

Jorge Otero-Pailos: The Ethics of Dust
Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary

Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, Köln

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Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary

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Painting Time

Daniel Birnbaum

Time, said Austerlitz in the observation room in Greenwich, was by far the most artificial of all our inventions, and in being bound to the planet turning on its own axis was no less arbitrary than would be, say, a calculation based on the growth of trees or the duration required for a piece of limestone to disintegrate, quite apart from the fact that the solar day which we take as our guideline does not provide any precise measurement, so that in order to reckon time we have to devise an imaginary, average sun which has an invariable speed of movement and does not incline towards the equator in its orbit. If Newton thought, said Austerlitz, pointing through the window and down the curve of the water around the Isle of Dogs glistening in the last of the daylight, if Newton really thought that time was a river like the Thames, then where is its source and into what sea does it finally flow?

W.G. Sebald

“Its walls are of alabaster, but worn and shattered, and darkly stained with age.” Ruskin’s famous words about Venice form a starting point for this exploration of time and matter, history and visual richness. When I first encountered Jorge Otero-Pailos’s work, I knew nothing about the issues he explores or about the field of research in which he is one of the leading authorities. I looked at his work with the eyes of an art critic, and what I saw appeared to me to represent a surprising approach to painterly themes. There are so many uninteresting “returns to painting,” but perhaps the real question is, does it have to be a “return”? After all the talk of the alleged “end” of painting, ongoing since the emergence of conceptual art in the 1960s, it now seems as if the question could be displaced and reformulated in terms of discipline-transcending strategies. A different view on the disciplines insists on their fluidity: drawings, watercolors, canvases, wall paintings, posters, architectural models, lamps, sculptures, installations can all be linked according to a transformative logic reminiscent of the Baroque city. Otero-Pailos’s work is a case in point, and so is that of many other artists

in the 53rd Venice Art Biennial. As Gilles Deleuze argued, writing about the 17th century: “Painting exceeds its frame and is realized in polychrome marble sculpture; and sculpture goes beyond itself by being achieved in architecture; and, in turn, architecture discovers a frame in the facade, but the frame itself becomes detached from the inside, and establishes relations with the surroundings so as to realize architecture in city planning. From one end of the chain, the painter has become an urban designer.” Thus the consideration of painting in the extended field centers on the idea that the medium no longer exists as a strictly circumscribed mode of expression; rather, it emerges as a zone of contagion, constantly branching out and widening its scope.

Of course, Otero-Pailos’s work cannot be reduced to a discussion about the possibilities of painting as a discipline. So many other themes are of relevance, for instance the infinitely rich and puzzling question of how to represent time. Immanuel Kant famously said that time has only one dimension. It is the form of our inner intuition and as such lacks visually discernable contours. It has no evident shape—*Gestalt*—but we produce our own images of time through various analogies. We borrow models from geometry to get a better grasp of the inner workings of time. Thus, we represent time as an infinite line, and from this image we then draw conclusions concerning its nature. Commenting on the phenomenological conception of time, Maurice Merleau-Ponty contends critically, “Time is not a line but a network of intentionalities.” On the other hand, Jorge Luis Borges, the most severe of all critics of linearity, says, “I know of one Greek labyrinth which is a single straight line.” And he adds, “Along that line so many philosophers have lost themselves...” Other thinkers have suggested other metaphors: the river, arrow, circle, spiral, cone, pyramid, crystal, fold, maze.

I doubt that Otero-Pailos will help us finally find a way out of the labyrinth, but in his company getting lost in time seems less of a problem. In fact, for me it has been pure joy.

Venice, May 2009

Introduction

Francesca von Habsburg

Converging disciplines has become the definition of Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary’s projects and special commissions, so much so that these projects make their way to us, rather than the other way around. *The Ethics of Dust: Doges’ Palace, Venice, 2009* is interestingly one of those projects that has come full circle. I had invited Jorge Otero-Pailos to Lopud near Dubrovnik for one of our debate sessions in June 2007, after being encouraged by Mark Wigley, Dean of the Architecture Department at Columbia University. Mark had been impressed with the conservation work that I had been undertaking with ARCH / Art Restoration For Cultural Heritage, a foundation created in 1991 to undertake conservation projects all over the world: Islamic Manuscripts from the Institute of Oriental studies of St Petersburg, the hanging coffins of the Bo in the Chinese Yunnan province, a frieze of the Sebasteion in Aphrodisias in Turkey, and the “Cherb-ou-Chouf” (“drink and look”) fountain in the medina of Marrakech, to name a few. During the last fifteen years, the foundation had focused its work in the Dubrovnik area, restoring many Renaissance altar paintings and sculptures, and the Franciscan monastery on Lopud had become its most ambitious undertaking to date.

Trying to determine which angle to take on the Lopud restoration project was the subject of countless discussions. Sadly, after war ripped across Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, Lopud had lost a lot of its population. The local economy depended on what had become an almost non-existent tourist industry, and the monastery was its major cultural focus. The restoration process therefore carried the connotation of resurrection, of “bringing it back to life.” Like Dubrovnik, the island was covered by a layer of dust since the war, and with all its natural beauty and heritage, it needed a new and fresh impulse.

I invited artists to consider and design projects there: Olafur Eliasson, Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller, Carsten Höller, Raqs Media

Collective, Ragnar Kjartansson, Olaf Nicolai, Cerith Wyn Evans, Brad Kahlhamer, as well as artists from the region such as Ivana Franke, Renata Poljak, and Albert Heta. They were joined by a number of architects such as François Roche, Nikolaus Hirsch, David Adjaye, and Dinko Peračić. Then there were the astronomers, physicists, botanists, curators, museum directors, and even hairdressers—the list is as long as it is colorful. In 2006, T-B A21 had moved Olafur Eliasson’s and David Adjaye’s *Your black horizon Art Pavilion* to a wonderful olive grove in the middle of the bay on the north side of the island of Lopud, as an experiment on how contemporary expression is the often ignored ingredient to making conservation a success. Taking the experiment a step further, I asked the French architects François Roche and Stéphanie Lavaux (R&S) to consider a new project in a Renaissance garden nearby. They conceived a “toxic garden,” which was reminiscent of its historical role as the nursery for medicinal plants for the monks. Although this project had received great praise from the architectural press for its visionary and courageous nature, it was turned down by the local planning authorities. Such reactions are consistent with the traditional approach to conservation which is still unfortunately over-regulated, and essentially geared towards freezing heritage and rigorously protecting it by restricting interventions and activities within it.

The Lopud Debate Sessions took place twice a year. “Preservation and Reanimation through Contemporary Art and Architecture” was one of the topics that we discussed with Jorge Otero-Pailos, François Roche, Mark Wigley, Andreas Ruby, Albert Heta, and Dinko Peračić in June 2007 and subsequently published in a Columbia University journal called *Future Anterior*. Because it was precisely that publication however that got us all believing that we were onto something important, we decided to reprint the transcript on the next few pages to make it available for you as well.

During this time, many projects have been initiated and not all of them furthered or nurtured by T-B A21. In the summer of 2007, Raqs Media

Collective were also in Lopud as part of the debate group, and shortly afterwards they were invited to become co-curators for Manifesta 7. They commissioned Jorge Otero-Pailos (Professor of Historic Preservation at Columbia University) to create a work for their exhibition, “The Rest of Now,” in the ex-Alumix factory in Bolzano. The installation turned out to be magnificent—no one had ever seen anything quite like it! The layer of dust that had built up over the decades in that factory while it had been in use was collected by applying a thin layer of skin-colored latex, and then hung panel by panel the width of a scaffolding structure away from the wall, thus concealing the structure but allowing the daylight to flow through it, creating a strange impression of gold leaf.

Jorge’s installation attracted a lot of attention. Daniel Birnbaum, the heir apparent of the Venice Biennial, was no exception, and before I could plan and scheme how to move this dialogue onto the next level, Jorge was invited to create a new project for the Arsenale, in the context of the exhibition “Fare Mondi / Making Worlds.” It is with tremendous pride and joy that T-B A21 has supported this project in collaboration with Columbia University. After all, conservation was practically invented in Venice, and at the same time, the Biennial has become an important symbol of the contemporary movement since the 1950s. By bringing these two worlds a touch closer with this project, we hope to demonstrate what Mark Wigley, Jorge Otero-Pailos, and myself fundamentally believe in: that the future of conservation and its good practice lies with the convergence of disciplines and undertakings that contribute in an effective and real way to preserving heritage with life, thus, not condemning it to death by freezing it in time. Together with the Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation of Columbia University, T-B A21 has also organized a symposium—triggered by Jorge’s work—at the Istituto Veneto in Venice, aptly entitled “The Last Temptation of the Contemporary,” which focuses on the importance of contemporary creativity within the world of conservation and on the role of contemporary art in classical or traditional museums which in the recent past have been compelled to open contemporary art departments.

My special thanks go to Jorge Otero-Pailos: you have put so much effort and commitment into this, I can hardly believe you also managed to father a baby in the process! I would like to thank Mark Wigley for all his encouragement to believe in such unorthodox practice and for his having given these experiments his full and undivided support and attention as well as Columbia University for the funding that went into the realization of the project and its publication. Daniel Birnbaum’s courageous decision to venture out and beyond our otherwise rather narrow understanding of the visual arts is nothing short of a sure demonstration of his brilliance. In Venice I would like to thank Renata Codello, Superintendent for the Architectural and Landscape Resources of Venice and Lagoon, who gave us the authorization to work on Venice’s crown jewel, the Doge’s Palace, as well as Ilaria Cavaggioni, the architect assigned to follow Jorge’s work on behalf of the Soprintendenza.

Daniela Zyman, who coordinated this project and kept the dialogue flowing over a great span of time and long distances, has to be celebrated for her perseverance! I would like to thank the T-B A21 team that I am always so very proud of, which includes Philipp Krummel, Eva Ebersberger, Barbara Horvath, Verena Platzgummer, Alexandra Hennig, Andrea Hofinger, Angela Hirsch, Samaela Bilic-Eric, Barbara Simma and Elisabeth Mareschal. My thanks also reach out to Jorge’s assistants Joshua Draper and Carlos Huber who have produced invaluable support for this project, and who have reminded us once again how team spirit makes everything possible.

I would like to thank Spanish State Corporation for Cultural Action Abroad (SEACEX) who has generously supported the project, and especially Arte Mundit of FTB Remmer for sponsoring the kilos upon kilos of latex needed.

Preservation and Reanimation through Contemporary Art and Architecture

Since summer 2005 Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary has been hosting seminars and debates on the Croatian island of Lopud. Conceived to create an impetus for innovation, dialogue, and exchange by interconnecting different agendas and practices the “Lopud Seminars” negotiate relevant issues regarding art, architecture, and preservation. It was at this meeting in June 2007 that T-B A21 had invited Jorge Otero-Pailos, Mark Wigley, Beatriz Colomina, François Roche, Raqs Media Collective, Daniel Birnbaum, and Nikolaus Hirsch for the first time on the occasion of the reopening of Olafur Eliasson’s and David Adjaye’s *Your black horizon Art Pavilion* in Lopud.

In the following discussion a new vision of contemporary preservation is formulated with the encouragement of Jorge Otero-Pailos, which puts creativity and contemporary interpretation ahead of the traditional approach to the conservation discipline. In this reversed paradigm, contemporary architecture (exemplified by *Your black horizon Art Pavilion*) is seen as an act of preservation—quite literally by preserving the lights of Lopud—and the preservation of the Franciscan Monastery as a radical transformative act. Whereas the architect’s responsibility is always to go against time, the preservationist puts architecture into time. As long as the battle between architecture and preservation is constructed as progressives versus conservatives, argues Mark Wigley, we run the danger of giving way to the radical repressions that are involved in constructing a particular heritage image of the past.

This discussion is thus to be seen as the incubator for the ensuing projects *The Ethics of Dust: Alumix, Bolzano, 2008* (curated by Raqs Media Collective) and *The Ethics of Dust: Doge’s Palace, Venice, 2009* (curated by Daniel Birnbaum) as well as the ongoing relationship with Columbia University’s Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation.

Francesca von Habsburg: Andreas Ruby recently told me that many things have ended in Dubrovnik, for one reason or another. I thought that we should focus the next couple of days on initiating things in Dubrovnik instead! I truly appreciate the interdisciplinary nature of this panel. This morning, we all visited the Franciscan monastery. For about five years, I’ve been trying to reconcile its adaptive reuse for both private and public purposes, with a sensitive restoration guided by principles of maximum retention of original substance. We’ve had a number of different opinions, discussions and arguments about how this monastery should be restored. Having been actively involved in heritage preservation since the early 1990’s, I naturally realize how complex and demanding the practice of conservation is. When you are restoring something, the first question that everybody asks is, how you are going to use it. My vision of the monastery’s future combines a home with a retreat for scholars to be creative and develop ideas, it includes use of some of the larger spaces for contemporary art interventions and projects, possibly mini-exhibitions, particularly performances in the large fortress in the back. The complex is actually a fortified monastery, which included a pharmacy, with a treatment center, and most likely a medicinal garden. It has a religious history as well as a protective function, along with the historical role that the Franciscan order had in the education of the community. I see here a link to the process of restoring the historical renaissance gardens of Lopud and creating a special botanical garden there, as another logical part of the revitalization of the island. The historical importance of botany and medicinal plants of renaissance Dalmatia is directly connected to the Franciscan order, which was very committed to these remedies and their pharmacies since the thirteenth century onwards. You have also seen visited Olafur Eliasson and David Adjaye’s beautiful, extraordinary Art pavilion, a contemporary art and architecture collaboration that T-B A21 commissioned two years ago first shown at the 51st Venice Biennial in 2005, and now rebuilt a stone’s throw from the monastery.

I’d like to start this debate by asking Jorge to talk about his impressions because he’s got a very interesting study group at Columbia University, which I believe is extremely relevant to this discussion.



Lopud’s Franciscan monastery viewed from the bay



David Adjaye and Olafur Eliasson, *Your black horizon Art Pavilion*. Lopud, 2007

Jorge Otero-Pailos: We’re in a historical moment in which art and architecture are beginning to rediscover each other through historic preservation. In order to make valuable discoveries in each other, these three disciplines must lower their guards. The question for me is how can we lower the guard of preservation, which is so much about guarding—protecting heritage—so that it becomes open to other interpretations of heritage that are not intra-disciplinary but that are extra-disciplinary and that come from art and architecture. I think that is where the contribution of the pavilions, already seen as part of Lopud’s heritage, is really quite striking. The pavilion allows to ask questions of this historic site, that might not have been possible within just the realm of conservation. How can historic Lopud inform contemporary art and aesthetic perception? Questions like this are not considered legitimate in historic preservation. So the mere fact that you are beginning to open up a space, for asking questions that are

in a sense guarded or forbidden so to speak in preservation is a huge contribution. I hope that in the process of our discussions, we will begin to make those discoveries of things that were unanticipated somehow, of new types of methods and ways of thinking about heritage that somehow have been excluded from the heritage discussion in order to really further a way of thinking about heritage. Today, connections are more important than boundaries, and preservation is all about setting boundaries, setting boundaries about what you can touch and what you cannot touch, what is excluded and what is included, where history begins and where it ends. We legislate what is a monument and what, two meters away from it, is not. We are beginning to question those boundaries here. I’m very excited to be here and be a part of this, and looking forward to lowering my guard and seeing what other people can contribute and bring into the discussion of preservation.



At the table (from left to right): Mark Wigley (obscured by audience), François Roche, Dinko Peračić, Andreas Ruby, Francesca von Habsburg, Jorge Otero-Pailos, Albert Heta. June 18, 2007, Lopud

Andreas Ruby: Maybe you could think about what comes after the guarding paradigm. It wouldn't exactly be the total opposite of it, like just letting go, but something in between. It's clear that it's a highly political situation. On the one hand you have this extreme petrification of the past in the name of authenticity and on the other hand you have situations where the past is just bulldozed as if nothing had happened since the tabula rasa days of modernism, like in China where old villages or old city cores are replaced by big high rises and CBDs. I think there must be a way to negotiate the past and the present, and that transition would be interesting to think about. Is there a way to acknowledge the past but not enslave you to it? Is there a way to tie future into the past without annihilating the past? This type of continuity seems to have no lobby yet. The preservationists seem to be the lobbyists of the guarding paradigm. Then you have the post, post, post trans-modernists who still believe in inventing an entirely new future, as we can see in the tiger states of Asia where the past simply has no lobby. It could be interesting to think about that almost seamless transition between past, present and future. It seems that there existed a knowledge of this transition, if we look back in history when, for instance, Christian monasteries were built in the remainders of old Roman baths which were destroyed in the big migration wars in the fifth and sixth and seventh centuries. There was no idea of rebuilding them, but rather using them as a raw construction, infrastructure, sheer matter,

in fact; tied into the hardware of another structure yet to come, with often totally contradicting ideological premises. I mean, there couldn't be a bigger gap than between the hedonist space of a Roman bath and then a Christian monastery for men only. Unless you think that there's an anticipation of a gay club. That type of sovereignty, of dealing with history by incorporating its material traces while giving them a new programmatic trajectory is something that we can find in different periods of history but are somewhat lacking today, and I'm wondering why that is so and whether we can find back that kind of spirit.

Francesca von Habsburg: Albert, you have a problem rising in Priština now, which revolves around the reconstruction of an old *hammam*. Please tell us about it.

Albert Heta: First of all, I don't come from a background of architecture, I'm an artist, and I'm a bit more critical toward an approach, which is currently being used in the countries of this region. Here, basically, heritage is politics, politics is memory, and heritage is used to either erase a part of our memory or recreate a forceful image that didn't exist before. Together with some colleagues, we are working on a project called *Architecture of Freedom* which investigates what happens in a country after liberation or after an emergency situation. It is like trying to follow these bits and pieces of history in creation—of

a forceful, nonexistent history in creation. A part of the story is an old Turkish bath, a *hammam*, in Priština which was built in the fifteenth century, during the Ottoman Empire, and today the local government is trying to restore it and possibly turn it into an European cultural center. For me this approach, or similar ones, look like acts of total colonization, like the cultural colonization of a space that used to function as a router for the citizens of Priština, as a gathering space, as a relaxing place during times of peace. Today, this already dead building is being restored and made dead again, because it is being isolated from the people and not allowed to communicate with the people where it's located. Similar initiatives exist in the region. The most extreme case in Kosovo is the issue of cultural heritage, which in the process of political negotiations had the biggest importance, or at least the biggest space. A large amount of "Serb" Orthodox churches are in Kosovo right now, and that cultural heritage today is politicized because it is ethnicized. They don't belong to the people. They belong only to an ethnicity, and through those churches one part of the population is claim-



ing a territory. The churches have been awarded a certain amount of land around them. If there were more churches they would have more land. It is as if you had eight monasteries then you could claim independence. In this case, through five or six churches they will have under control twenty eight percent of the territory of the country. So heritage in Kosovo is only political, it doesn't belong to experts or to culture *per se*. It is an issue, which is highly politicized. We are starting a debate to tackle a few issues and to basically throw a "virus" in that environment, a critical virus, and we aim to address these issues on another level which doesn't exist right now down there.

Jorge Otero-Pailos: I think that's an important point to bring in, to remind preservation of politics, because so often preservation stands back and assumes the mantle of detachment of the architectural historian, or the art historian. But in fact, when you look at the history preservation it is intimately linked with war. Not just here, but also in the United States where the early stirrings of a preservation consciousness began with the 1863 Lieber Code, which established the rules of engagement during the Civil War and regulated what could be done to captured enemy property. It addressed a fundamental preservation question by asking: "When we fight each other, what are we going to retain from each other's heritage?" The Lieber Code also served as the basis for the 1929 Geneva Convention. Today we are beginning to look upon the destruction of heritage as a war crime. French preservation also had its origins in civil war, the French Revolution. When revolutionaries went about destroying all signs of the monarchy, intellectuals stepped back and said: "We must de-politicize architecture. These are beautiful buildings, forget about their political symbolism and let's just preserve them for their aesthetic and stylistic value." That was the beginning of preservation's invocation of style as a means to de-politicize architecture. The interesting part of the conversation with the conservators of the monastery was that they can't seem to find the style for it. This absence of a style creates a crisis within preservation be-

Restoration work in Lopud's fortress

cause then on what grounds do you preserve it? The question of politics immediately follow, but we haven't gotten to that yet...

François Roche: It's very strange how our future is a sensation of the past, it's nostalgia. Our future has been designed in the sixties and there is a vintage sensation of the future. So I don't know how we could introduce preservation in this world, it is very difficult for me to use. There is an hour of time between past and future, hesitating, palpating between both sensations. It is something very interesting, in a way. I remember a movie of Kiyoshi Kurosawa, *Charisma*, about a tree, a very old tree, which illustrates the social pressures historic preservation faces. In the movie the tree was at first protected because it was the oldest in the forest. But the community found out that the tree was infiltrating the ground and toxifying the real forest, which was the source of the local economy. So they decided to destroy the tree, because it was not preserving what the humans created after the dinosaur period. So do we need to preserve the toxicity of the monastery, or do we need to inject a new toxicity into the monastery?

Andreas Ruby: Couldn't we also understand historic preservation as that is less value-laden, something like a transformation, which may have a whole variety of connotations but which does not imply that any one period has any kind of moral sovereignty over any other. If we take this monastery as an example, there is an interest in keeping it as historical heritage, but there is also a need to reprogram it. Francesca, what is the challenge for you, the monastery's history or the potential that you can see connected to it?

Francesca von Habsburg: I walked into that building ten years ago. It was a really terrible ruin with most of its roof missing. However, I felt the stones were alive and there was still an incredible vivacity to the place. It had been abandoned about 150 years, and many people had used, abused and looted it since then. When the Italian fascists came here in the Second World War they wrote "Il Duce" in big graffiti on a wall, adding yet another incredible layer to the site's history. What I

want to preserve is the memory of the monument with all its different layers, also including part of the condition that it's in now. This concept is very difficult to get through to the Institute of Protection of Monuments because for them it's crucial to restore the original condition as best as possible, obviously erasing records of recent neglect.

In view of the discrepancy between my intended reuse of the complex and the conservation authorities' insistence on complete restoration, I commissioned Janet Cardiff, a Canadian artist, to create a "video walk" through the monastery. She has already been here twice, filming, documenting, and immersing herself in the multilayered history of the complex, and she will come back for several more visits. The final project will incorporate these many visits into one video-walk, drawing the viewer into Janet's imagination. In parts of the walk one will be able to see the process of change—and that's the only way I could recapture that memory. Interestingly, working with a contemporary artist has become the most efficient way to keep this memory alive. I know that once the building is finished, it will be very difficult to recollect those years spent battling with its restoration. It is also my intention to revitalize the fortress and transform it into a creative platform for new artworks. This has now led to other new commissions such as Olafur's project to create a hanging bridge that creates an essential new public access to the fortress from the monastery. Catherine Sullivan will come and create a new work here in the fall based on Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* and the dual sexual role of the two main characters that he created for his plays, using Illyria as a backdrop. It's really important to me that the walls of the fortress don't turn into a stage backdrop, but rather become an integral part of the creative process of the artists' projects, thus giving new meaning and purpose (form and function) to the building. I am very interested in the work of people who have an unusual sensitivity and approach to the context of a site.

Andreas Ruby: Dinko, what do you think would have happened to the monastery if Francesca hadn't come along ten years ago and said "I want to do something with it." What would the normal state of affairs be in Croatia?



Olafur Eliasson, *Your black horizon*. Installation view, Lopud, 2007

Dinko Peračić: I'd like to extend this conversation a bit to contextualize and to understand what preservation means, in a wider sense, in Croatia. Everyone at the moment knows that Croatia is an undevel-

oped or untouched country, especially its coastal ports, and because of the global pressure and because of many other influences, it is going to be built up very soon. Croatia is becoming a major tourist destination. In tourism, authenticity is what is sold as the content. The result is a kind of projection of a wish for authenticity onto our architecture.

Everyone wants something that looks old and kind of made in an old way. Authenticity has become our national objective. The marketing slogan for Croatia is a “Mediterranean as it once was,” and we are also supposed to live in that place as it used to be. And the people are being asked to create this tourist product. All these people are in a way creating this Mediterranean as it once was. Not a Mediterranean as it could be, or as it has to be. In Split, there is a slogan: “Split is a city where the time stands still.” Try to imagine your own country’s societies, as places where time is stopped. What I am really interested in is to find out what could be extrapolated from this story about the history of Croatian architecture. I’m really curious about developing, extrapolating the methods and principles by which we can talk about history as a living system rather than a style.

Jorge Otero-Pailos: I agree that methods are important, and should be rethought. Finding similarities in how we do things is a first step toward interdisciplinary work. For instance, the principle of reversibility is central to conservation practice. In other words, if you do something and you did it improperly, somebody in a future generation might be able to do it better. It’s very interesting that the only way to get the pavilion built was to pitch it as a kind of reversible intervention. It’s considered a temporary pavilion by the buildings department. It’s seen as a kind of test. I think that’s really the level at which the discussion is operative and very fruitful in the sense that the very concept that is central to preservation, and that makes preservation the most conservative, so to speak, has now been able to be deployed as the most progressive kind of principle, enabling this radical pavilion to be built in the island of Lopud. It is at that methodological level that I think there is an opportunity to bridge worlds of art, architecture and preservation. How could we develop that? What would it be to think about the coast of Croatia as a kind of reversible coast? What would it be to have a reversible development, as opposed to sustainable development?

Francesca von Habsburg: I think that, in a way, I was describing Janet’s project in the monastery because I felt that it integrated the cre-

ative process into the conservation work, as opposed to commissioning a project for a finished space. Integrating contemporary expression into a historical monument, as opposed to juxtaposing them later, seems far further reaching and innovative. It’s a similar process to the one that David and Olafur went through: the building and the artwork were actually created and conceived simultaneously. If I take a few steps back and look at the revitalization of Lopud, as opposed to just restoring the monastery, I see Lopud as an extraordinary pristine place that really has the potential of being developed far differently than the terrifying way that Dinko just described as the future vision for tourism in Croatia. It could become a cultural hub of contemporary expression, a place of reference, and inspiration. The pavilion itself is something that can revitalize only part of the island; I can’t imagine it revitalizing the whole island because, obviously, it also depends on the economy generated by conventional tourism to survive. However parachuting a wonderful project into a beautiful location is simply not enough. We needed to trigger off an interaction. The question remains how does it resonate with the landscape as well as the community? Learning to read the ripple effect it creates as opposed to creating a tidal wave of change is the key. We are really here asking ourselves these questions, how does this work and how could it work in the future, what would be the potential of leaving a pavilion here “full time”? And what effect would it have on the island and what would it generate, if anything at all? It could be possibly easily dismissed, nobody bothering to even come out here to visit it. I do believe in setting a project up that then poses such questions, then waiting for the response before you start to move forward and plan more projects, because I think it’s practically impossible to have a clear guideline on how to revitalize, or how to breathe life into something. This remains an experiment for me!

Mark Wigley: The two projects, the contemporary art pavilion, just constructed, and the restoration of an old building as an ongoing long project is kind of like a text book, a brilliant text book argument about the nature of art, preservation and architecture because so clearly and so strongly—as Jorge made evident earlier—the pavilion is a preserva-

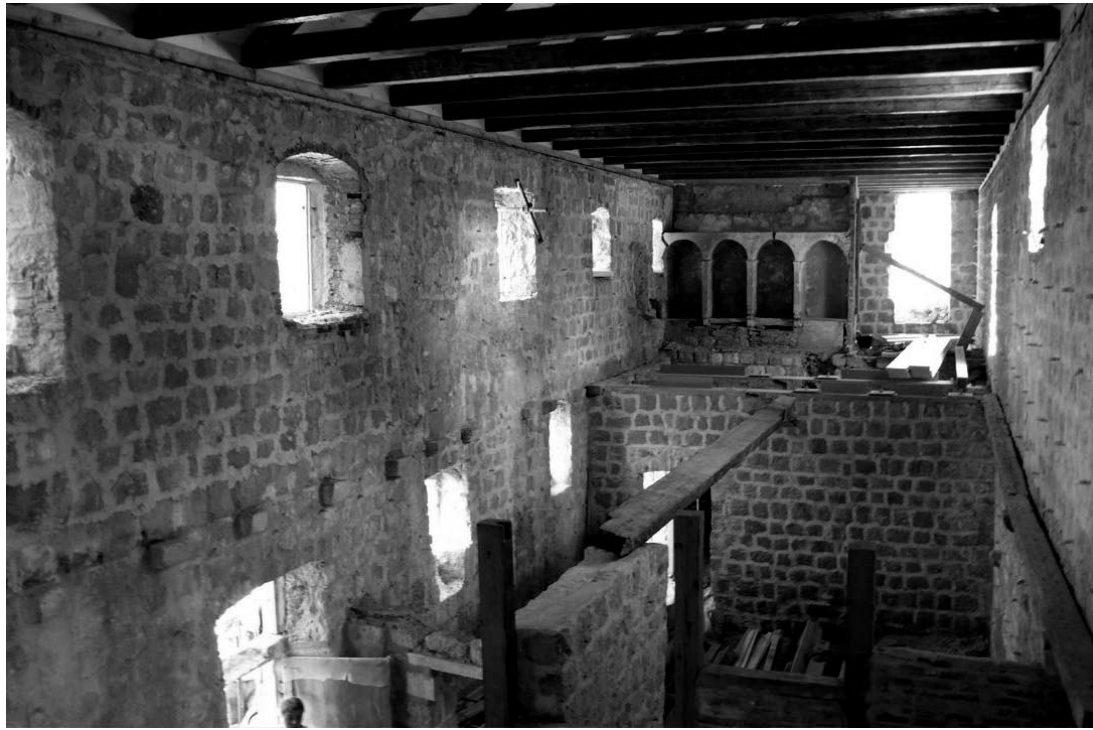
tion job. Even from the most simple sense it’s a preservation of the pavilion in Venice. Very precise observations, scientific observations have been made on the differences of the light in the place, the light on the outside but also the light on the actual horizon line itself. On the other hand it’s very clear that the restoration job on the monastery is radical art, is a radical transformative act, a revitalizing act of art. It’s a radical step and in neither case should that come as any surprise to us because in any case preservation is extremely radical. To put it one way, to preserve something is to change it and so preservationists are people who change things because they don’t let them be. The primary purpose of architecture is to reveal change and to reveal it by not changing it, so it’s slow. We want the house always just to be sitting there, so the responsibility of the architect is always to go against time and so the preservationist interestingly enough enters into the situation and in fact invigorates the architecture and puts it into time. Which is why as long as we think of the preservationists as the morticians, preserving the past versus the artists and architects as the revolutionaries who change the future such that the preservationists have to see the artists as their enemy, we fail to see the more or less conservative nature of architects and artists and the more or less radical nature of preservationists. The past is always a project, the past is not something that happened, it’s a project, that you throw into the future and you choose your weapons to make the throw. The preservationist field is an expert at a certain kind of throw, which will give us in the future a mythical past. It’s always mythical. So the question is what kind of throw, what kind of myth? And in the case of the monastery, there are many different kinds of throws, and the object itself is layered. Preservationists are radical, and they must take responsibility of its radical techniques. Literally, we saw stone walls with hypodermic needles and no architect ever uses technology as good as that. It’s the preservationists that have all the best tricks. But it’s done in the name of the past, in the name of no change but it’s all about radical change and I think the primary focus is to encourage preservationists to see what they are themselves in fact doing and become a little more creative in the moves they make. Survival is based on openness to mutation and

then a kind of resolute dogma. And I think what we need to do is to construct a preservation discipline, which is absolutely stubborn—legally and technologically stubborn—and also able to mutate.

Albert Heta: I think that all your theories cannot be applied everywhere. Where I come from, heritage or let’s say: preservation is seen as the biggest enemy, right now. The people in that territory would like that there was no particular heritage in that territory. None whatsoever. Precisely because historic preservation is used by the former occupiers of the country as a tool with clear political aims. The problem, I think, is when heritage is turned into something ethnic.

Mark Wigley: Actually I don’t agree and I want to say that I conceded on all of this. Actually I think it’s not true. If those who have political authority over preservation, for example, were operating in a way you are describing it would be impossible to resist them. In this situation, it’s impossible to resist such forces if they are positioned as let’s say conservative protectionists, guarding versus let’s say another discourse which is understood to be multiple, open, diverse, and so on. I think the only politically effective act is, to sort of publicly and clearly identify the radical nature of that so-called protectionism. In other words: the radical repressions that are involved in constructing that particular heritage image. It’s the only way to change it, and as long as the battle is kind of constructed as progressives versus conservatives, it’s a disaster because actually the real progressives in that sense are the preservationists who are usually redesigning - as in this case - an entire nation, the aesthetics of an entire nation. And this kind of politics is really politics as a work of art. I agree the language is offensive. The situation is offensive. But it’s really happening. It’s not only happening here. It’s the way things work. It’s part of the engineering of tourism, but tourism itself is one of the master industries of forgetting all that was done in the name of memory.

Andreas Ruby: Maybe an architect now in order to change something needs to step in and take the role of a preservationist. From history we



Restoration work in the monastery

can learn that the true nature of preservation is transformation. If I make a statement or intervention that radically changes the situation, I'm actually making a preservative act. Obviously that challenges the self-understanding of the discipline so far because as you said even if preservation undertakes these radical changes they always do it for the sake or in the name of keeping things as they are. So the question is how can you break up the self-image of preservation and how can you change the idea of what a preservationist does.

Francois Roche: So if you want to revive the stone, then put a manifesto inside the stone, palpitating, reviving its instructions. We can

invent an instruction for using something. In the case of the monastery, we can introduce a narrative function, which is not only reworking the iconography of the existing patrimony. We can introduce a narrative way to deal with this dead body, so it comes from the grave to say "hello!" We can write a scenario of this narrative revival of the dead body as a ceremony. The ceremony is important, we want to recreate a Franciscan monk. Imagine a conspiracy: People leaving the tower... we don't know exactly what's happened...

Andreas Ruby: But I think it's important that you said the ceremony should not be the same ceremony that it has been. You're saying

that the stone is not enough and we need to invent some kind of scenario that helps us to use it as an infrastructure for life and not as a fetish that is of a museum. I think that's probably what you're doing. You're trying to create that type of ceremony that helps us to see in it more than stone.

Francesca von Habsburg: There is this need and desire and, of course, there is a freshness in designing your own building, something new, and it's really difficult to find an architect who's really willing to look at the old building and help you reinterpret it. This is a discussion—how do you do that? Contemporary architects find it very difficult to get excited about these kinds of problems, and conservation architects are bogged down in theory, are very restricted in their ideas.

Jorge Otero-Pailos: Preservation is not just working on monuments but also includes these kinds of performance pieces, ceremonies if you will, that happen during the process of visiting historic sites. Preservation organizes how one visits. In fact, I define preservation as the organization of attention. It's the kind of organization of attention that is all about distracting. It's distracting you from looking at that which you are not supposed to be looking at. For instance, think about the coast here and the whole branding of Croatia as "the Mediterranean as it used to be." It's interesting that it's diverting you from Croatia as it used to be. The whole organization of your attention is towards the Mediterranean, and that's the whole journey and the whole experience that you're supposed to have. But what would happen if we were to re-slogan Croatia in the journals and travel magazines as "Croatia as it used to be." That alone would reorganize attention.

Albert Heta: Croatia during Ante Pavelić! In terms of preservation it is like asking if the Taliban were doing preservation when they destroyed the Bamiyan Buddhas.

Mark Wigley: Yes, from a stupidly abstract point of view, the Taliban have to be understood as expert preservationists. One could look

at the Taliban arguments made during the moments of maximum violence and the language there would be a language of preservation. Of course, it's the preservation of the self and destruction of the other. Not only is preservation always haunted by simultaneous protection and violence but there's always violence in preservation. One wonders to what extent the sort of Western legitimization of those figures also led to their destruction.

Francesca von Habsburg: I heard the bells of the church of the Franciscan monastery ring ten times and this is actually dinnertime. I think the thought of the reconstruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas as being a horrendous gesture is something we all agree about.

This debate session took place on June 18, 2007 on the island of Lopud.

Participants

Francesca von Habsburg is the chairman and founder of T-B A21 in Vienna.

Albert Heta is an artist based in Pristina/Kosovo.

Jorge Otero-Pailos is a Professor of Historic Preservation at Columbia University, New York.

Dinko Peračić is an architect (Platforma 981) in Split.

François Roche is an architect (R&S) in Paris.

Andreas Ruby is an architectural critic and theorist (textbild) in Berlin.

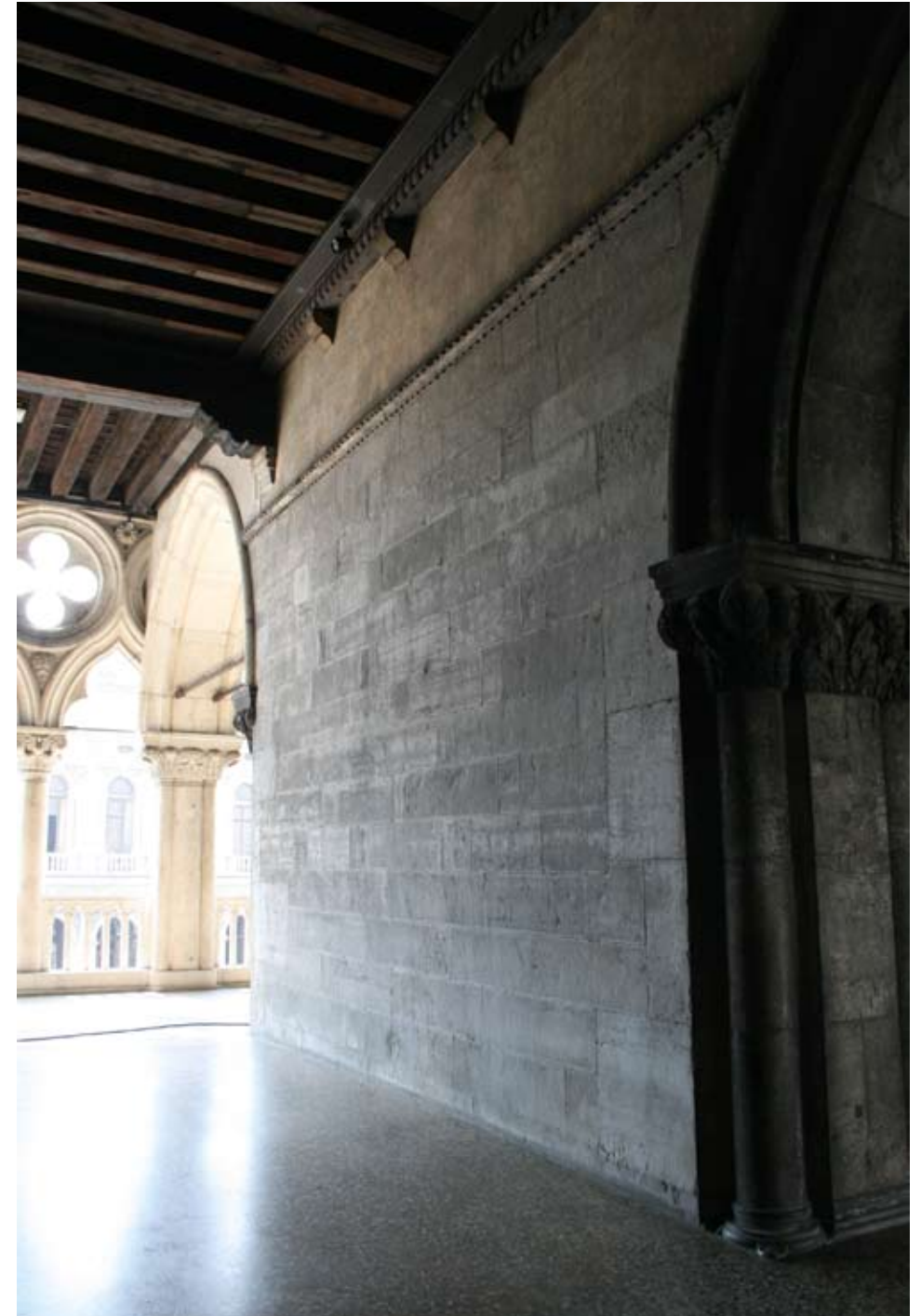
Mark Wigley is the Dean of Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation at Columbia University, New York.

The Ethics of Dust: Doge's Palace, Venice, 2009
exhibition views "Fare Mondi // Making Worlds"
curated by Daniel Birnbaum
53rd International Art Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia





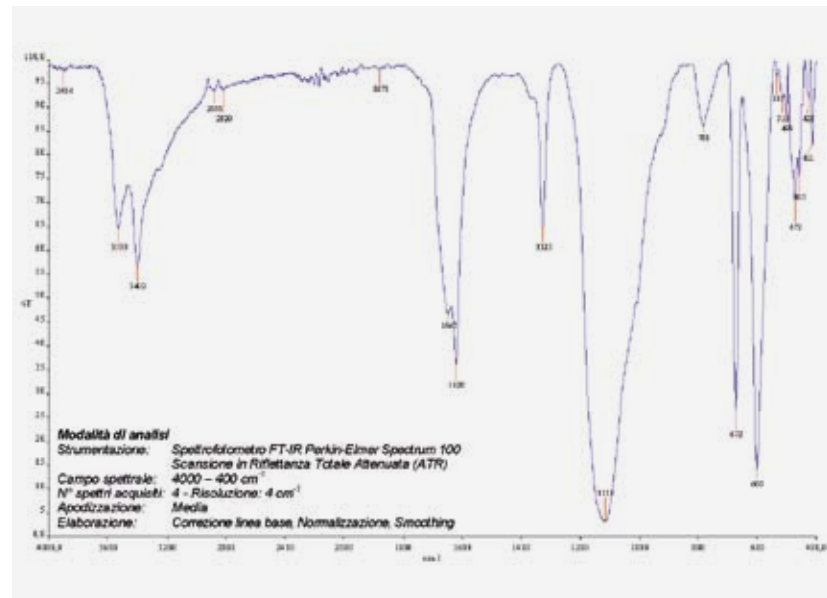
Original site prior to the cleaning





Details showing the layers of pollution



















Filippo Calendario, sculpture of Adam and Eve. With pollution (as it appeared in the 1990s) and after the cleaning (performed by the City of Venice, as it appears in 2009)



Imprint

Jorge Otero-Pailos: The Ethics of Dust

The Ethics of Dust: Doge's Palace, Venice, 2009 is commissioned by Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary.

This book is published on the occasion of the presentation of *The Ethics of Dust: Doge's Palace, Venice, 2009* at the 53rd International Art Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia as an official project of the exhibition "Fare Mondi // Making Worlds," curated by Daniel Birnbaum. 7th June – 22nd November 2009.

This book is co-financed by the Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation of Columbia University (GSAPP), Columbia University, New York.

Additional sponsorship by Arte Mundit of FTB Remmers, and by SEACEX, Spanish State Corporation for Cultural Action Abroad.

Artist's assistants: Patrick Ciccone, Joshua Draper, Carlos Huber, and Elisabeth Olson.

With special thanks to Mark Wigley, Dean, Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation, Columbia University; Arch. Renata Codello and Arch. Ilaria Cavaggioni, Soprintendenza per i Beni Architettonici e Paesaggistici di Venezia e Laguna; Filip Moens, CEO, Arte Mundit® of FTB Remmers; Manuela Lucadazio, and Massimiliano Bigarello, Production Office, La Biennale di Venezia.

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Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary, Vienna
Himmelfortgasse 13
A-1010 Vienna
www.TBA21.org

Published by
Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, Köln
Ehrenstr. 4
D-50672 Köln
Tel. +49.(0)221.205 96-53
Email: verlag@buchhandlung-walther-koenig.de

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Translations from the Italian: Cesare Birignani (Text Lorenzo Fusi), Giuliana Racco (Text Valeria Burgio)
Editorial assistance and research: Greta Hansen

Graphic design: Max Nestor, Markus Weisbeck /
Surface Gesellschaft für Gestaltung, Frankfurt am Main
Printing: REMAprint, Vienna

ISBN 978-3-86560-655-3
Printed in Austria

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

Distribution

Switzerland
Buch 2000
c/o AVA Verlagsauslieferungen AG
Centralweg 16
CH-8910 Affoltern a.A.
Tel. +41.(0)44.762 420 0
Fax +41.(0)44.762 421 0
a.koll@ava.ch

UK & Eire
Cornerhouse Publications
70 Oxford Street
GB-Manchester M1 5NH
Tel. +44.(0)161.200 150 3
Fax +44.(0)161.200 150 4
publications@cornerhouse.org

Outside Europe
D.A.P. / Distributed Art Publishers, Inc.
155 6th Avenue, 2nd Floor
New York, NY 10013
Tel. +1.212.627 199 9
Fax +1.212.627 948 4
www.artbook.com

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