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WOMEN AND PARTISAN ART

Aesthetics and Practices of Resistance in Yugoslavia and Carinthia

[transcript] Culture & Theory

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List of Abbreviations

AFŽ Antifašistički front žena (Antifascist Front of Women)
AVNOJ Antifašističko vijeće narodnog oslobođenja Jugoslavije (Antifascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia)
KPJ Komunistička partija Jugoslavije (Communist Party of Yugoslavia)
NDH Nezavisna Država Hrvatska (Independent State of Croatia)
NOB Narodnooslobodilačka borba (People's Liberation Struggle)
NOP Narodnooslobodilački pokret (People's Liberation Movement)
NOR Narodnooslobodilački rat (People's Liberation War)
NOV Narodnooslobodilačka vojska (People's Liberation Army)
OF Osvobodilna Fronta (Liberation Front)
SFRJ Socijalistička Federativna Republika Jugoslavija (Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia)
SKOJ Savez komunističke omladine Jugoslavije (League of Communist Youth of Yugoslavia)

How to Build an Antifascist Museum

The Case of the Peršmanhof Museum

Markus Gönitzer and Julia Stolba

Figure 1: Peršmanhof Museum within its surrounding, 2022.

Photo: Christian Brandstätter.

The present is characterised by global fascisation and authoritarianisation (Zaoui 2024). In addition to the emancipatory social movements of the present, it is also the culture of remembrance and the history of antifascist, LGBTIQ*, feminist, antiracist and working-class movements that are being fought against and repressed by right-wing actors. The Peršmanhof Museum, which commemorates the partisan resistance and the Nazi terror against the Carinthian Slovene minority in the southernmost part of Austria, sees its history and current activities in a strong continuity with the historical content it conveys. The following article is written from the standpoint of cultural workers

currently involved in the museum. We explore the question of what characterises Peršmanhof Museum both historically and in the present, in its roles as a museum, memorial site, educational space and social meeting place. By reflecting on the context, developments and contradictions of the Peršmanhof Museum, we will approach the question of what a contemporary antifascist museum could look like in light of Nora Sternfeld's understanding of "places of remembrance as contact zone" (Sternfeld 2013) and in understanding the museum with its area, its actors and their (hi)stories as an affective archive. In doing so, we will analyse the potentials and challenges of the Peršmanhof as a contemporary antifascist museum.

The Peršmanhof and its visitors

On a Sunday in spring 2022, a shy man enters the museum during the opening hours of the Peršmanhof. The Museum is located over 1000 metres above sea level and right on the Austrian-Slovenian border. It is very remote and cannot be reached by public transport. The visitor is local to the village of Bad Eisenkappel/Železna Kapla but has never visited the museum before. The museum educator tells the man about the history of the local partisan resistance and the harsh reality of the resistance fighters' lives. She talks about the history of the Carinthian Slovenian minority and the repression they faced during the Nazi regime. Finally, she reports on the lives of the families who worked on the Peršman farm before they fell victim to a tragic Nazi massacre. The Peršman educator talked about how, in the last gasps of the Second World War on 25 April 1945, an SS police regiment murdered members of the Sadovnik and Kogoj families living on the site of the museum. Eleven people were killed, including seven children.[1] The residents of the farm actively supported the partisans' resistance against the Nazi regime and paid a bitter price. After this introduction, the educator invited the visitor to stay for a cup of coffee. Even though he did not mention anything of the sort at his arrival, the visitor recounted almost casually in the conversation that followed his museum tour that he was also a Carinthian Slovene and that his grandfather had even been involved in organising the local resistance movement. He unconfidently and nervously mentioned that his grandfather could be seen in one of the photos in the exhibition. The educator reacted with embarrassment, apologised for having gone so far afield and remarked that he should have been the one listening to the visitors' stories and experiences.

This anecdote not only provides an insight into the everyday practice of the Peršmanhof Museum, but it also raises the following question: why does disclosing biographical points of contact with the history of the partisan resistance or the Carinthian Slovenian minority seem to be tainted with shame or reticence? The aforementioned visitor seemed insecure and reluctant to mention his biographical connection to the resistance, even in a museum that is dedicated to this history more consistently, extensively and affirmatively than any other space in Austria. These questions invite us to embed the museum

1 The victims of the massacre were, Franciska Sadovnik, Luka Sadovnik, Ana Sadovnik, Franciska Sadovnik, Victor Sadovnik, Bogomir Sadovnik, Katarina Sadovnik, Albina Sadovnik, Filip Sadovnik, Stanislav Kogoj, Adelgunda Kogoj (Rettl & Blohberger 2014, 270–271).

in the specific historical and societal context of Carinthia/Koroška, which will help us to understand the genesis of the museum together with its stances and values, as well as to gain an overview of the expectations placed on this special place.

The remembrance of resistance and the history of the Slovene minority in Carinthia/Koroška

The partisan resistance of the Carinthian Slovenes took place as part of the Slovenian Liberation Front (Osvobodilna Fronta Slovenskega naroda, OF). Historically, it is considered the most significant armed resistance against the Nazis within the 'German Reich' (Pirker 2012, 534). This leads to the following question: why does the resistance of the Carinthian partisans play such a marginal role in official Austrian history? And why does the involvement of family members in the resistance even seem shameful in some cases?

The myth that Austria was the first victim of Hitler's Germany concealed the fanatical involvement of large sections of the Austrian population in the Nazi regime until the 1980s and blocked a consistent denazification of society. This victim myth also enabled the German nationalist associations to present themselves as loyal to their homeland but not as Nazis, thereby concealing their deep involvement in the Nazi regime. Central to this development was and continues to be the supremacy of German nationalism in Carinthia and its political, institutional and cultural influence (Goetz 2012, 45–47).[2] In Carinthia after the Second World War, German nationalist associations and organisations succeeded in establishing a victim-perpetrator reversal between partisan resistance fighters and Nazi criminals and collaborators.

The starting point of these developments can be found in the early 20th century. From the end of the First World War, Anti-Slavic narratives played a key role in Carinthian German nationalism (Goetz 2012, 45–47). Anti-Slovenianism was deeply inscribed in Carinthia's interwar society, its institutions and parties and found its most militant propagandists in the organisations Carinthian Defence Fighters' Association (Kärntner Abwehrkämpferbund, AKB) and Carinthian Homeland Service (Kärntner Heimatdienst, KHD). When the latter organisations were dissolved under the Nazi regime, many of their functionaries found themselves euphoric participants in the Nazi system. (Ibid., 76) On the basis of these developments, the so-called German National Consensus and its actors succeeded in portraying the Carinthian Slovenes in post-war Carinthia as nest-burners and traitors of the 'Volksgemeinschaft', despite their suffering from persecution, deportation, and discrimination by the Nazis.

Regardless of their heterogeneous political composition and their heterogeneous political goals, the former partisans were generally devalued with a double stigma as 'Slavic aggressors' and communists (ibid., 75). In the 1970s, Carinthian Slovenes still found themselves exposed to such an aggressive mood that the installation of bilingual

2 Historically, German nationalism in Austria is characterised by the idea of a Greater Germany with the inclusion of German-speaking Austrians. The ideological formation, which gained strength in the 19th century, was based on the idea of 'Volksgemeinschaft', which was strived for through racist and anti-Semitic exclusions, alongside other ideological elements.

street signs, to which the minority was entitled under the state treaty, led to an escalation by the German nationalist forces similar to a pogrom (Gstettner 2002). For many Carinthian Slovenes, these attacks in 1972 were a re-traumatising experience. In the 1980s and 1990s, militant German nationalism, with its components of anti-Slovenianism and the defamation of partisan resistance, was integrated into a newly emerging form of right-wing populism (Obid et al. 2002, 139–142).

In this political balance of power, a Carinthian-Slovenian and pro-partisan culture of remembrance was established as a counter-hegemonic culture of remembrance organised 'from below'. Similar to other victim groups (including Austrian resistance fighters and KZ-Survivors), the victims of Nazis belonging to the Slovenian minority and the actors of the antifascist resistance in Carinthia/Koroška had to fight for their own public spaces, monuments and memorials in post-Nazi Austria (Sternfeld 2016, 77). This history of resistant remembrance also characterises the history of the Peršmanhof Museum.

Peršmanhof as a 'museum from below'

After the Peršmanhof smallholding was burnt down during the massacre in April 1945, the surviving members of the Sadovnik and Kogoj families rebuilt the house in order to return to live there again. In 1981, family member and owner Lukas Sadovnik decided to sell the farm. A gunsmith purchased the farm from Ferlach/Borovlje. Since the new owner was affected by the deportations of 221 Carinthian Slovenian families by the Nazis in 1942, he leased the farm to the Association of Carinthian Partisans (Zveza koroških partizanov, ZKP) for a symbolic price (Malle 2011, 49).[3] The lease, which was drawn up from 1981 to 2081, was linked to two conditions: on the one hand, a museum for the local resistance and victims was to be set up on the premises, and on the other, the surviving children of the Sadovnik family were to be granted lifelong residential rights (Rettl 2014, 195). This actual dual use of the building brought with it a tension that could hardly be resolved in the following decades.

The year 1982 marked the birth of the Peršmanhof Museum. Dozens of volunteers invested thousands of hours of work to renovate the building so that it could become a museum. The deployment of youth work brigades from nine different nations, as well as 28 Yugoslav students, marked the starting point of two further continuities at Peršmanhof: the involvement of young people and international networking among antifascists (Rettl 2006, 221–222). The great need for voluntary and activist supporters was also evident in the lack of funding from sponsors. In Carinthia, memorial sites of the German nationalist camp were given financial priority, while the federal government did not consider the cause important enough (Rettl 2014, 195). Despite modest financial resources, a resistance museum was built with the help of curator Marjan Sturm and designer Peter Wieser. While for the first 20 years of its existence, the museum primarily served as a collective space of remembrance for broad sections of the Carinthian Slovenian minority, the turn of the millennium also ushered in a new era for the museum.

3 The Association of Carinthian Partisans is the direct successor organisation to the Carinthian Regional Committee of the People's Liberation Movement.

The Association of Carinthian Partisans agreed to the founding of a second association (Društvo/Verein Peršman) in 2001, comprised of scholars, artists and activists showing solidarity.[4] To a certain extent, this opening marked the beginning of a de-essentialisation of local memory: for decades after the war, members of the Slovene minority, former partisans, as well as their relatives and descendants were the carriers of their antihegemonical culture of remembrance, which faced a lot of hostility in the Carinthian context. By approving the founding of the Društvo/Verein Peršman, the Partisan Association also agreed that non-Carinthian Slovenes and non-partisan functionaries would be able to publicly represent their history. However, questions of biographical involvement, ethnic group affiliation, and associated agencies remain important in the negotiation process to this very day. This innovation was another important step towards the museum's original declaration of intent, which was formulated as follows by the former partisan and chairman of the Association of Carinthian Partisans, Janez Wutte-Luc:

> [Peršmanhof should] become a place of reconciliation, where former fighters and antifascists of both nationalities should meet and where the memory of the atrocities and heroism of the antifascist struggle should be passed on to the younger generation to all those who fortunately do not know from their own experience what prisons and camps, what torture and violent death mean. We hope that we will never have to experience 25 April again. We wish to build a better world in peace and national equality. (Rettl 2006, 224–225; trans. by the authors)

This declaration of intent has also experienced political opposition since the museum was founded. German nationalists launched revisionist smear campaigns against the museum in the province's newspapers with the highest circulation, and the association repeatedly documented acts of vandalism by political opponents up until 2009 (Wulz & Kolb 2011, 328–329). Apart from one exceptional case in 2014, in which a politician from the extreme right-wing party FPÖ accused an educator working at the Peršmanhof of 'left-wing fascist' incitement in an Austria-wide press release, the political attacks levelled off in the 2010s (*Der Standard* 2014). Prominent literary references to the Peršmanhof and the history of the surrounding region by Peter Handke and Maja Haderlap helped the museum to see a sharp rise in visitor numbers from 2011 onwards. The planned complete renovation of the museum's permanent exhibition was also carried out in 2012. More than ten years later, the museum is a modern place of remembrance that regularly hosts school workshops and teacher training programmes and uses multimedia approaches to convey its content. Peršmanhof was awarded the seal of quality for museums in 2024, which is based on international ICOM guidelines, thus representing a further milestone

4 According to the cooperation agreement, the Društvo Peršman association was entrusted with the task of developing and implementing educational concepts for the museum and designing a new exhibition. This future cooperation represented a great vote of confidence on the part of the former partisans and their descendants and a desire to open up and form alliances. While the Partisan Association is largely made up of members of the ethnic group and thus Slovenian speakers, the composition of Društvo Peršman is mixed. The members of the new association also included supporters from other Austrian provinces and from Germany, i.e. people with no biographical connection to the local history.

in professionalisation and public recognition. Alongside these developments, the museum tries to maintain the organic links it has developed with activist organisations and youth groups. These partly contradictory developments suggest considering Peršmanhof Museum as an agonistic contact zone.

Figure 2: Educational workshops with school class at Peršmanhof Museum, 2022.

Photo: Društvo/Verein Peršman.

Contradictions and challenges in the contact zone

By embedding Peršmanhof Museum in the historical and political context of Carinthia/Koroška and summarising the history of its development, several contradictions come to light that are still the subject of dynamic negotiation processes today. Following Nora Sternfeld's theorisation of memorial sites as 'agonistic contact zones', we understand Peršmanhof as a space full of conflicting discourses and narratives of remembrance put forward by actors from different social and cultural situations. Contact zones are, therefore, spaces that are permeated by power and relations of domination that structure the respective discourses (Sternfeld 2013, 82). The framing of the contact zone relevant to the Peršmanhof is 'achieved memory' (Sternfeld 2016, 92–94). For the Peršmanhof Museum, the 'achieved' consensus means recognising the Slovenian ethnic group as victims of Nazi terror and a fundamental acknowledgement of the necessity of partisan resistance against the Nazi regime. If we extend the circle of the contact zone and include the visitors, this consensus becomes fragile again.

Therefore, the Peršmanhof contact zone is a meeting place for various agents, each with different demands and expectations of the museum. A few of these parties should be mentioned here to illustrate this: The descendants of the partisans who want to give space to their decades-long repressed culture of remembrance in the form of a heroic museum of resistance, the descendants of the victims' families who see the rebuilt Peršmanhof as a place of intimate remembrance, the neighbours of the surrounding farms whose ancestors suffered similar tragic fates but feel inadequately represented in the museum, the Društvo Peršman association, which aims to intervene in public education systems with a contemporary didactic approach and various steps of professionalisation, and finally, activist contexts that want to preserve the self-organised and subversive character of the Peršmanhof as a museum from below. As noted, this list is incomplete, and an in-depth discussion of the individual controversies between those approaches should be the task of future papers.

However, conflictual aspirations listed here in the Peršmanhof Museum contact zone not only pose challenges, but they also guarantee, to a certain extent, a lively and democratic negotiation process between the various claims of different communities of remembrance. The task of the museum as an antifascist museum and its agents could be to continue to help these different claims to become visible, to moderate them and to provide them with a clear antifascist framework that makes revisionism and discriminatory lines of argumentation and attitudes workable or excludes them altogether. Thus, defending Peršmanhof Museum as a contact zone is a key challenge within and against the process of fascisation since it means defending a space that sets clear boundaries against revisionism and discrimination, defending a space that prevails histories and remembrances on emancipatory movements as 'achieved memories', and finally defending a space that guarantees a democratic discourse by enabling ambivalent and contradictory memories and claims.

Museum Peršmanhof as an affective archive[5]

In the summer of 2023, we visited the Peršmanhof Museum with a group of students from the Hamburg University of Fine Arts. The students had already learned about the history of this place. During the week of the excursion, we 'lived' in the museum. In the evenings, we watched films from the museum's library. One of them, entitled *Der Kärnter spricht Deutsch* (The Carinthian speaks German), is a documentary film by Andrina Mračnikar (2006), who interviewed various people from the area that were persecuted, deported, and tortured by the Nazis, whose families were murdered and who took part in the resistance. The film ends with an interview with Ciril Sadovnik, one of the three children who survived the massacre at Peršmanhof. He points down the corridor and to various parts of the square and describes who he saw lying there murdered as he ran away with his severely injured little sister. And he points under the corner bench in the room where we were sitting and watching the film and tells us how the children had hidden themselves under this bench before the Nazis had shot under the bench to murder

5 This section of the paper originates from Julia Stolba's unpublished doctoral dissertation.

them too. Of course, it is not the same corner bench, as the Nazis burnt down the entire courtyard, and only the main building was rebuilt.

Nevertheless, this reconstruction of violence in space had an extreme affective dimension. It was only through this part of the film that the participants truly understood the place, and it was really understandable where we were. We had a long conversation into the night about the feelings that emerged, the presence of violence and that of resistance against it, the everyday life at a crime scene in all its contradictions. "Peršmanhof really is an affective archive", said one participant at the end of our discussion.

This story can be read as a 'shifting moment' triggered by an affective transmission of knowledge (Deleuze & Guattari 1991, Waibel 2013, Rolnik 2018). An example of how history and archive material (Foucault 1969) can be accessed via affects. It is quite possible to know historical circumstances and to grasp them emotionally and ideologically. However, something else happens when we hear the ghosts of history speak to us as an affective transmission of knowledge. Like memory, the archive not only stores but also (unconsciously) represses or suppresses knowledge and history. The repressed, forgotten, and hidden are, therefore, also part of the archive. Jacques Derrida calls these contradictions and ambivalences, following traces of repressed memory and never being able to achieve completeness in a manic search, *mal d'archive* (Derrida 1995). In a country where the history of violence is still repressed, to a varying extent unconsciously, places like Peršmanhof Museum signify precisely this manic searching, bringing forth and keeping alive what Derrida describes.

Affective transmission of knowledge in the context of Peršmanhof Museum

The history of the Carinthian partisans clearly shows how hegemonic archive logics operate to create a collective narrative. The archive of the Peršmanhof Museum, which has been fighting against this revisionist resistance for decades in its many different roles as a gathering place, memorial, and museum that conveys history with a clear antifascist stance, does not only include the exhibition, the library and recordings of events that took place there. Instead, what is special about this place is that everything there and everyone there creates an archive that extends past the museum's site to the entire area and beyond. The 'contact zone' around this archive's site generates space and visibility for diverse biographical, political and emotional relations. At this site, we do not just look for history among the files and folders that can help us reconstruct the past. We also find it in the conversations that arise between all those who are holding the space. And we can find it in the traces of the area that exist as silent contemporary witnesses.

Another significant dimension is the transgenerationality that seems to exist as a matter of course at the Peršmanhof Museum. Without the memories and experiences of the ones that came before us, we would lack solutions to the problems of our present day, "and one would no longer even understand how an ancestor can speak within us, nor what sense there might be in us to speak to him or her, to speak in such an 'unheimlich', 'uncanny' fashion, to his or her ghost. With it." (Derrida 1995, 36). The archive as an "irreducible experience of the future" (ibid., 68) is not only a repetition associated with the past but also shapes the future through what is transmitted and passed on through archiving. Both the second and third generations, i.e. the children and grandchildren

of those who experienced Nazi persecution, and the first generation directly affected, and the survivors whose loss we are already confronted with now and in the future are aware of this. These are the words of the introduction to the book *Jelka, aus dem Leben einer Kärntner Partisanin, nach Tonbandaufzeichnungen mit Helena Kuchar*, edited by Brigitta and Thomas Busch:

> The experience she has acquired over the course of a lifetime should belong to everyone who knows what to do with it. […] Everyone who is young anywhere in the world could be her grandchildren. And she has only one wish for this generation – that they are spared the experiences that she and her comrades have paid for with blood. And just one question: if it still comes to that, who will be prepared? (Kuchar 1994, 8–9)[6]

This can be read as a common remembrance but also about a ubiquitous threat that tells the young generation, "watch out, it can happen again, be prepared", about passing on the knowledge of resistance, not only as a reminder but also as very practical instructions for action in this case. This scenario seems eerily present again in the current political situation.

Artistic, curatorial and educational engagement with archive material and the resulting affective potential can cause a shift in one's own perception and perspective. This possibility of affect is inherent in artistic practices, exhibitions and projects that are based on an engagement with history and archive material; Okwui Enwezor describes them (artists who work with archives) as "the historical agent[s] of memory" (Enwezor 2008, 46).

Knowledge carries strong affective potential. However, it depends on how it is transferred in a curatorial and educational way so that it is not only possible to know something but to understand it truly. The practice of transmitting history at the Peršmanhof Museum is in many aspects that of an 'affective archive': the archive of this place is created by everything that is there, everybody who is there and all those who were there before and whose stories we can encounter in the museum, which, in the words of Sara Ahmed, creates objects of emotions that move between those who are engaging with the place, sticking on them, shifting them (Ahmed 2004, 10–11). Not least because of the various roles and functions of this place, everyone who is there and shares the potentially meets, what Irit Rogoff and Nora Sternfeld call "the Unarchivable" (Rogoff & Sternfeld 2021), that which cannot be part of a physical archival collection but emerges when one engages with and investigates the archive. The voices of those who call out from the material are stories that could not and cannot be archived and are still part of the archive (Derrida 1995, 100).

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6 Translated by the authors after the original German text: "[…] Was sie im Lauf eines Lebens an Erfahrungen erworben hat, soll allen gehören, die damit etwas anzufangen wissen. […] Alle, die irgendwo auf der Welt jung sind, könnten ihre Enkel sein. Und für diese Generation hat sie nur einen Wunsch – dass ihr die Erfahrungen erspart bleiben, die sie und ihre Genossen mit Blut bezahlt haben. Und nur eine Frage: wenn es doch soweit kommt, wer wird dann bereit sein?"

In this respect, Saidiya Hartman (2008) proposed the method of *critical fabulation*. By following the stories of enslaved women[7], Hartman demonstrates the necessity of continuing to work with the material in the archives, concluding from the data found there and thinking based on her analyses where they end or where she saw ruptures and voids, also reflecting on the contradictions and the danger of potential romanticisation that it could produce.

> The intention here isn't anything as miraculous as recovering the lives of the enslaved or redeeming the dead, but rather labouring to paint as full a picture of the lives of the captives as possible. This double gesture can be described as straining against the limits of the archive to write a cultural history of the captive and, at the same time, enacting the impossibility of representing the lives of the captives precisely through the process of narration. (Ibid., 11)

Following a logical chronology of experiences, Hartman tries to imagine events as they might have been, not as a phantasmatic narrative but as an account close to the archival data and its testimony of extreme violence and a consequence of very precise analysis. In this way, it becomes possible to think about the parts of the narrative that are contained in the archive but are unspoken and cannot be summarised in words and data: The resistance of events and people that reveal themselves as *unarchivable* and, as soon as one engages with them, a relationship between the material, the story emerges, to the person engaging with it.

This way of engaging with archives is essential for the pursuit of trauma and transgenerational transmission in the archives, as archives always contain gaps and inconsistencies when they are created in the context of violence. It cannot be assumed that an environment of oppression and exploitation of Black women does not tell their stories coherently and truthfully and without traces of this violence. And the archives, which were created in the context of the violent crimes of the Nazi terror and tell stories of people who had to flee from war and experienced racist, antisemitic and sexist violence, will not contain a complete narrative either.[8] Especially not if everything in the archive consists of memories that change over time or get lost.

Critical fabulation is, therefore, not about pure imagination or conspiracies, which also exert a strong affective force. Instead, it is about collecting as much information as possible and speculating about what is missing based on facts, data and statements, and thus certainly gaining a more comprehensive picture of the history (or histories) than would be the case in a powerful portrayal of history by the perpetrators and their successor generations. The suppressed and partly repressed knowledge – on the one hand, on the part of the hegemonic narrative, on the other hand, also through the extreme traumatisation that is passed on transgenerationally and thus includes everything that was *not* allowed

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7 It is important to say that it is not the intention of this text to compare the history of slavery with the history of crimes of the Nazis against the Carinthian-Slovenes. Rather it is interesting to see how Saidiya Hartman's method can show us ways to engage with the lacks that archives and their histories of violence produce.

8 This also applies to the Peršmanhof museum, since most of the documents and photographs in the exhibition are coming from police and court archives.

to be said (and perhaps still cannot be said), means that such a marginalised history has not been fully archived. Nevertheless, traces of history can be found everywhere, which makes the Peršmanhof Museum a living archive, with the exhibition as a kind of centre whose most crucial characteristic is perhaps to create a space where everything and everyone who is the archive comes together. In this diverse transmission of knowledge lies a strong affective force capable of shifting and moving oneself as soon as one comes into contact with the archive and the voices of the *unarchivable* and becomes part of the *contact zone*.

A living archive, a living museum. Transgenerational transmission of the Carinthian-Slovenian history

What does it mean when an entire region becomes part of a living archive, part of a living museum? The history of Carinthian Slovenes is not only present in the area around the Peršmanhof. Not all of them remained in this place after the liberation, from where they were brutally expelled and their families murdered. Nevertheless, the history surrounding this place is becoming more concentrated, partly because so many of those affected and subsequent generations have approached history through art, especially through literature. In this way, their own experiences and those of their families are reported, and other stories of those who did not write themselves or were unable to write down their history are included. There seems to be a great need to confront what one or one's parents or grandparents have experienced in writing, which certainly works for some as a sublimation and helps to work through the post-traumatic and post-memorial.

The discourse on the transgenerational transmission of trauma caused by Nazi crimes, which Marianne Hirsch calls *postmemory* (Hirsch 2012), is of great importance for the context. In the 1970s, researchers began to examine survivors of the Shoah and their children after it was discovered that these children exhibited symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder even though it was not them but their parents who were directly affected (Kestenberg 1974). Daniel Wutti (2013) has analysed the transgenerational transmission of trauma in Carinthian-Slovenian families. He traced this phenomenon using three case studies, which clearly show, among other things, that anger and the rigorous refusal to forgive the perpetrators is more pronounced in the second generation than in the first and third generations and that discrimination continues to run through the generations (ibid., 107–108). Artistic means such as writing, singing, theatre and dance, which play a central role in the Carinthian-Slovenian culture of remembrance, can help to work through and process all this (Gönitzer 2023). Finally, writing is also a resistant practice to make one's voice heard and to insist on history against historical revisionism. The musealisation of the region and the people of the area is probably both a curse and a blessing. Insisting on history and demonstrating a strong political stance passed down through generations is undoubtedly an outstanding achievement and indispensable in the fight against right-wing populism and historical revisionism, which we cannot do without. At the same time, trauma is also inscribed in resistance.

In this *contact zone* of different memory communities in the area, it is vital to be aware of contradictions and gaps and to know that the musealization of the area does not always lead to a productive confrontation with the trauma. But it is the coexistence of dif-

ferent memory communities that also keeps history alive at the Peršmanhof Museum. All the literary analyses in which survivors and their children work through history biographically and autobiographically can be found in the museum's library, read on-site or purchased. Most people who regularly visit the Peršmanhof are siblings, children, grandchildren, and friends of its authors. They meet to talk to each other and those who visit the museum or to enjoy a coffee or beer in the middle of the partisan region. This is another way of working through the trauma, showing solidarity with the ghosts of history, passing on their stories and not forgetting them.

"For life, against death." Actualising an antifascist museum

Lipej Kolenik, former partisan and political activist, describes the importance of partisan songs for the survivors:

> Anyone who has not experienced this cannot understand what the partisan song meant to us at the time. It was worse than a weapon because it not only acted as a propaganda tool but also gave new strength day after day to all those who longed for freedom. Even though we were almost always in a hopeless situation [...] for life against death. (Kolenik 2001, 247)[9]

Just as the prisoners sang resistance songs against the death cult of fascism, a contemporary antifascist museum should also take a critical view of current trends of extermination and show solidarity with the movements "for life" that counteract these trends.[10] This could mean not only working for the survival of the memories of the victims and resistance fighters but also questioning what they mean for contemporary feminist, ecological, antiracist and class struggles. Therefore, the challenge of forging new links between the past, present, and future while maintaining a sensitive approach to historical experiences and facts could be a touchstone for a contemporary, antifascist museum. Museum Peršmanhof tries to serve those needs by giving space to the activists mentioned before and struggles to connect, learn, and discuss.

As we stated at the beginning and looked at in more detail, the Peršmanhof Museum has various roles, all of which are important in order for it to function as a place of learning and remembrance for antifascist history and working towards a better future. The core of the museum is its clear antifascist position, which determines all other spaces of meaning for the people who, together with the museum, constitute the Peršmanhof archive. Many institutions act opportunistically within the context set by the cultural

9 Translated by the authors according to the original German text: "Wer das nicht erlebt hat, kann nicht begreifen, was uns das Partisanenlied damals bedeutete. Es war schlimmer als eine Waffe, denn es wirkte nicht nur als Propagandamittel, sondern es gab Tag für Tag all jenen, die sich nach Freiheit sehnten, neue Kräfte. Wenn wir auch so gut wie immer in einer hoffnungslosen Lage waren [...] für das Leben gegen den Tod."

10 For a theorisation of the similarities and differences between contemporary activist movements fighting for the survival of humanity and the planet and against the destructive forces of a racist, patriarchal capitalism, see Redecker 2020.

field, which is why there is a justified lack of trust in the claims of cultural institutions by many activists and marginalised groups. The above-theorised approach of the contact zone poses a challenge to museums and institutions within neoliberal cultural contexts since the need for efficiency and output does not allow the time needed to moderate between different perspectives and claims. Both the process of neoliberal transformation as well as the pressures of political fascisation can again lead to the suppression of marginalised perspectives and a clear antifascist stance. In contrast, the entanglement of different agents in its history of development as a museum from below, as well as the ownership of the Museum by the Association of Carinthian Partisans, guaranties the visibility of marginalised and antifascist standpoints at Peršmanhof.

In continuation, both the group dynamics and political roles of the site are important, as well as a psychological dimension that, on the one hand, gives space to the transgenerational transmission of the history and trauma of those affected and, on the other hand, takes into account the affective potentials that concern all those who deal with the Peršmanhof archive. All this makes the museum a space of solidarity in which multi-perspective knowledge and history (histories) can be shared. Part of this is also recognising ambivalences and contradictions and constantly renegotiating them. In this way, tensions remain in the many roles of the site between memorial and resistance museum, which prevents both a sacred, depoliticised commemoration of victims and a heroising perspective on the partisan resistance.

A central task for the future of an antifascist museum is, consequently, its constant actualisation. Let us suppose that we understand the Peršmanhof Museum as a living archive with and for all who are a part of it. In that case, working in it means constantly searching for the places where the *unarchivable* becomes visible and getting closer to the secrets that are still hidden. Which stories are missing? Which voices call out to us from the archive material – from the folders, the stories and the songs, the movements, the forests as a silent witness of the times? What answers do they give us to the challenges of the present? Whose traces will we follow, and where will they take us?

We want the museum to continue to be a living place of solidarity, connecting different protagonists in this place together as Enwezor's 'agents of memory' and, therefore, an archive whose affective power enables knowledge to be transmitted. We would like to see resources and infrastructures that make all this possible: legal and material protection of the museum, which simultaneously should not question or blunt its critical perspective through institutionalisation. To that end, it is necessary both to have an educational impact on society at large via the role of the official museum and, at the same time, to preserve the space for the heirs of history in which they feel comfortable and can be sure that their history represents the hegemonic history.

At the time this article is being written, the museum is not yet affected by politically motivated defunding or other austerity measures and other government actions that would endanger the museum existentially, not to mention direct physical violence by extreme right-wing organisations, which is conceivable in the light of an intensifying fascisation. All these scenarios threaten its current mode of operation and the desires outlined in this article. Antifascism, therefore, also means, first and foremost, and especially now, maintaining and defending spaces of solidarity.

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