, and the question has been asked: should it be put back? After long discussion, the conclusion has been reached that it should not, because to do so would be to destroy history.

3. Respect the 'Authenticity' of fabric.

In the Rue de la Croix Faubin in Paris there are five granite blocks set flush into the road surface. These are the very blocks on which the guillotine was erected for public executions outside a now demolished prison. Knowing that these are the actual blocks is more powerful than knowing that this was the actual site of public execution; and a restoration with new blocks would not have the same impact either.

4. Respect all histories.

In Brook Street in Mayfair in London, there are two adjoining early C18 houses, very similar in design, both of which have memorial plaques on the outside. One records that this was the home of the composer George Friederich Handel, the other that this was the home of Jimi Hendrix. Who is to say which is the more important history?

5. Allow for change. Nothing is ever finished

As Jane Jacobs wrote in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961) "Cities need old buildings so badly it is probably impossible for vigorous streets and districts to grow without them."

Some reflections on Memory in the context of Remembrance and Identity

1. Memory can be manipulated.

This is not always deliberate. In London, the only places where it is now possible to see the evidence of World War Two bomb damage on standing buildings are on various churches, and public museums. This can give the impression that these were the only targets, but that isn't correct.

2. Memory can be political.

In Trieste the excavation and display of the Roman Forum and the Roman Amphitheatre took place in the 1930s after Trieste was annexed to the Kingdom of Italy in 1920. The purpose was to show that this had been an Italian place, and that the years 1382-1918 when Trieste was part of the Habsburg Empire were of lesser significance.

3. Memory can change.

As Ryszard Kapuscinski wrote in *Travels with Herodotus* (2004) "So it is with memory. Some of its images die out, but new ones appear in their place. The new ones are not identical to those that came before – they are different. Just as one cannot step twice into the same river, so it is impossible for a new image to be exactly like an earlier one."

Some concluding remarks

Can art help?

I would argue that sometimes it could. Here are three examples:

In 2007, Anselm Kiefer erected two *Jericho* towers of reinforced concrete components in the forecourt of the Royal Academy in London. He had explored the theme of towers before. He had built similar towers in Barjac in France and he had also created a series of towers for a permanent installation in a disused Pirelli factory building in Milan. The *Jericho* towers bear a remarkable, and probably coincidental resemblance to the recently demolished stair towers of the Palace of the Republic (*Palast der Republik* 1973-76) on Museum Island in Berlin. Looked at in this way, *Jericho* helps us to understand a bit more about the complex history of this place after the loss of the Stadtschloss.

In 2003, a small memorial to James Joyce was erected on one of the platforms at Ljubljana's central railway station. In 1904, Joyce and his wife Nora mistakenly disembarked there, believing they had reached their destination - the city of Trieste.

It is thought that the young couple spent a night in a park in the city of Laibach (as it was then called), watching the sky through a telescope. They were happy and resumed their journey to Trieste the next morning. Some passers-by find the meaning of the plaque by sculptor Jakov Brdar to be rather obscure. Well, couldn't we say this is a good introduction to Joyce's work?

In 2010, the latest occupant of the so-called Fourth Plinth in London's Trafalgar Square is a 1:30 scale replica of HMS Victory in an acrylic bottle with African-inspired batik sails, a work created by Yinka Shonibare, an Anglo Nigerian artist. The Victory was Lord Nelson's flagship at the Battle of Trafalgar and, Shonibare argues, this work explores the legacy of British colonialism and its expansion in trade and Empire - made possible by Nelson's victory in the Battle of Trafalgar.

And one final thought:

As William Morris said, in his *Address to the Annual General Meeting of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings* in 1889: "These old buildings do not belong to us only; ...they have belonged to our forefathers and they will belong to our descendants unless we play them false. They are not in any sense our property to do, as we like with. We are only the trustees for those who come after us."