Archives: Building-in Time

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Abstract

The zero-moment of an architectural undertaking precedes and the final one postpones the conventional moments of building and demolition. This pre-usage of the material and of the site turn the 'birth' of the house into a rather vague moment. In the numerous makings there exist prior makings, and sites often appear to be palimpsests, layer upon layer, erasure upon erasure. This manner of approaching the question of the temporal 'sponginess' of architecture recalls the question concerning the beginnings of architecture. In this chain of fertile 'blackouts', the 'origin' of architecture ceases to be the inaugural moment still sought to this day: in a making there exist prior makings, and in an unmaking there endures the chance of future lives, at least in principle. Moreover, the question 'when?' deserves another, probably more fertile for the economy of this text: 'For how long?'

Keywords: The making/unmaking of architecture, Post-occupancy evaluation (POE), (painful) archives, co-presence, timelessness

> Thus, the oldest traditions were saved. Everything that we know by word of mouth about what was beautiful, grandiose or in any other way special, be it with you, here, elsewhere, all this was noted down here with us and kept from time out of mind, in temples. And when with you and with other peoples, whenever it happened that things be somehow ordered as regards writing and everything that is needed in cities, there comes over you at precise times, just like a disease, the heavenly flood that spares only the uncultivated and those deprived of the gifts of the Muses. So that you become again ignorant, like youths, without any idea of what happened in the times of old, here or among yourselves.
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> (Plato, *Timaeus*, 23a–b)

> As for the race of men (*genos anthropon*), the Egyptian priest of Timaeus assigns 'places' to it: there are the places propitious for memory, or the conservation of archives, for writing and for tradition, these temperate zones which provide protection from the destruction by excesses of heat and cold (22e–23a).
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> J. Derrida

Time before the House

It was only after I had been in Oxford for a while that I noticed something downright shocking: the alley leading from the main yard to the church and library of my College, St. Edmund Hall, crossed the old graveyard of the church and the slabs making up the path were tombstones. I trod on inscriptions into which the living had had carved their sorrow at losing those buried there. That manner of diverting stone from its basic purpose never ceased to send shivers down my spine, especially as I had no alternative route to take custom bans walking on the perfectly manicured lawn close by. Suddenly, by reading the inscriptions, the path I trod on acquired a temporal see-through character that seemed truly unbearable, as if those stones were actually windows to a past which had tumbled down from its commemorative purpose. I was treading on painful time made visible.

A shift in the relation with walled matter can be seen close to my home, at Densuș church in Transylvania, where the building materials used to construct the Romanesque church entwines include bits and pieces from the ruins of the Roman constructions that must have been available at the time when it was erected. This is nothing new: to 'phoenix' one building into another, the substance of the first being used in a new configuration of space seems to be rather the rule than the exception—namely, the rule which considers that houses are subject to becoming, just as living beings are. If you can use something from an old house—a privileged location,[1] or merely the building stone—so much the better—formerly, this act had nothing of the impiety which today strikes those who look at houses through the glasses of modernist timelessness but was rather a natural celebration of the process-like nature of building. We condemn such actions because we tend to endow the constructions that we celebrate as monuments with a sense that they are 'without end' when we halt their becoming at an arbitrary point in time, one which merely happened to be contemporary with this—powerfully conditioned from an ideological standpoint—modern view of their destiny. The falsely reverential attitude vis-à-vis monuments as objects stunted in their becoming and mummified in one of its life-stages is more recent than we might think. It is from this taxidermic standpoint that we criticize, inventing fallacious theories of conservation and restoration on which I will dwell a little later.

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[1] The understanding of the sacred as it refers to places and constructions is beholden to the repetition of founding rituals on the same site, that which somehow instils in the ground the spirit celebrated by the ritual which 'makes room' for it.

The Time of Making

For now, let us return to living architecture, which, more than any other of the so-called 'spatial' arts, does not have a beginning or an end that can be clearly defined as regards its making, seen from a temporal perspective. A gesture, an object, a perfume, or maybe a trauma can sometimes cast a cone of light back in time, extracting therefrom what might seem forgotten and which thus becomes part and parcel of the present, over and again. This is the manner in which memory, always nostalgic, operates. The archives of architecture are no exception to these mechanisms of remembrance.

The zero-moment of an architectural undertaking precedes and the final one postpones the conventional moments of building and demolition. This pre-usage[2] of the material and of the site turn the 'birth' of the house into a rather vague moment. In the numerous makings there exist prior makings, and sites often appear to be palimpsests, layer upon layer, erasure upon erasure. This manner of approaching the question of the temporal 'sponginess' of architecture recalls the question concerning the beginnings of architecture. In this chain of fertile 'blackouts', the 'origin' of architecture ceases to be the inaugural moment still sought to this day: in a making there exist prior makings, and in an unmaking, there endures the chance of future lives, at least in principle. Moreover, the question 'when?' deserves another, probably more fertile for the economy of this text: 'For how long?'

We all know stories about the long periods needed for the construction of cathedrals. This lengthy process, to which a considerable part of the community contributes, seems compensated by the temporal 'stability' of architecture. It gives time back, withstanding not only the poorer aspects of reception (changes of style), but also physical aging. How is this possible? After only a short time practicing architecture I have come to realize there is nothing esoteric about this view. The fact that in design you can step back and sleep on an idea, giving it time to settle; the fact that you can test the idea together with the customer, with the builder; endows the building with an ever greater air of concreteness, even if you can perceive in it, new as it is, hesitations and changes of mind, scars of the conflicts which arose on the way, or the marks of past winters that would be clearly seen were they not camouflaged by the finishing touches.

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[2] At the upper limit of the amount of time accumulated before the translation into fact lies 'prefabrication', which can, in fact, reduce the creation of a building to an ensemble of 'nearly ready-made' sub-assemblies: fitted bathrooms, complete rooms or living units which are affixed to a central trunk (as in the case of Kurokawa's tower). In those instances, the house no longer has a different rank from the matter that it organizes in a superior manner—what difference does characterise it is all the more insignificant ontologically the bigger the degree of prefabrication.

Such a traumatic coming into the world on the part of the architectural object we often see in the case of Italian churches begun in the Romanesque and finished in the Baroque style. This makes the object of architecture less prone to change because it already includes in its substance a multitude of decisions—some only partial—and of variants, even if not consummated; in other words, virtual stages through which the building has gone. Such an object is no longer only its final form, but also all the stages it went through before it was ready. It is not a question of whether such a building–palimpsest is necessarily 'better' than any of the 'what ifs' that it went through, as long as the final decisions also exude either a partial air—which, be it only for that reason and nothing else, calls into question Gadamer's optimum solution—or one that looks like the outcome of incomplete decisions. In any case, I know for certain that the 'real effect' of such a house is superior to the houses made without using any 'remains', after a single design, according to a single decision, no matter how well informed and/or authoritative it may be.

The example of the Sagrada Familia Cathedral in Barcelona is enlightening in this respect. In the final years of his life, Antonio Gaudi worked on it almost alone. Since his death, the construction work seems to be advancing no more rapidly than it would have done if its author was still the sole builder. This pushes the completion of the cathedral into a future which cannot be defined since, in parallel with new construction, the issue of restoring previous stages has arisen in order to conserve and perhaps to give them the chance of temporal cohabitation with the new. On the other hand, the manner in which the Sagrada Familia is being 'completed' is not taking on board the supplementary contribution of ideas which a new epoch can inject into a building whose making it inherits; on the contrary, the new construction work is markedly different from Gaudi's 'original' in terms of its (intentionally) more imperfect construction: Gaudi's fractal-like geometries of detail are being simplified to a significant extent so that the new is explicitly, deliberately, and visibly inferior in execution as compared to the 'original'.

However, one thing is certain as far as building in time is concerned: such a house, erected at leisure, if not deliberately 'put off'—which calls to mind a possible connection with Derrida's différance—will continue to bestow time, even when its construction is finished. How? First, by means of its capacity to provide dating indices, under the aegis of both its own slow becoming and the built-up context. The first Gothic choir can be identified in connection with the still Romanesque nave of the same church, just as the successive chapels of Westminster Abbey push the building further to the east and at the same time into the Gothic—ever more lacy, ever more detached from gravity, up to the flamboyant and perpendicular. Crossing the threshold, one notices this very movement in time of the house itself, and with it, of oneself as an observer of this anamorphosis. But what one

sees is the compression of century-old changes in a matter of a few minutes. In attentive observers of this accelerating change in forms this causes a dizziness comparable to watching a movie whose successive frames are rendered sufficiently fast to capture the blossoming of a plant and its wilting. In other words, what would otherwise be inaccessible in a lifetime becomes comprehensible by a mere crossing of the church from east to west.

The co-presence of constructions dating from various periods offers something more than mere visual diversity, namely, a contextual situation in time—the dating of our lives. Our house shows its and our own past, present and future by being located in time in between past, contemporary and future edifices. The possibility of stating that our house was built before or after some edifice, district, or street inserts it into historical time—but not only our houses, our lives too. This is one reason why cities established on a pre-established plan (such as Brasilia or Chandigarh) or massive reconstruction projects in a city—especially when the 'new' architecture looks archaic (i.e. delayed in style with relation with its time of building), of which Stalinist architecture or Bucharest's 'Victory of Socialism' Boulevard are privileged examples[3]- do not return the same kind of timing to their inhabitants as the "normal", i.e. build along ages, settlements do.

Time to Use the House (Post-Occupancy Evaluation)

Post-occupancy evaluation has existed in the West for quite some time, but it has not yet emerged in Romania (although there are indications that in the 1970s there were sociological studies which somehow resembled it). As I have already written about in more detail elsewhere, here I shall only address its relationship with time. Post-occupancy evaluation makes observations concerning what happens to a house under the tenancy of different occupants over different periods of time. The purpose of this is to try to identify how it is best used, in keeping with the design and the construction and architectural solutions applied. In other words, Post-occupancy evaluation seeks to discover to what extent it is a "happy solution" (Gadamer). Moreover, any alterations made by a particular occupant or by a succession of occupants, are recorded and subsequently examined, for the purpose of improving future design.

It is clear why modern architecture desperately needs such a discipline and why an architecture based on *vague space*, from the point of view of

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[3] To these I am afraid soon will be added the consistent interventions of historicist postmodernism — in the genre of the Antigone Complex of Montpellier by Ricardo Bofill — a privileged model of the Bucharest boulevard, a thing acknowledged by some of the architects whom I have consulted on the matter, like, for instance the now vice-president of the International Union of Architects, Mr. Alexandru Beldiman who used to be in charge with a part of the Boulevard of the Victory of Socialism's architecture.

functionalist rhetorics that is, does not. If, from the beginning, one allows a house to adapt over time to various—even opposed—ways in which it might be used, post-occupancy evaluation can evaluate their adequacy in accordance with what vague space offers. Moreover, a large part of the data which post-occupancy evaluation makes available can be simulated on the computer before or during design so that it becomes unnecessary to resort to empirical data; this is the case, for instance, with the behaviour of houses during earthquakes, which can now be simulated with considerable precision. The results of such simulation can be taken into account in structural and architectural design calculations, just as the simulation of aerodynamic tunnels or of impacts provides vital data which makes it possible to do without testing in 'real' wind tunnels or using crash-test dummies.

Time to Unmake

In other words, houses—built at different times—date our lives, offering us location in both space (through the variation of its intensity vectors in relation to a home, the most intense of all), and time. Houses do something else for our lives, which are much more perishable than their own: they embody memories for us. The volume *The Story of Houses*, published at the ACS Publishing House, clearly shows how much individual and family memory is associated with dwellings—and often with their loss.[4] The intensity of such stories about houses and streets is without compare: the house acts like a condenser of these 'founding myths' or myths of family continuity, just as exemplary edifices compact together the great narrative of ever larger communities, justifying them both in their own eyes and in the eyes of the others, of strangers. It condenses— because the intensity of each story grows with the addition of a new one—and acts as a fixed point of memory. The house settles these 'great narratives', whether they belong to the individual or family, or to the collective or even the nation.

Another problem related to the temporal dimension—on top of the making or unmaking of a house—is its interpretation. The perception of an edifice is not necessarily related to a temporal sequence, as in the case of a piece of music in which the order and time in which the work unfolds grow together in the act of reception (because that is how it is conceived).

Naturally, the perception of the object of architecture takes time, but the way this time is *earmarked* does not condition the understanding of the whole. No privileged course exists, nor does an optimum duration. One can start from the city or from a stone detail; from the interior space to the exterior *ambiance* or context; we can cover colonnades and end with the

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[4] Alexandra Mihailciuc, Alexandra Cuculescu, *Cartea Caselor* [The Story of Houses], București: ACS, 2021.

study of the shells held captive by the geological eras in the travertine of the facade. At the same time, things can very well happen the other way round, without damaging in any way the process of drawing the object closer to architecture. Some use a building for a long period of time before being suddenly struck by the sheer beauty of their home throughout their life. Others perceive it for a moment and preserve the *enlightenment* of that moment of grace for the rest of their life, which I have had the privilege of experiencing several times in my life, first in Venice, then in Rome, and in front of *Fallingwater House* by Frank Lloyd Wright.

The Timeless House

This potential for accumulating time and giving back history has been challenged by modern architecture with considerable force. Time potential, which acts as a 'bonus function' of the house in relation to its explicit ('denotative') role—to provide shelter—disappears in three ways: (i) with the use of materials which do not decompose over time,[5] and which therefore do not express their aging and death, cancelling out in the process the analogy with the body/organism, probably the most persistent metaphor with which architecture has ever been associated; (ii) by means of temporal, ephemeral, or *disposable architecture*;[6] and finally, (iii) by disengaging the decoration from the economy of the edifice—the enemy of Modern architects, by which location in time is achieved—and by emphasizing the privileged position of the carrying structure.[7]

Reduced to its functional and structural 'essence', the house is deliberately extracted from time, under the pretext that this bare structure is the endpoint in architecture's process of becoming. The moderns have suppressed the context in order to present a house in its 'integrity', untroubled by comparisons and contradictions, yet in this way they have diminished it, almost to the point of mutilation, as Venturi noted as early as 1966. Dating is no longer necessary; it disappears as a problem in an environment where only 'pure' architecture exists. The absence of situating landmarks in time creates

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[5] More precisely, which do not do so at a pace that makes obvious the degradation effect in the 'consumption' of materials, in the decline of the house.

[6] This is not constructed with a view to endurance and, as a consequence, its making does not take up time in the way a 'perennial' house does; a disposable house does not have to be *memorized* and, with the exception of photographic or video testimony, it is not. Not even the buildings which replace it make any reference to it, since it leaves no trace. *Disposable architecture* calls into question everything that is not "useful" in a building and in doing so it 'un-founds' it, reducing it to a shelter—possibly a poorly decorated one but definitely a shelter.

[7] The creation of the dichotomic relations between decoration (peripheral, marginal, added: a surplus) and the carrying structure (central, essential, simple and pure) is an explicit (sub) product of architectural modernism.

an uneasiness which has attracted comment from the socio-psychological studies carried out with respect to dwelling in 'instant milieus', where there is no temporal 'before and after'. The dislodgment from historical duration and, consequently, the loss of collective memory, are, as a matter of fact, effects to be expected from modernist cities in general, not only those of totalitarian regimes; the disintegration of a community perched in an apartment-block city from which historical landmarks have been erased can be considered either the deliberate gesture of a diabolical mind or the unintended effect of the utopian idea of 'communisation'. Examples are easy to find in post-communist Romanian towns. The dislodging of time here doubles the alienation produced by the disfigured site: all the towns and cities in the country look terribly alike because they were all badly constructed from the same set of designs.

But even when its execution is flawless, modern architecture seems not so much timeless as deprived of time, frozen in a moment which it tries to turn into a continuous present. If we look at the designs of Sant'Elia in the early twentieth century, or at the Futurama building and exhibit at the New York World Exhibition of 1939, one may see that the same modern architecture was admired by differently dressed people in cars that seem funny to us today; everything has changed in the meantime, yet this architecture still seems 'topical'. No wonder, since in its essence it is decomposed into primal factors, cleansed of elements that might have rendered it obsolete—above all, ornaments—it appears somewhat 'muted' in respect of time.

The Intoxicating Nature of Time

Retrospection—the house looking back and, nostalgically, allowing itself to be impregnated by time and history—is a privileged method of 'renewing' architecture. The rediscovery of antiquity after the Gothic episode (itself not inured to the ancient heritage which it interprets against a background of amnesia in respect of its own built archives) represented a renewing shock situated—paradoxically only at first sight— in the remote past. More exactly, it was sufficiently remote to become new once more. The moderns operate in the same way, rejecting tradition (that is, historical heritage) in order to take inspiration from the 'origins' (peri-Mediterranean or African primitivism). In Romania, there is an equivalent of this rejection of history as something too burdensome: Orthodox architects of the pre-war period, which downgraded the medieval episode as unsatisfactory because of its diversity of sources and the allogenous ethnicity of their builders, which somehow did not help the nationalistic rhetoric of the right-wing or, eventually, national-Communist politics. This separation from the past is done in the name of origins, both religious (that is, Byzantine) and ethnic (that

is, Latin). Architecture oriented towards the past is an interpretive and selective reading of the archive. What is visible from the past is preserved, intensified, or even modified. *The Romans colonnades took on a kind of 'colossal order' from Palladio, while with Speer, Piacentini or, closer to home, with Duiliu Marcu and Contantin Joja, they became a row of pilasters stripped to their essence and with an austere geometry.* The elements caught up in a system with its own rules of coherence are 'released and allowed to fly freely on the wings of memory. Roman arcades acquire came back in fashion in the *stile littorio* or in the Carol II style (Victoria Palace by D. Marcu), in each case for different reasons, naturally. The first case is an exclamation of the imperial vocation of the fascist regime: for the Romanian architect, over the 'Roman' source floats the memory—monumentalised—of the vernacular autochthonous. The belief that the architecture of 1930s Romania is massively influenced by local folk tradition remains an uncritical commonplace among historians of the period.[8] This says more about the role of culturally formed archives in shaping our collective memory than about the 'real' sources of influence of the architects in question.

How are the past and its archival layers seen by way of the object present at hand? Sediment can float and resurface as cultural memory in the long series of consecutive remaking of the same programme or the same town. The successive remaking of a sacred site will, for instance in the form of a votive plaque, at least imply the presence—a mention—of what was replaced. The ghost of what has vanished returns to the collective memory: London or Chicago before their great fires; Bucharest before the successive waves of demolition. This glimpse into the past is not necessarily a deliberate action but belongs to the normal mechanisms of site stratification. The layers are never perfectly superimposed—they do not cover up the past perfectly, leaving no remains. In other cases, we are dealing with unintentional unearthings. You dig to make room for a new house and stumble upon vestiges or traces of the old one. This thing, especially of late, means a change of plans, moving the house or even halting its construction; the archive regains its status.

At the extreme, this unearthing of the archive can become deliberate and, through its effects, aggressive vis-à-vis memory. Unearthing or incomplete covering, in short, partial or iceberg-like visibility, is a procedure quite frequently used in the *post-bellum* reconstruction of cities devastated by bombs: for instance, the reconstruction of Buda (the hilly half of Budapest) features such 'shards', fragments of ruins left as such in places and positions that make them visible as 'not belonging there'; in fact, logically, it is quite the other way around: the ruin is the "original" and the new came eventually

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[8] Cf. Luminita Machedon, Ernie Scoffam, *Romanian Modernism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999).

into the picture. Archive fragments surface in this way, and, by way of contrast, in their relationship with their situation they elicit the question, 'What is this ruin that obtrudes in this way?' Even this inconsequential question can trigger the unfolding of the archival story, which thus becomes somehow active and is brought up to date.

Another procedure is the incorporation into a new house of what is old in the spot, as testimony of its 'continuity'. What is added to the restoration of the old is marked out as new in relation to what is 'original'. In these 'benign' forms, the preservation of a trigger capable of unleashing the archive—or at least of invoking its physical presence or absence—is beneficial both for remembrance and for inserting the new in historical time, so ennobling the new house, which wears the old fragment as it were in its buttonhole. The new is no longer absolute, inaugural. It becomes blurred, falls into filiations, acquires a patina. As in the case of a marriage of convenience contracted by the newly rich (or, until not long ago, top communists) and the declining aristocracy, this is a mutually beneficial alliance. The former (or their descendants) acquire a certain social visibility, while the latter escape misery, poverty, or even physical extinction. Similarly, a symbiosis of this kind which—as pure and tough modernists would say, 'contaminates' the new house—postpones the evaporation or loss of the archive. I call these forms of new/old symbiosis the *active archive*.

Digging for a buried or invisible archive can be accounted for in terms of discontent with the present, surface archive. In such radical cases we can say of the archive that it is rather *aggressive* than active. G. M. Cantacuzino, in his 1947 book *On an Aesthetics of Reconstruction*, criticized the way in which the Italian architects of the Fascist period made the Roman ruins participate in the political propaganda of the system. The effort to uncover such vestiges and to reconstruct them sometimes entailed deliberate destruction of the existing city, and so of the surface archive, which were 'minor' *in comparison with* the relevant propaganda goals. The present or the recent past—unworthy of the heroic future—had to make room to the excavation of a more suitable past. What I have in mind here is, to quote Cantacuzino, "the *presence* of ruins and monuments that over the centuries found a setting that had become integrated into the artistry of the Renaissance",[9] the way veterans exhibit the stumps of their violently crippled limbs in order to justify their heroism. Cantacuzino speaks of the "awakening from the lethargy of ruins" (in other words, from the neutrality of their stance or position as *underground layer* of the living city). This procession of the unburied must march along with the living: "the ruins have been taken out of their vegetal, picturesque scenery, the columns have been washed and

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[9] G. M. Cantacuzino, *Despre o estetică a reconstrucţiei* [On an Aesthetics of Reconstruction] (first edition 1947), Bucureşti: Paideia, 2001, 37.

scrubbed, entire walls have been rebuilt, the tomb of Caesar Augustus has been reconstructed to become a political document… Everything has been ravished and put in a false light".[10]

Naturally, Italian architects were not alone. The German plans were on an even larger scale, geographically at least, and included Greece, Asia, and northern Africa in their search for 'Arian' vestiges to justify present grandeur. By comparison, the efforts of the Romanian mayor of a Transylvanian city to dig beneath a medieval past which does not serve his ethnic argument in order to *violently* bring to light, (*aggressively so*, that is) Roman ruins might seem ridiculous. These are invested, despite their original neutrality, with the same propagandistic role as the Roman ruins of the Eternal City in the Fascist period. This is not only a question of monuments or edifices—that is, buildings the original intention of which was display, public visibility, the embodiment of a desired collective image of such and such a community. In the Transylvanian city in question an accidental instance of the archive is being mauled by being unearthed, the one that happened to be under the 'foreign' square. Consequently, it cannot prove anything, or at least nothing of what the ultra-nationalist mayor might imagine. It is an uncovering of the bones of the long dead. The unearthing of vestiges in this way is, to a considerable extent, just as shocking as the disinterment of the dead. In the village of my birth, inhabited by Rasnov peasants from Dobrogea, there is a tradition of disinterring a grave after seven years. The bones are recovered, washed with oil and wine, covered in a white cloth, and reburied. The moment, which I witnessed several times during my childhood, is over-whelming. It brings to light, 'here', what ought to have stayed in the perpetual darkness of the 'beyond'. The remembrance of those who have passed away in this way becomes newly traumatic by the revisiting of their remains, after a period which would normally have softened the impact of the demise proper. My father refused to perform this seven-year disinterment on my grandparents, willing to risk offending against the local custom. Instead, he preferred that a sermon be said at their graves, perhaps because there is something immodest, unbearable in the unearthing of the archive, in its aggressive bringing up to date. I remember that when my grandfather died we had to dig up the grave where my cousin, only a few months old when she passed away, lay. All that was left of her were the few plastic toys that had been placed in the coffin.

The aggressive silence of a dislodged archive—in modern architecture— is doubled by the violence with which the archive left open or violated, like the white bones of a dead man who can find no rest, in totalitarian architecture. The way in which American restoration, for instance, makes possible the reconstruction of an archive as if it could live one more time

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[10] Cantacuzino, 37.

(as at Knossos) has something of the harshness—though with the reversed as meaning—of this disinterment. The living-dead is, in the case of architecture too, a strange way of manipulating the archive.

There is, however, another form of survival of the archive which is, in fact, never buried; namely, continued practice of the trade that created the previous layers of 'sediment'. Identical repetition—or with only a small degree of variation—of what once went *before* innovation, at least with respect to the wirk of craftsmen and master-masons. A particular way of treating the material, of decorating it, becomes the trademark of a certain team of medieval builders and leads to the reason they are further on called to build. They can erect a monastery which is "much more beautiful and much brighter", yet still in accordance with the model which consecrated them. Against a prevailing background of redundancy, there are as few variations as possible—information or the 'new' is reduced. It is virtuous to remain piously in the shade of one's forerunners; following in their footsteps guarantees one's grandeur. The past instils quality in present deeds: the more indistinct in relation to the archive, the greater the chances of the new edifice being fit for an archive and therefore of lasting. One becomes part of the past because one is already 'old'; because one is part of an undeviating filiation.

Another manner of using the archive is the quotation. By means of quotation the new building invents for itself a pedigree or even invents an entire archive with the burden of justifying the new presence to justify its presence now. This is the reverse of the new–old symbiosis, in which the new is, if I may put it like this, the newcomer. On the contrary, in the case of the quotation what is invoked is the old brought into the new as a partner in its respectability. The quotation—which, as postmodernism teaches us, has an aesthetic function—operates against a background of difference between the new and the quoted object, which is somehow shortcutted by the gesture of quotation. This short-circuits a prolonged amnesia. It is seen as endowed with the gift of eliminating the alienation between the new and the old edifice—thus, it is a form of 'healing'. This holds not only of historicist postmodernism, which uses the archive as a source of quotations without really believing in their role as a 'bridge' between periods, but also of the recovery to the archive of individual sources of prestige. In other words, it is not a way of practising architecture which is recovered here (or continued, as in the case of the guilds), but an 'individual thing', one of its final products. I 'quote' such and such a monument, or one of its details, without repeating the process that made it possible.

Palladio's example provides us with an interesting means of understanding the *difference*: his manner of building (which made extensive use of the recent archive of the Renaissance and also the deep archive of the Roman world) had an amazing career in Britain, from where it crossed the Atlantic to become

almost the vernacular. American colonial architecture is almost entirely a reading (to a considerable extent unfaithful) of Palladianism. On the other hand, against this backdrop we might also consider the separate career of the Villa Rotonda in the work of Benjamin Latrobe or T. Jefferson. It became the ultimate example of a 'democratic' house, an edifice that could in itself embody the values of the new American state. A particular manner of practising architecture attains excellence in an edifice. By using it again and again, one can call again into presence this very prestigious monument or style which is being quoted, the social rank of the customers who ordered it, the political, cultural, and religious environment that allowed it, the city or state where many others simply copy the excellent example of the mastery or collective state of grace in question. The Pantheon, the pyramids, the Hagia Sophia, the temple in Jerusalem: all these knots of intensity in the archive are revisited again and again because they have the ability to draw on the entire archive.

Co-presence: The New Archive

There is a contemporary manner of starting a dialogue with the built-in time of a historical object. Can a space be jointly inhabited—in other words, can we erect a new building without thereby eliminating the states through which the site has already passed and without relegating, in the process, the time they contain? Deconstructivists have come up with part of the solution; the other is provided by a postmodern view of restoration. I will combine them under a sole generic term, 'co-presence'. Co-presence refers to the possibility of making now and then coexist in a single house or building. 'Then' is not a spectre, a good genius watching over and justifying the new building, but an indissoluble part of it.

The first manner of co-presence is represented by a new building on a given site which is equally 'now' and 'then'. Co-presence implies the presence at the same time, at the same location, and what is much more important, in the same undertaking (new building, urban arrangement, conversion of an existing building, restoration) of as many as possible of the significant instance incarnations through which the site—and the building—has passed. In the case of Derrida's and Eisenman's La Villette, the authors, as inferred from Derrida's quote about the *khora*-grid, intended the joint existence of all the layers on the site. As a matter of fact, Eisenman is a sort of trailblazer of co-presence: see, for example, his Wexner Center in Columbus, Ohio. Built on the site of a former armaments factory, the new construction reminds us fragmentarily—as befits all memory—of what went before, somehow recovered as the 'meat' of the present.[11]

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[11] The same Peter Eisenman turned the extension of the DAAP (the Design, Architecture, Arts and Planning College in Cincinnati, Ohio) into an architectural 'Nude Descending a

Co-presence is thus not only desired but even imperiously necessary, being a manner of the 'saturation with being' of the place or the house subject to transformation. The new instance thus no longer represses or replaces the other spatial–temporal spaces but is merely one of those concomitantly present. The old is not superior to the new (the traditional view), nor is the new superior to the old (the modern view). The two ages have the same axiological status. The final ensemble looks like a body with two – or more – different ages: it is both new *and* old: something entirely new is added to an existing (or disappeared but brought back into life) building or fragment; the new one, after the joining, takes over the task of 'rewriting' the entire organism. This radical hermeneutical approach to the matter of simultaneity presupposes the absence of a (sole) 'text' that celebrates itself in favour of a contextual continuum and, especially, of an uninterrupted, constantly updated age. No house can, in fact, be present, being "always already" (Heidegger) submerged in the history of its own becoming.

This becomes obvious in the case of conversions, the second manner of co-presence. The house subject to conversion is 'then'—a 'then' interpreted from the vantage-point of the present but used 'now'. It reveals its original age or successive ages, but makes no secret of having undergone a facelift, following which, even if it had been a successful solution (Gadamer), it becomes nonetheless something entirely new, often a mere 'carcass' for an entirely new content.

The 'rewriting' of old buildings to accommodate new roles (sometimes fundamentally opposed to the original one) is seldom easy. The contrast between what is visibly old but just as visibly renewed or even updated is what generates these tensions, more than the difference between the roles. As a fellow of Collegium Budapest in spring and summer of 2000, I had the privilege of working for five months in the former city hall of Buda, on Szentháromság Square, opposite the Mathias Cathedral. The interior of the Renaissance building (in the local sense of the term) has been turned into a modern environment of hi-tech electronic apparatus and office furniture, with computers everywhere, naturally. The contrast between the stone framework on the one hand, and the avant-garde lighting fixtures and the Internet cables on the other, at first spark off a certain tension, but this is quickly offset by the charm of the place. But contrasts of this kind can be even more dramatic: elsewhere in Budapest, reminiscent of similar interventions in the United States and Western Europe, a mill on the eastern bank of the Danube, facing Gellért Hill, is soon to become Gizella Court, a

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Staircase'. The imprint of the existing building was moved to the site and the new house records as it were 'stroboscopically', superposed, the succesive stages of this tectonic displacement. In the end, what we have is not a new building overlapping an old one, but rather an ensemble in which generating and generated form coexist in the same territory, explaining each other.

centre for yuppies offering high standard housing, offices, and an adequate restaurant. Other examples of co-presence in conversions come from the historical areas of Western cities: whisky distilleries in Edinburgh converted into dwellings; churches in the same area converted into housing and industrial buildings turned into unreal, involuntary 'sculptures' or modernist installations, surrounded by parks. More recent London examples include the transformation of the Bankside electricity plant (situated on the Thames across from St. Paul's) into new Tate Gallery or that of another power station in Chelsea (Lot's Road) into a housing ensemble (arch. Terry Farrell).[12] There is a certain Gothic air about these worrisome conversions, but this is doubtless to be preferred to the scorched-earth tactics presupposed by modern architecture.

This phenomenon is probably even more visible here than in the United States where the skyscrapers of modern downtowns make room for the unprecedented development of what is left of the historical areas, which are brought up to date by cosmetic and interior reshaping. These urban gestures often resolve—as an alternative to demolition—the problem posed by old warehouses and factories, and the ruins of industrial society in general. In summer 1999, I visited two cities fully engaged in recovering their inner-city areas so that they would be more in relation to the downtown area: Rochester, NY, and Cincinnati, Ohio. Both are revealing examples because, being relatively small, the sky-scraper district has not managed to devour the 'old' one entirely (as a rule, the latter dates from the nineteenth century when it, in turn, eliminated the 'competition'). The process of restructuring and bringing-back-to-life what five years previously had been in ruins and a bad neighbourhood is amazing and indicates, hopefully, a change of direction on the part of the American city towards the recovery of the downtown area which, in a contorted way, is also a pilgrimage to its own past: the space of collective memory.

Layers, Scars, and Folds: The Painful Archives

The archive often becomes a problem (and co-presence difficult) in the case of the restoration or reconstruction of historical sites when a choice has to be made between layers or between the layers in time and an entirely new house. The incorporation of the surviving fragments of the old layers (in other words, not their reinvention, as in the case of Eisenman's co-presence) seems to become an ever more 'fashionable' tendency in the case of the construction of historical sites, as if the new house would continue, or

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[12] See *Financial Times* (20 May 2000, A5), "Converting power stations is not an easy way to earn a crust … but they can provide the most dramatic spaces, as visitors to the new Tate Modern Gallery at Bankside realize."

perpetuate the 'flesh' or substance of the old. The continuation of the cankered 'logic' of the first disappearance by marking the scar tissue or the growth of the 'tumour', which does nothing but make more visible the intrinsic plague of destruction, seems to be the specialty of Lebbeus Woods. His projects for Sarajevo and Havana could provide a few lessons which, I am afraid, we may grasp only with difficulty and are unlikely to accept. Nevertheless, they follow the internal 'logic' of destruction.

The question posed by Woods is: Why do we persist in camouflaging the traces of urban dramas when that is one of the causes of their repetition? In other words, Woods invites us to meditate on our attitude to the inconvenient archives of the immediate past: we bury them by camouflaging them under layers of 'reconstruction' and 'new' things, or, on the contrary, we preserve them as something living and therefore painful. Is there an intermediate space between these extremes? The artist himself seems to think so, although he opts for a variant closer to the extreme of the living archive: a healing without cosmetic surgery: where once there was a wound, let the scar be seen, no matter how 'ugly'. The Warsaw variant of Stare Miasto—just as politically loaded—constitutes the opposite case: healing without a visible trace (other than collective memory) of the extermination to which the city was subject. Budapest, likewise, prey to a process of violent extermination during the Second World War, chose a more moderate variant: the preservation, sometimes, of the ruins in the new flesh of the houses or the preservation of the type of houses pulled down in the architecture of the new ones. The German cities left without a centre sometimes put up a modern one in a desperate attempt to avoid the physical presence of the archive, especially when it was inconvenient. On the contrary, in Dresden, with a gesture just as ideologically loaded as the one which produced it, the ruin of the sacred space bombed in 1945 was preserved 'alive' until recently like the memory of a wound in the body of the city to remind us of the past and to prevent it from descending undisturbed into the depths.

Bucharest is not an example to follow, either for the way in which it managed its pre-war archive or for the manner in which the archive as it stood right up until 1989 was revisited in the following decade. Why should we believe that an international competition or, indeed, any other solution could erase the drama which occurred in downtown Bucharest in particular? Furthermore, why should we want it? To use tall buildings to camouflage the House of the Republic is a dramatic form of co-presence in which the new hides the 'tumour', but in such a way as to suggest that, in the midst of this concealment, there is something that must be swept under the carpet. By making this gesture of covering a canker with a new texture we do not heal the city; in fact, as a result of this it might perhaps no longer be susceptible to healing in the sense that it might be able to return to the patriarchal

serenity it enjoyed before destruction; but perhaps it can come to terms with its handicap and live, psychically at least, at peace with its presence, the way the deaf put up with their hearing aids or others with draining pipes in their abdomen. This is no longer 'normality', but at least it is a life in possession of the decency of its own infirmity, in which the being survives, accepted by society, without pretending to be a fashion model if it is a paraplegic insofar as it addresses (post)communist cities, is this: If the canker is metastatic, let the patient know: don't pull the wool over his eyes!

In other words, *co-presence* is a field in which the ingenuity of the architect puts into—sometimes violent—contact the past and the present, if not the (unwanted) future as well. Yet this violence engenders memories, conserving and attracting to itself the memory of the place. By ceasing to make room for their houses by eliminating the 'adversary', architects seem to understand that past time is essential in architecture and therefore in the life of the houses they create. The archives of a site's layers are therefore involved in a symbiotic process. The old houses continue to exist and to lend what they have accumulated as a consequence of their longevity—always a quality associated with wisdom, seriousness, and, in art, also with aesthetic value— to the new houses which are added to them or into which they themselves are transformed. In turn, the new edifices make visible and present (also in the sense of duration) the old house near or in which they sit.

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