RE-ENACTING THE PAST. MUSEOGRAPHY FOR CONFLICT HERITAGE

RIATTIVARE IL PASSATO. LA MUSEOGRAFIA PER L'EREDITA' DEI CONFLITTI
The book draws on the study "Beyond the Memorial: Exhibition Design for Conflict Heritage", which is the topic of the thesis of PhD Candidate Michela Bassanelli (Doctorate Programme in Interior Architecture and Exhibition Design at Politecnico di Milano). Moreover, the work is part of the research activities of the PRIN project 2008 "The musealization and intercultural communication intervention in archaeological sites" (National Coordinator: prof. Marco Vaudetti), carried out by the MIBE group Politecnico di Milano (General Coordinator: prof. Luca Basso Peressut, Coordinator of the research topic "Conflict Archaeology": prof. Gennaro Postiglione). The same topics have become latter subject of a further investigation within the international project "REcall-European Conflict Archaeological Landscape Reappropriation" (www.recall-project.polimi.it), financed by the EC-Culture 2007 programme in 2012 (ref: 2012 - 0927 / 001 - 001 CU7 COOP7). Prof Gennaro Postiglione is the Project Leader and PhD Candidate Michela Bassanelli is Principal Investigator of the project.
## INTRODUCTION
Beyond the Memorial: Museography for the Conflict Heritage.
Oltre il memori: la museografia per il patrimonio dei conflitti
Michela Basunelli

## PART 1
ARCHAEOLOGY OF CONFLICTS OF THE XX CENTURY
ARCHEOLOGIA DEI CONFLITTI DEL XX SECOLO

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The construction of fortifications was neither new in the 1930s and forties nor limited to Germany: especially since 1900 more and better weapon technology, as well as the development of the air-raids, made the building of bunkers from reinforced concrete necessary. It led to new systems of fortification along the borders and to the civil defense programs during Second World War, which oversaw the building of air-raid shelters mainly in larger industrial cities of the Reich. Whereas the building of the so-called East Wall (Oder-Warthe-Bogen) had already begun at the end of the twenties, it was Hitler who gave the order to reinforce the German-Polish border with concrete fortifications and corridors. This stopped in 1938 because the war strategies changed. Now the aim was the occupation of Poland, thus the fortification of the border did not make sense. Instead the manpower of the Organisation Todt and the Reichsarbeitsdienst (RAD) were concentrated on the West. During the war, the underground tunnels in the East were used as production sites for Daimler and Maybach, as well as for forced laborers and Concentration Camp prisoners who were housed at these sites.

The West Wall (Limes or Siegfried-Line) was built from 1936-1940. The huge project reflects the geopolitical strategies of Hitler, the flexibility of the planning, and the belief in the feasibility of monstrous projects. The numbers provided in the sources vary, but list from 17,000 to 20,000 bunkers. The leading figure was Fritz Todt: more than 270,000 men of the organisation Todt, military companies, and the RAD together with force laborers and war prisoners were working at the fortification lines. The whole project was embedded in an enormous propaganda strategy to prepare the German population for the planned war.

After the sea battle against England had been lost, and the troops of the Wehrmacht
had to be thrown into the Eastern front, Hitler decided to fortify the Atlantic coast in the occupied countries in the West (5000 km). Both logistics and manpower were transferred to the Atlantic from Norway to France. Instead of constructing underground corridors Fritz Todt, and later the Minister of armament Albert Speer, concentrated on the fortification of small and bigger ports and anti-aircraft batteries. Part of the Atlantic Wall as well as other huge bunkers which were planned and constructed after Stalingrad, were supposed to be production sites. The bunkers in St. Nazaire, L'Orient and others were intended for submarines, the subterranean bunker of La Coupe as a launch site for the V2. Similar shelters for production sites were also planned in cities in the Reich, for example the submarine bunker Valentin in Brema.

The civil air-raid shelter program was only started in Oct. 1940 and restricted to 61 cities. In 1941 this program was the main area of building activities in Germany and by Oct. 22nd 1941 3.4 million cubic meters of concrete had been used. The majority of workers were forced laborers and inmates of the concentration camps. In 1942 the program was scaled down to facilitate the construction of the Atlantic Wall. And after 1943 only shelters in cities with armament industries were to be built. Here, the local governments of the cities were responsible.

This very rough survey shows the close links between the different programs. A closer look also reveals how these programs were embedded in the National Socialist geopolitics with their racist aims. If we look at the organizations and responsibilities within, two things become clear: first the polycentric decision making process, especially crucial at the Atlantic Wall, with the competition between the Organisation Todt (OT) and the military ranks. Secondly, the enormous demand of manpower and material that are reflected. The belief in the feasibility of technological construction projects together with the enthusiasm of engineers and other experts sheds light on the modernity of the NS regime. One engineer who worked closely together with Fritz Todt still points out: “I am very proud of the whole project” (Op de Beeck 2001). This statement reflects not only the attitude of the German engineers but also the perspective of some locals who used to work on the sites of the Atlantic Wall: “The German engineers as Baumeister des Bistros,” as somebody praised the Germans in the film. (I won’t cover here the issue of collaboration which still is a highly sensitive field of cultural memory).

Besides solving the logistical problems and achieving huge technological efforts, architects and engineers developed a serial production of more than 60 types of bunkers. This made it possible to construct these bunkers in rather short time. The priority of this program meant neglecting the needs of civil defense. At the core of the civil defense program was furthermore the Nazi definition of inclusion and exclusion. Forced laborers and Concentration Camp prisoners who were building the civil defense shelters were to be excluded from the protection against air raids. And their suffering in the camps as well as the murdering is not even addressed here. Furthermore, forced laborers—and a smaller number of Concentration Camp prisoners—worked on the sites of the Atlantic Wall as well, especially on the huge sites of the submarine bunkers and the V2 battery in Omer, but also on the other construction sites: Slave labor was one of the characteristics for the NS system during the war and crucial to the realization of these construction programs.1

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The civil air-raid shelter program was only inaugurated solo nell'ottobre 1940 e limitatamente a 61 città. Nel 1941 questa iniziativa, che al 22 ottobre 1941 aveva utilizzato 3,4 milioni di metri cubi di cemento, risultava la voce principale del settore edilizio in Germania. La manodopera era perlopiù costituita da lavoratori coatti e prigionieri dei campi di concentramento impegnati nella costruzione dell'Atlanticwall. E dopo il 1943 gli unici rifugi approvati per la costruzione erano quelli siti in città dove risiedevano industrie belliche, in quanto iniziative poste sotto la responsabilità delle amministrazioni municipalì.

Par sommantiquesta panoramica mostra quanto le diverse iniziative fossero legate tra loro e, dopo un esame più attento, quanto fossero parte integrante della geopolitica nazionale-socialista con le sue finalità razziste. Se ci concentriamo sulle organizzazioni e le relative responsabilità al loro interno, due cose appaiono chiare: in primo luogo il processo decisionale policentrico, particolarmente cruciale per l’Atlanticwall, con la competizione tra l’Organisation Todt (OT) e la gerarchia militare; in secondo luogo, il fenomeno del lavorare costruttivamente e le relative responsabilità al loro interno, due cosa appaiono chiare: in primo luogo il processo decisionale polisemantico, particolarmente
The whole process of planning and constructing the fortifications and shelters was embedded in Nazi propaganda: Especially the Siegfried line was part of a visualized propaganda strategy to prepare the Germans for the coming war, to redefine labor and reconstruct the figure of the worker in a military and nationalist design. Since more research has been done concerning the Siegfried line, I will concentrate on this topic.

Anyway, propaganda for the Atlantic Wall was impossible. Therefore propaganda concerning the Siegfried line was mostly similar to that for the West Wall. The differences were due to the time shift and the need to propagate its invincibility especially in the occupied countries. After 1943 with the losses of Stalingrad this became even more important in order to reassure the Germans at home that an invasion was impossible. Therefore propaganda concentrated on batteries and technique, rather than on the images of the workers.

The visualization of the Siegfried line was done in different media and through different genres. First of all the Organization Todt and the RAD had their own magazines (e.g. "Der Kamerad am Westwall") which transposed the image of the worker as a soldier or as a hero in many ways. But other magazines, like the Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung, the magazine of the DAF, and of course the newspapers which has not been researched in detail yet, also contributed to this ideal was propagated. Without going into details, the core of these visual strategies was to redefine masculinity by virile strength and discipline: Labor and war were just two sides in the social-Darwinist struggle for life. The "Frontarbeiter," a term which was created for the workers at the Siegfried line became the synonym for the NS model. Robert Ley, leader of the DAF, summarized some weeks before the attack on the Soviet Union (1 May 1941): "Labor in a National Socialist sense is not a economic concept but a ideological (schriftschausche) thesis. Labor is the expression for the battle of life. [...] He (the worker at the front) is the visible synthesis between worker and soldier and as such also the visible expression of our new, revolutionary workmanship" (Hachtmann, 2010).

The line therefore was not only the visualization of the worker as a soldier but the monumentalization of the buildings itself: OT employed painters to depict the bunkers. Especially Theodor Ortner, a main painter of the OT, praised the modernity of the huge buildings. Ortner painted the bunkers as cathedrals of modern times human beings in front of the concrete walls became nearly invisible and were to be neglected. The fortification architecture plays another important part in defining borders in a geopolitical and racist sense. Not only were, as Eckhard Gruber shows, the soldiers at the Siegfried line placed in a landscape without inhabitants, recalling the images of the First World War with their trenches and wire fences, but the border itself was visualized in maps idealizing the wall as invincible. Again, simply by building the Siegfried line the exclusion of those outside is clear. The concept to other older fortifications is clear: the Chinese Wall as well the Roman Limes comes into the mind: the official name of the West Wall was indeed Limes.

Hitler and his architect Albert Speer, who became responsible for the Atlantic Wall after the death of Fritz Todt, were especially aware that architecture could mentalize and control. Monstrous building projects like the area of the Reichsparteitage in Nuremberg, the SS-Ordensburg in Vogelsang and the planned "Germania" in Berlin were used to build the Third Reich would stand the test of time modello nazionalsocialista. Qualche settimana prima dell'attacco sull'Unione Sovietica (1 maggio 1941) Robert Ley, responsabile della DAF, faceva questa sintesi: "Il lavoro nel senso nazionalsocialista non è un concetto economico ma una teoria ideologica (rassistische). Il lavoro è l'espressione della battaglia della vita. [...] Ligi [il lavoratore al fronte] è la sintesi visibile tra lavoratore e soldato e come tale anche l'espressione visibile del nostro modo nuovo e rivoluzionario di lavoro" (Hachtmann, 2010).

So not to write simply to visualize the laborer as soldado but also of monumentalize li stessi edifici: the Organisation Todt si serviva addirittura di pittori per decorare i bunker. Uno di questi fu Theodor Ortner, uno dei dipinti principali dell'OT, che mostrava la modernità di quei giganteschi edifici affasciandoli come fossero cattedrali della modernità davvero davanti alla parete di cemento gli eserciti umani davano e quei invisibili dunque destinati a essere messi da parte. Un altro ruolo importante svolto dall'architetto delle fortificazioni riguardava la definizione dei confini in senso geopolitico e razzista. Non solo, come dimostra Eckhard Gruber, i soldati stazionati sulla linea Siegfried si ritrovavano in un paesaggio privo di abitanti, che ricordava le immagini della Prima Guerra Mondiale con le tipiche trincee e recinzioni in fil di ferro, ma il confine stesso era visualizzato nelle carte che idealizzavano il muro come invisibile. Di nuovo, il fatto stesso di costruire la linea Siegfried determinava chiaramente l'esclusione di chi si trovava al di fuori. Il richiamo alle fortificazioni del passato è evidente: vengono in mente sia la Grande Muraglia Cinese che il Limes roman e, a meno che non fosse la denominazione ufficiale del Westwall era proprio Limes.

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like the antique ruins) one may argue, that the enormous chain of bunkers at the coasts, at the borders of the Reich, and in the cities symbolize this hybris of the Nazis and may be part of the myth of the theory of the ruins.

In this context I would like to quote Ernst Jünger, then a commander of the Wehrmacht at the Siegfried line. After a visit to a bunker there he wrote in his journal, published in 1942 in *Gärten und Straßen*:

"When I had strenuously opened the enormous steel door and descended into the concrete crypt, I stood alone between guns, exhaust vans and hand grenades, holding my breath. Only now, I recognized this to be the home of the iron-knowing Cyclopes, missing its inner eye. Thus, I was confronted with the 'Zeitgeist,' whether appearing in the inside of the pyramids or the in the depth of the catacombs, which I saw as an idol lacking the swaying glimmer of technical finesse and which tremendous strength I began to accept."

"Quote after (Threuter 2009, 19)."

Jünger's articulation of his emotions and fascinations does not only make a close link to configurations of the National Socialist ideology: the naturalization of the bunker—the Cyclopes, very competent about iron but without an inner eye, can be interpreted in the way that these Cyclopes, whose strength is praised, are blind to death and annihilation around them. The allusion to the pyramids or the pyramids were built by slaves, similar to the bunkers, they were sacred architecture and monuments for the deaths. The contemporary architect Friedrich Tamm, who planned some of the shelters, said, that these sketches represented "symbols of belief and eternity of German human beings [...] true monuments of god, reminding eternity and God Almighy."

"Quote after (Treuther 2009, 19)."

Contrary to the myth, the Nazis and other fellow-travelers created themselves was the architecture in the landscape around the fortification lines. Here the bunkers of the camps, their fences etc. were constructed. del Reichsparteitag a Norimberga, l'"SS-Ordensborg a Vogelsang e il progetto "Germania" a Berlino testimoniano della fantasia totalitaria di costruire per l'eternità. Anche se la "Teoria del valore delle rovine" (Ruinentheorie) è di per sé un buon esempio di come i miti possano diventare reali e creare una realtà a sé stante (la teoria non è, come si è creduto per molto tempo, un'invenzione di Hitler, ma una legittimazione postbellica da parte di Speer, che affermava che gli edifici del terzo Reich avrebbero superato la prova del tempo come le rovine dell'antichità), si potrebbe pensare che l'enorme catena di bunker, sulle coste, sui confini del Reich e nelle città simbologgi quest'arroganza dei nazisti e possa far parte del mirò della teoria delle rovine.

In questo contesto desidero citare Ernst Jünger, all'epoca un comandante della Wehrmacht alla linea Siegfried, che, dopo aver visitato un bunker, annotò quanto segue nel suo diario, pubblicato nel 1942 in *Gärten und Straßen*:

"Aperta a fatica l'enorme porta d'accesso sono sceso nella cripta di cemento, dove, trattendomi il fiato, mi sono trovato solo tra le mitragliatrici, i condotti di scarico e le bombe a mano. Solo adesso capisco che questa deve essere la casa dei Ciclopi maestri del ferro, privi dell'occhio interiore. Così mi sono trovato di fronte allo 'Zeitgeist,' come può appa­rire all'interno delle piramidi o nel profondo delle catacombe, che vedeva come un ideale privo del baricentro, nel quale il naturale acuto della forza tecnica e la cui forza terzica ha concretato ad accettare" (Threuter 2009, 19).

Il modo in cui Jünger articola le proprie emozioni e ciò che lo affascina non si limita a rivelare un legame particolare con le con­figurazioni dell'ideologia nazional-socialista: la naturalizzazione del bunker—il fatto che i Ciclopi, tanto esperti in materia di ferro, fossero privi di un occhio interiore può essere interpretato come cecità dei Ciclopi, dei quali par si elogia la forza, alla morte e alla distruzione che li circonda. L'allusione alle piramidi può avere molteplici letture: in modo analogo ai bunker le piramidi furono costruite da schiavi ed erano architetture sacre e monumenti ai morti. L'architetto contemporaneo Friedrich Tamm, che progettò alcuni dei rifugi, disse che quei disegni rappresentavano "simboli di fede ed eternità degli esseri umani tedeschi [...] veri monu­menti di dio, che ricordavano l'eternità e Dio onnipotente" (Treuther 2009, 19).

L'architettura nel paesaggio circostante le linee di fortificazioni, dove furono costruite le baracche dei campi, le recinzioni, ecc., è l'opposto del mito che i nazisti e altri loro ac­colti si erano creati. I bunker come architettura strategica (Brian Hatton) e le baracche sono collegati. Le baracche non sono più visibili: costruite per un uso temporaneo, face­vano parte di sistemi di violenza e di potere e rappresentano l'altro, gli spazi eterotopi o
Jünger. The Relics: Fascination in Concrete, Ambiguous Remembrance of the WAR or how to deconstruct Paul Virilio and Ernst Jünger

The German cultural memory after 1945 was split. As we all know, the self-victimization of the Germans in the Federal Republic as well in the GDR was deeply rooted in the political and private memorialization. Nevertheless, West-Germans felt themselves on unsecure ground. From the seventies on by the pictures of the atrocities. But these memories on the Nazi era were dominated pictures, meant to confront the Germans with their guilt, enabled people to distance themselves from it. Thus only in the last decades we observe a linkage between the private view on violence in the everyday-life and the participation of the “normal Germans.”

The relics of the war, the air-raid shelters as well as the fortifications were part of a national narrative that memorialized the German victims and suffering of the war and as such was contaminated by the knowledge of the atrocities. Only in the last decade relics of the places of NS self-celebrations where rediscovered and decoded as part of fascist topography. Examples are the Wewelsburg where Himmler celebrated the SS, or the Bückeburg where the annual Reichsdeutscherfahnenfest—a rural celebration—took place. This is also true for the ramparts of the Siegfried line. The core problem with these relics is that the propaganda of the Nazis is still part of the sites. The myth of the ultimate strength, or the potential for ultimate protection inscribed in these relics is still effective.

I want to discuss the question of memory of which fascination was a crucial part of, how the Germans are dealing with their colonial heritage—in two aspects. Germans in general have only started in the last decade to deal with the relics of war, more precisely with the air-raid shelters, with the Siegfried line etc. Germans in general but also historians have for a long time neglected the history of the bunkers and fortification lines. But alongside the hegemonic discourse on memory of the scientific community, what I would call a semi-scientific community existed throughout. Local researchers, sometimes people collecting militaria, or people interested in fortification architecture from the Roman Limes to the Atlantic Wall turned to the structures without differentiating between the different societies and historical contexts. Sometimes you even find them in academic journals, as for example the dissertation from 2003 (2 vol.) of Thorsten Heber. Himself a lieutenant colonel of the reserve, he did a scrupulous analysis of the Atlantic Wall without even mentioning forced labor, the murderous war aims of the Nazis etc. His critical remarks are refrained to whether Hitler understood that a fortification wall like this one could only be effective with the right number of soldiers who defended it. One may argue that Heber is carried away by his

The core problem with these relics is that the propaganda of the Nazis is still part of the sites. The myth of the ultimate strength, or the potential for ultimate protection inscribed in these relics is still effective.
fascination for the achievements and technical and logistic efforts. This is also true for non-German researchers who use very similar arguments, e.g. Keith Mallory and Arvid Otto (1973). They emphasize the problematic competition between the decision makers (military and Speer etc.) but come to the conclusion that “despite the eventual failure of the Atlantic Wall, its casemates and observation posts stand out, together with the National Socialists’ flak towers, submarine pens and civilian bunkers, as some of the most far-reaching legacies of the conflict 1939-1945.” (Mallory and Otto 1973). Colin Partridge’s book Hitler’s Atlantic Wall (1976) does not hide his fascination either. Only Anthony Saunders (2001) argues a bit more differentiated. He mentions the contribution of forced labor, but in the end fascination is stronger. The main problem here is the very narrow focus all these authors are taking.

Silke Wenk concludes for the German context—but this may also be true for the European context—that the reason why the bunker architecture was ignored by art historians made between modernity and National Socialism. As a cultural historian I would like to add that this gap was a sort of self-distancing strategy from National Socialism. But to conclude, I would like to dig deeper referring to the German writer Ernst Jünger, author of Bunkerarchäologie (Nelle tempi d’acqua, 1951), an inno to the legame tra guerra e tecnologia after the Primavera Mondiale, and to Paul Virilio, philosopher postmodernist who scopsi the reperti dell’Atlantikwall da giovane già negli anni Cinquanta del secolo scorso. His well-known Bunkerarchäologie is a text that the art historian Klaus Pias resumes, writes Ernst Jünger. But one may as well argue he dismantles these relics from their Nazi connotations. Wars are man-made disasters, technology has to be embedded in the history of its political and societal circumstances of production. To quote Klaus Pias “he leaves the technical to the technicians” (Pias 2001, 51).

So even in the context of the Atlantic Wall as a “colonial heritage” that memorializes the victory over Nazi Germany, the fascination and the effects of these relics are ambivalent. They are diverse and not so easily embedded in a narrative which is compatible with the needs of the European future. Thinking of the “Fortress Europe” of today, maybe we can put the Atlantic Wall in a very different perspective.

To sum up

Thus the Atlantic Wall is part of a map referring to dark memories in many different ways. The re-enacting of this past should make these ambivalent memories visible, referring to the myths we have to differentiate between the contemporary myths the Nazi propaganda tried to create and the myth that was created after 1945. Furthermore, there are some indications that these myths are still effective. The myths of the Nazi propaganda were rooted in an archetype of human anxiety and need for protection. This archetype and the NS myth about the fortifications are closely linked and the success of the
historical myths the Nazis tried to create can only be explained by embedding it into the older narrative. Matthias Wuecht in his article in docupedia (2010) tries to define myths as a historical category: myths are telling stories which are not based on rational or empirical proofs but appeals to emotions. Myths are not only transferred by narratives but in the Atlantic Wall do tell various stories: they even though these ruins are witnessing the and geopolitics. But behind the Nazi history, are closely linked to the racist Nazi ideology not protect the German soldiers— they against war is possible at the expense of the lives of others.

Traduzione italiana: Antonella Bergamin

Notes

1. See Lemmes 2012.

References