

At St. Kolumba: The Drowned and the Saved
Transmitting the Spirit of Place—Interpretation / Meaning

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Abstract. From 1995-2000, an American interdisciplinary team of mostly Artists, Architects, Art Historians, and Historic Preservationists collaborated on an experiment in documentation at the St. Kolumba sacred historic site and ruin in Cologne Germany, through the Erzbischofliches Diözesanmuseum, Cologne. The Diözesanmuseum had just been given the much-revered site of St. Kolumba in the oldest central part of the city for the design and construction of new architecture for the Diözesan's Collection. Fall of 2007, the new Diözesanmuseum designed by Peter Zumthor opened to the public.

This conference provides a unique opportunity to examine the research of the American team that experienced St. Kolumba as a locked, silent, cloistered ruin. And to see the images and interpretations of the site just before the new architecture was introduced, at the moment when the archeological excavations, the Gothic church ruins and the Gottfried Böhm Chapel were absorbed and changed into the new architecture

Cologne Germany was mostly destroyed at the end of World War II. The wreath of thirteen Churches built on the Roman remains of the center city (Wolff 1993), had been more than ninety-percent destroyed. The great monument, Cologne Cathedral, constructed over the course of six centuries was leaning, yet still standing with “grievous damage” (ICOMOS 1996). Twelve Romanesque churches and Cologne Cathedral were reconstructed after the war.

Cologne Cathedral was nominated to the World Heritage List the 18th of August 1995, even after extensive reconstruction at the end of WWII; the Cathedral Workshops, had rebuilt 22 high vaults. The ICOMOS expert mission evaluation stated, “[Cologne Cathedral] ...in its way [is] the most perfect Gothic cathedral. Begun in 1248, it was built in several stages in a spirit of complete faithfulness to the initial plan. As a result, it exhibits perfect homogeneity.” And, “Cologne Cathedral is an outstanding work of human creative genius...powerful testimony to the strength and persistence of Christian belief in medieval and modern Europe (Kurmann 1996).” In the nomination, recognition of the leadership, knowledge and skills of the Cathedral Workshops confirms the strengths of a centuries old concept of maintaining expert craftsmen and apprentices on-site: “The essential factor is that all the work, from the 13th to the 19th century, was carried out with scrupulous respect for the original design, and that this tradition was continued in the post-world war II reconstruction. In this respect Cologne Cathedral may be considered with justification to be *sui generis* and hence its authenticity is absolute (ICOMOS 1995).” This was not the case with the Altstadt as a whole.

The research of the American team in 1995, lead by Dr. Ruth Moscop, on the center city context of St. Kolumba, was expanded in 1996 to examine the re-construction plan of the Altstadt after the war. A study, concentrated on architectural theory and interpretation, surmised that the Altstadt had been reconstructed to a pre-war nineteenth century urban fabric generated out of the collective memory of the populace – and, that this process produced a “theft of authenticity” (Taylor 1996). Artists and Earth Watch documented the joinery of fabrication - an irregular line at the edge, where the new construction had sprung from the original architectural fragments.

In 1995 St. Kolumba was the only site remaining in the center city that showed the scars and visible signs of the destruction of World War II; St. Kolumba was the only one of the thirteen Churches that had not been re-constructed to its pre-war architectural form.

St. Kolumba in Cologne. Dr. Lesa Mason

Cologne is a city of heroic artistic and human endeavor and it has maintained this position from the Roman times onward. Throughout the Medieval period authorities of the city concerned themselves with the development, organization, and establishment of social, spiritual, and intellectual cultural centers for the citizens. Decisions were well grounded in the structures established since the early Roman times. When considering the physical

structure of any single one of the Medieval, civic and ecclesiastical buildings, and by studying how history has affected them, two continuously unbroken and tightly interwoven threads of thought have prevailed throughout Cologne's history: a genuine reverence for the city's historical past, and a commitment to its revitalization.

The city of Cologne was founded by Roman settlers along the Rhine River, circa 50 AD. Anton Mercator, one of the leading sixteenth-century cartographers, shows in his 1571 view of Cologne, the entirety of the city at the end of the Middle Ages. A wide semi-circular formation on the west bank of the Rhine River is surrounded by well-fortified city walls and dominated by churches (L. Ennen 1881, p. 81; J. J. Merlo 1895, p. 588; Joseph Hansen 1902, no. 278, pp. 141ff). The overall view depicted in the map shows traces of older stages to the city's development dating to the Roman times. Today the outline of the Roman settlement of Cologne is visible in the semi-circular form of the encompassing city. Portions of the Roman fortification and other buildings have remained intact in certain parts of the city; the majority has been incorporated into modern buildings.

Cologne was among the most important and richest cities in the Middle Ages. As one of the first ecclesiastical houses built in the city, carrying the name of the apostle Peter and housing the holy relics of the three Magi, the late Gothic Cathedral of St. Peter's (Cologne Cathedral) became the very core of the Medieval city around which everything was built. Alongside of St. Peter's Cathedral, there existed eighteen parish churches, eleven monasteries, thirty-six cloisters and numerous chapels and convents.

In the "Holy City of Cologne" existed the great church of Sankt Kolumba. The basilica lies in the heart of this city, and it is a secret garden, stone ruins, and an archeological site. The ruins of the gothic walls are important testimony of Cologne's incredible destruction after WWII. The overall ground plan itself indicates the remains of the Roman, Early Christian, Medieval and Baroque additions. First established in the form of a small room or chapel in the 1st century on the ruins of part of the old Roman city, the building grew from church to church: Early Christian, Medieval, Carolingian, Romanesque, Gothic, late Gothic. The church was destroyed during the WWII leaving the remains of architecture open for exploration and only a few remnants of wall were left standing. When the city of Cologne was being reconstructed, these remains were spatially left open and only a small part was renovated. The "Madonna in Ruins" chapel, (1950) by Gottfried Böhm houses the gothic statue of Mary at St. Kolumba that had survived the devastation of war. It is extraordinary to think that most of the city was rebuilt after the war, but that this environment lay untouched and protected by a canopy and a wall so that only the very tricky vagrants crept inside at night to take refuge in the complex pockets of unearthed Roman walls. Today found St. Kolumba is still a church but the archdiocese museum is also incorporated. The new building designed by Zumthor absorbs the remains of all existing

fragments into one complete building. It is a brilliant amalgamation of historical parts into one structure. It is an answer to an ageless dilemma. How do we deal with the past and bring it into the future? Does the history of a site transcend time or does its past get lost in the present? As arbiters of the past how are we responsible resonators of the past and what do we do to bring the past into the present? In adopting the original plans and the actual building on the ruins, the new building becomes part of an architectural continuum. The warm grey brick of the new building meshes with the tuffs, basalt and bricks of the ruins. The integrity of the original stone was considered as the new structure utilized the original material of Baltic origin. The new building merges with the remains of the old building and conveys an integrity and respect for what remains of the past structure. The “largest room of the building encompasses the two thousand year structure of the city as an uncensored memory landscape.” Its “filter walls” create air and light, permeable membranes, which contain within them the functionally independent chapel (www.kolumba.de). This room sits over what once was a cemetery underneath the floor of the medieval structure. The walls emit a mesh of light that the architect conceived while considering the old medieval wall fragments and a source of natural light for the chapel. Zumthor designed them in such a way that they resemble the mesh of a sweater so that natural air and light permeate the space.

Physical and Phenomenological Survey: Sound, Light, and Deterioration from Destructive Forces David C. Overholt

The Archeological Excavation and Investigation conducted by the Department of Landmarks Preservation and the Historical Museum of the City of Cologne, 1974-1976, provides clear evidence of the construction history of St. Kolumba:

Roman times: first century secular building on an insula, house with floor heating system, waterbasins, pools, rectangular structure. After first century: apse is added.

Building # 1: rectangular structure with an apse – 8th or 9th century.

Building #2: 11th century (3 aisle) nave with apse and (2 aisle) tower.

Building # 3: mid 12th century – expansion of earlier nave with apse and (3 aisles).

Gothic church mid century, Romanesque tower incorporated into the Gothic structure.

Tombs under the floor: 33 tombs – 15th century, 19 tombs – mid 18th - 19th century (for important citizens, i.e. mayors of Cologne). Largest tomb: the priest of St. Kolumba, behind main altar, last burial in 1777.

Archaeological research in the 1970's revealed a section of the foundation wall of a secular Roman building, 1st Century, AD, modified by the construction of an apse, as a religious (early Christian) structure. The footprints of other early Christian structures are present, revealed through intact foundation walls. The Romanesque Church was the

largest of thirteen inner city Romanesque churches. Around 1424 there were some 8000 parishioners and a need for expansion. In the mid 15th Century the whole church was razed except for the West tower and 4 columns from the center aisle. Parts of the Romanesque church were incorporated into a late Gothic 5 aisle renovation.

During World War II the Gothic church was destroyed in phases, the roof was destroyed by fire from a bomb and temporarily replaced. Archival photography documents the chronology of the destruction. Twelve Romanesque churches were rebuilt after the war. St. Kolumba was left as a ruin. In 1950 a small chapel was constructed from stones quarried from the rubble and architectural fragments collected on the site after World War II. It was modified in 1957.

The remains of the Gothic church ruin include the first story of the exterior walls with Gothic window tracery, and the Sacristy. The human remains from tombs are buried under the Sacristy. A temporary roof was constructed to shelter the exposed excavation; the Sacristy was left open and uncovered.

The archaeological resources at the site were partially exposed during WWII. The exterior walls remain as record of the devastation of war. The experience of this place is to witness a record of damage from bombs, fire, smoke, flying or falling debris, and subsequent exposure to environmental elements and forces since 1945. In recent years raised walkways bridged the site to mitigate damage.

The historic preservation survey team documented the existing conditions of the exterior walls by correlating data with architectural bays. Large format photographs were made of each bay, and 35mm photographs recorded specific areas of concern within each bay. Sketches and measured drawings delineated cracks and observable deterioration. Environmental forces that accelerate deterioration were noted and assessed. Visual examination of interior finishes confirmed extensive damage from smoke and heat, though small areas of plaster, paint and even gilding survived.

Structural examination involved measurement of wall alignment to determine deviation from plumb. The tops of the exterior walls were found to consistently tilt away from the center of the site by a few degrees—resultant damage, perhaps, from the percussive force of detonated bombs and collapsing roof structure.

Light and sound level readings and analysis of sun and shade angles at the site yielded interesting results from an experiential perspective (Rasmussen 1959). Though it was assumed that the site would be cast in shade during most of the winter months, analysis proved otherwise. Angles of the sun reaching the perimeter walls of the site were calculated for various seasons and found to not be effected by the International Style building to the east of the site. Sound levels on the busy street contrasted with the relatively quiet environment inside the walls. Motorcycles, busses, automobile horns all added to the cacophony on the street. One phenomenon was noted that produced the highest decibels:

groups of school children passing the site.

The interdisciplinary survey team blended researchers and writers with those who work hands on to produce art and preserve cultural heritage. The process of documenting this place, rich with multiple layers of meaning, became a creative collaboration that captured a visual and written record of St. Kolumba for that moment in time.

The Documentation Project Introduction Teresa Norton

The Interdisciplinary documentation project began in Greenville, North Carolina, with a major exhibition of the German Artist Joseph Beuys. The large prominent image in the catalog was a black and white photograph of Joseph Beuys during the performance of “How to explain paintings to a dead hare” (Adriani 1989). One of the challenges of having an American team document a site in Germany was the process of introducing both professional participants and students to German history, art and culture in a timely manner. The approach to teaching and lectures in Cologne would be the study of materials, techniques and process: all the disciplines involved had that essential language in common.

The icon of the project introduction became the autodidactic Joseph Beuys himself, his head soaked in honey, covered in gold leaf, holding a dead hare in his arms. Most of the students found Beuys to be disturbing and compelling in the extreme: they were all keen to read what Joseph Beuys had written - and struggled with the conflicting concepts presented between, on the one hand, what was seen in the exhibition and videos and on the other hand, what Beuys had said about the work. There were many questions: What was Beuys saying to the hare? Why could he not say this out loud? Why is the hare dead? And, for what purpose? To paraphrase the modernist slogan of the Russian formalist critic Viktor Shklovsky, if *art is that which forces you to notice* ...the Beuys exhibition was certainly successful. Even in a conservative setting like North Carolina where minimalism reigned...all of this “content” was different and not unwelcome.

As a kind of therapy, after World War II (Beuys was a young German fighter pilot), Beuys immersed himself in German history, German mythology (the origin and meaning), Christianity. Out of the ashes of war, in the middle of the human psychological destruction as well, with no materials, no means of support - what was left to him? Christ stood up and spoke, washed the feet of his disciples, performed miracles. These were “processes” that Beuys considered carefully. In a conversation with the Jesuit Priest, Friedhelm Mennekes in Cologne, Beuys proved that in his urgent quest to know and to act, he had become fully prepared to engage and counsel the Jesuit scholar about how one could heal the German psyche after the catastrophe of the war: “The only thing

worth elevating is the human soul. I mean “soul” in the extensive sense...the powers of realization, the capability of thought, intuition, inspiration, I-consciousness, and the power of the will...they must be saved. Consequently, everything else is saved anyway (Mennekes 1989).”

As a student, living in Cologne, working with Mataré on a bronze door at Cologne Cathedral, Beuys had introduced himself to the Cologne Collections and to the Schnutgen Medieval Collection in particular: he had internalized the objects, the materials and the meanings (concepts) through drawings. Here, he could see the chronology of the cross through the entire Middle Ages. The cross became a major subject and a material object in the work of Beuys. The red Greek cross, used as an “ink symbol” was a sign of therapy; the Roman Cross that historically represented the crucifixion: suffering and sacrifice, was never shown as complete in his work - a sign for what needed to be repaired or reunited. The divided cross was a sign for action: to bring together science with intuition; the material with the spiritual... these were materials and meanings that were roughly woven into the body of the work of Beuys.

Among the German’s, Beuys was loved or hated. There were different approaches to reconstruction after the war: there were those who had designed or appropriated elaborate schemes to forget the past and start anew. Taking Christ as an example, Joseph Beuys designed “show your wound”...this kind of approach, put Beuys in opposition and direct conflict with the tenants of modernism in a way. The Bauhaus theory (starting at Zero) advocated a complete schism with the past and in practice distilled more and more into minimalism; Beuys was digging up almost everything from the past, examining the material in a very unhygienic way and remembering everything.

At the International Symposium held at the conclusion of the exhibition, East Carolina University, June 1995. Dr. Westermann Angerhausen, Director of the Schnutgen Museum, Cologne, presented a risky “experiment”: a plan to place the work of Joseph Beuys within the Romanesque basilica of St. Cäcilien, built between 1130 and 1180 that housed the permanent Medieval Collection of the Schnutgen (Norton 1995).

In 1996 *Joseph Beuys and the Middle Ages* opened at the Schnutgen. The exhibition posed a new world of questions about a divided Germany, Beuys and Christianity, and the holocaust. Westermann-Angerhausen was, as she put it “...introducing yeast into a dough”. Tramstop was installed in the basilica. (Norton 1995).

St. Kolumba

The Sacristy area is paved with stone set in sand and dirt fill that has settled to uneven ground – the very heavy steel sculpture, *The Drowned and the Saved*, by the American artist, Richard Serra now stands over the bones of the dead, excavated from the archaeological dig and deposited under the Sacristy floor. It

was made as an intimate holocaust memorial, at Stommeln Synagogue in the Rhineland. Serra published a small book on the occasion of the temporary installation of *The Drowned and the Saved*, a sculpture named after Primo Levi's memoir of the same name.. According to Mark Godfrey, this is an unusual "personal piece " of writing for Serra:

It is difficult to defend yourself against retributions for an unknown. There is no Preparation.

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To keep good faith with yourself, to understand yourself requires truthfulness, sincerity, a moral effort. Is that possible if part of your identity cannot be revealed?

When I was five years old I would ask my mother: What are we, who are we, where are we from? One day she answered me: If I tell you, you must promise never to tell anyone, never.

We are Jewish. Jewish people are being burnt alive for being Jewish. I was raised in fear, in deceit, in embarrassment, in denial.

I was told not to admit who I was, not to admit what I was. (Godfrey, 2007)

The Artist on-site in 1995:

The first artist to arrive on-site at St. Kolumba was Michael Ehlbeck, a printmaker and drawer. Having just completed a large body of work in Hong Kong - Cologne, as we had discussed, would be an almost opposite experience from his most recent work. After seeing his large scale prints of expansive sky, unlimited views and miles of water and distant monumental architecture, I was convinced he could tackle a city that we called an experience of infinity inward- a place of many layers, hidden interiors, hidden objects within objects. Starting much in the tradition of Johann Peter Weyer, the Cologne artist who documented the Churches of Cologne in such great detail and accuracy, that after World War II, when reconstruction began, it was possible to reconstruct these churches with amazing exactitude and accuracy from his renderings; every detail about the built environment including interior furnishings and objects was meticulously recorded (Weyer 1993). Ehlbeck's work was also about a beginning, middle and end approach, leaving nothing unturned: but unlike Weyer, his task was the record of the deconstruction of a site. He had agreed to document the site in context with the Altstadt.

The on-site work began on a dismal, cold summer day. Ehlbeck sat on the curb, across from the Chapel and started to draw. It was an unremarkable beginning. In two weeks time, Ehlbeck had made line drawings of the exterior perimeter, recorded in great detail the Böhm Chapel interior, the archeological excavations, and tombs.

Dr. Arnold Wolff, head architect of Cologne Cathedral, gave a series of tours of the Cathedral with Dr. Mason. One of the tours was on the roof of the Cathedral. From the vantage point of the Cathedral catwalks, Ehlbeck could see

all of Cologne. From that point on, he lived on the roof of the Cathedral and with the cartography historian at the Bildarchiv and the Stadt Museum, searching through the history of the maps of Cologne. After he left Cologne, he wrote to ask for photographs from WWII. He had started a series of intaglios from the 100's of drawings that he made on-site and would send proofs to Cologne of each step of development. The series of intaglio prints included a large scale print dominated by a huge black textured forest of the finials of Cologne Cathedral in the near ground and the St. Kolumba site depicted without the protective shelter over the excavations and tombs showing with great clarity the foundations, the tombs and the elements of the site and ruin in context with the entire Altstadt.

Martha Enzmann and Karen McVay began work in the excavations. First, there was a video of a chronological walk: starting within the deepest roman section of the excavation, continuing along the perimeter of each foundation wall from the earliest structure to and along the edge of the existing one story wall of the late Gothic structure.

The excavation site had been recently occupied by vagrants: there was trash, including aluminum drink cans mixed in with bone fragments, syringes and newspaper (the sacred remains and the profane debris existed side by side). Pinhole cameras were made from the drink cans on-site. The cans were placed near or on the spot where they were found - on the ground or down in a tomb-set upright and level. The curve of the vessel created a very-wide angle effect and the inferior perspective was like a rat's eye view of the site.

The negative images were 2 4"X5" sheets: each image was a diptych. Martha Enzmann later made large prints from the negatives: most were over 6 feet in height. The change of scale caused these images out of humble origin to seem ethereal and monumental.

Karen McVay wrapped herself in newspaper that was found on the site; she would wrap her whole body, an arm or a hand and stuff herself into a narrow tight part of a tomb or foundation wall. Gil Leebrick arrived on site after Martha and Karen had started the paper pieces; he photographed their work in black and white, horizontal format.

On-site, the experience was all process-artists continued to visit and work at St. Kolumba until 2000. Relationships and collaborative work between disciplines began to occur as artists cemented relationships and returned to the site year after year. In 1998 there was series of videos and photographs made at night when the site was darkened to the extent that it was almost a complete camera obscura. The exterior urban night- life was projected four dimensionally on the interior.

The studio work off-site has continued well after the site visits ended. Here where the sacred and the profane existed side by side individual artists processed and internalized the experience and have acted and responded for over a decade: Elizabeth Cain wrote to me this June about a graphite piece, *Maritime Mundo*:

(the title is) “perhaps in reference to the seas that connect us to the world and also to our past. Being in Germany had a profound effect on me. I am of partial German descent; my mother's family was from Heidelberg. My father was a prisoner of war in Germany and bombed Berlin. The Kolumba site was an easily projected in situ manifestation of my personal history, plus a powerful visual and physical place.”

At the moment we arrived in 1995 we realized that this site was a Memorial...an Open Wound - in some ways the entire process was treated as a vigil. It was difficult to imagine the site “cleaned up and prepared for public consumption.” I knew it could risk becoming a meaningless memory-empty and a casual “walk through”. To me it seemed that leaving an open wound was appropriate here: that the site should not be dressed or healed up.

St. Augustine wrote: “the blood of the martyr is the seed of the Church”. Established here, St. Kolumba (her faithfulness, suffering and sacrifice) is this place; the Christian saints, parishioners, mayors of Cologne, beneath our feet, the remains exposed in the excavations. Here too, Joseph Beuys who also had planted a seed: Serra's piece seemed like a re-united Beuys cross-one side leaning on the other for support; it now rests over a Christian sacred site, a sacred memorial of the holocaust. The history and the secrets of Cologne were exposed in this place: Beuys is an artist who shows the world divided; He has found a strategy to make the viewer internalize visually, viscerally, the concept, usually of contradictory elements; he creates a conflict in the mind and is compelling the mind to solve the dilemma. The mind keeps coming back to re-examine, which keeps the work in the present. It keeps the issues of Beuys in the moment - makes the entire process dynamic rather than static. St. Kolumba and all that it holds as we experienced it personally as a private exploration, still resonates in our consciousness and remains in our work and thought. And, yes there are questions that are unanswered and things that still cannot be said.

At St. Kolumba: The Drowned and the Saved

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