



WHAT IF? WHAT NEXT?

# **SPECULATIONS ON HISTORY'S FUTURES**

## **SESSION 2A**

### **ROUTES TO THE PAST**

**Critical, Cultural or Commercial: Intersections  
Between Architectural History and Heritage**

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# **MEMORY AS A MATTER TO REVEAL AND COMPOSE IN THE EXISTING: THREE ADAPTIVE REUSE STRATEGIES**

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*The moment of recognition by the consciousness of a place as being of interest is the beginning of an intervention, as Cesare Brandi reminds us in La Teoria del Restauro (1963). Intervention is that action which mutates the existing, makes it evolve in a different, unpredictable way, to quote Henri Bergson. Between these two moments, it is possible to locate the birth and outcome of strategies that reveal the memory of places. Memory and architecture are strictly linked. Taking for granted theories that forge the practice of the architect's profession and personal memory/experience, in this paper different aspects of memories, related to a built environment, are approached to understand the importance of architecture in its representation. Historical memory, participatory memory, universal memory: how has their connection with architecture evolved in the last century? How are those memories translated into the practice of architecture? As case studies three adaptive reuse projects are analysed that answered the question of the memory of place by three different strategies: Kanunnik Petrus Jozef Triestplein in Melle (Belgium) by Dvvt, FRAC in Dunkirk (France) by Lacaton & Vassal, and Sala Beckett in Barcelona (Spain) by Flores y Prats. In those projects, memory can be revealed through matter, space or patina in relation to the specificity of the site.*

## Memory and the Constructed Environment

Memory and architecture are closely linked, in this paper different types of memories related to a built environment are analyzed from historical and theoretical lens, trying to understand where they come from and how they deal with in the project process. Remembrance is the cursor that allows one to estimate the value of a monument as articulated in Alois Riegl's "The Modern Cult of Monuments", the basic text of any conservative or adaptive theory.

### *The Art of Memory*

The art of memory, or mnemonics, has existed since ancient Greece. Architecture is used in mnemonics, as a support in the construction of an artificial memory. As explained in ancient texts<sup>1</sup>, architecture becomes a tablet of virgin wax where the speaker put objects in places (*loci*) and in a precise disposition, in order to reactivate his memory. Anything that can be synthesized into an image remains printed in our mind and it is therefore easier to extract it afterwards. The memory at the service of the speaker passes through a described architecture. The "place of memory" follows rules, which nature teaches us, based on the observation that the unexpected fixes our attention<sup>2</sup>.

### *Historical Memory*

The Nineteenth Century is called by Riegl the *Historical Century* because "the individual fact, the singular human act in the purity of its original emergence was discovered with interest".<sup>3</sup> We are interested in everything unique, and not just those that concern our own community. This attitude would subsequently be expressed in the 20th century with the common practice of safeguarding monuments.

In *Lieux de Mémoire*<sup>4</sup> of Pierre Nora, the heritage memory is closely linked to the events that took place in a site, and that we remember through symbolic architectures. Since the 1960s in Europe, a campaign of monomialization has been carried out to confirm or create a semblance of collective memory on the basis of precise facts; sites become coats of arms between the event to be remembered and the national pride that follows. Monomialization of memory can be akin to communication operations, stemming from a political will with precise orientations. The subject to be remembered is defined in advance, as a kind of objective, and the architecture becomes a support to feed these predefined belonging values.

### *Participatory Memory*



Figure 1. Lieux infinis à la Biennale de Venise 2018. © Chiara Fucelli.

As William Morris used to talk about in his lectures, as soon as society feels involved, it actively participates in heritage conservation that becomes a development tool for cities.<sup>5</sup> This brings us into the political domain of the management of the city, where monuments are “fixed points”, as Aldo Rossi recalls in *L'Architettura della Città* (1966), resulting from a collective will, expressed through architecture. “Fixed points” are maintained in cities, with their own image intended to be preserved for perpetuity. In 2005 memory was placed on the agenda by the Council of Europe with the *Faro Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society*. If oral transmission was already present with Pierre Nora, in the Faro Convention it has also become a participatory process. When participatory memory management takes place; the inhabitants of neighborhoods or villages are directly involved and they become active players in the oral transmission of the memory of a place. Memory can thus become a lever for participatory projects. In *Lieux infinis - Infinite Places*, ten situations in disused places were presented at the 16th Venice Architecture Biennale in 2018. Architects *Encore Heureux*, show that the past life of the building has an interest, and this will be the starting point for the updating of the places by the new communities that settle there. In this type of participatory project, the architect and architecture assume a social role, and must be able to propose and support other forms of life, appropriation and sharing of site.

### *Universal Memory*

For Morisset, memory can be considered as a consequence of heritage, which is attached to the material world and therefore to the built environment. This notion of heritage memory makes architecture important.

The “sites” [...] would thus be completely inseparable from memory: more than revelators, they would even be producers. This is how heritage, not only denotes, but “spatializes” identity.<sup>6</sup>

In this case, the heritage memory is like universal memory, which is the memory of each individual in relation with his environment. The notion of heritage widens infinity, it no longer refers only to buildings classified and officially recognized as heritage, but to any built environment. During a conference at Expo 2015 (in Milan) Cino Zucchi noted:

We went from a policy of expansion to a policy of modification, we live in cities that are not built by us, as Kevin Lynch and Aldo Rossi remind us: a form survives the condition that generated it.<sup>7</sup>

Urban and architectural facts persist in cities and are part of our baggage of memory images, such as the archetypes of Carl Jung, present in minds of individuals. Ruskin in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* considers remembrance as one of the foundations of architecture: “We can live without it [architecture], we can worship without it, but without it we cannot remember”.<sup>8</sup> He describes how a built element (Grandson’s square dungeon), gives meaning to an unchanging landscape by imprinting this in memory. Architecture and landscape thus become universal. A landscape and a place can reactivate in our memory another landscape, another place, which belong to our past, because we have lived it or simply studied it.

Today some architects highlight the importance of their memories of life, childhood, lived experiences, in the architectural design process. For example, Olgiati in 2013 for his book *The Images of Architects* asked forty-four influential architects to send him ten images they have in mind when they create, the images that would be the origin of their architecture, in order to explain the autobiographical roots of their works.

### *Riegl and the Universality of Age-Value*

At the end of this tiny catalogue of types of memory and to relate it to the practice of adaptive reuse, it is relevant to evoke the age-value. Introduced in the *Modern Cult of Monuments*, age-value is considered by Riegl to be the noblest and the most universal value of monuments. It participates at universal memory, because it is aimed at each individual. This is the value of the 20th Century and at the same time the most complicated to understand: “The cause of the

historical value of the much larger social strata must be won before the great mass is ripe for the worship of the age-value.”<sup>9</sup>

Over time, stratifications are necessary to keep this value present. Riegl asserts that in order to respect the age-value, nothing should be done, nothing should be touched, therefore we are not to intervene, before we finally arrive at the loss of the monument, which will become ruin, then a pile of stones, indecipherable, possessing no longer any historical value, nor age, nor art. However, he himself ends up admitting that it is necessary to preserve a monument so that it can continue to exist, but then leaving it in its visible state of degradation, but how far? Riegl speaks of compromise with the use-value of the monument, remaining rather general in these remarks, so as to leave the interpretation to the reader.

A recent example, where these questions are topical and where the age-value seems to have a preponderant importance on the other values, is the DVVT project in Melle, analyzed below. We have seen in this section that memory in its various aspects is strictly linked to the built environment. How does this translate in adaptive reuse strategies?



Figure 2. Paysage bourguignon. ©Chiara Fucelli, 2015.

### Memory: Matter to Reveal

In the article, *Édifier une mémoire des lieux en recyclant l'histoire. Usages et fonctions du passé dans l'architecture actuelle*<sup>10</sup>, Noppen and Morriset argue that making history the material of the project means no longer looking for ways to restore history – which inevitably leads to copying the past – but rather than restoring the semantic corpus that constitutes the historical interpretation. In this case, wouldn't the story of a place be its memory?

How is the memory of a place treated today in adaptive reuse interventions? Taking into consideration theories that influence contemporary renovation practice (like the Venice Charter), and knowing that the intervention is initially determined by different parameters (by place, by program, by matter, by energy ambitions, etc.), what strategic choices are left to the architect?

### Materiality, Spatiality and Principles of Perception

Intervention in the existing presupposes the presence of a materiality and a spatiality. The way of perceiving them is a trigger of the project's creative process. Understanding how an existing place or building are apprehended at the beginning of the project allows us to clarify the primitive idea behind the intervention project:

Our perceptions give us the outline of our possible action on things themselves. The contours we find in objects simply mark what we can achieve and change. (...), It is obvious that the materiality of a body does not stop at the point where we touch it.<sup>11</sup>

Henri Bergson, in *The Creative Evolution* (1907), opposed the Darwinian theory on the evolution of the species in affirming that evolution is unpredictable. He criticized the mechanistic and finalist approach to reality. For Merleau-Ponty, man is at the center – the objective Euclidean space does not exist, but there is a subjective space.<sup>12</sup> In the perception of this space, memory participates in the reconstruction of the invisible. We trust memory to pretend to know everything hidden behind things.

Perception starts with the intention on which the image is based. Perception is therefore intentional. On the other hand, looking at the work awakens a feeling, it is this feeling that gives rise to the image. Sentiment is an immediate way of understanding the image.<sup>13</sup> In this regard Jacques Herzog notes that: “Perception is always the beginning of a transformation (even if it seems banal)”.<sup>14</sup> Perception, therefore, unlike the gaze we place on an object, is an intentional action; memory is activated to complete and understand the object we have in front of us. Understanding the mechanisms of perception can therefore help us in the study of the approach of an architectural project on an existing site, to understand how memory is processed in the perception that generates the idea of the project.

### Questioning

The moment of recognition by the consciousness of a place as being of interest is the beginning of an intervention, as Cesare Brandi reminds us in *La Teoria del Restauro* (1963). Intervention is that action which mutates the existing, makes it evolve in a different, unpredictable way, to follow Bergson. Between these two moments, it is possible to locate the birth and outcome of strategies that reveal the memory of places. Taking for granted theories that forge the practice of the architect's profession and personal memory/experience, we will analyze three adaptive reuse projects that have answered the question of the memory of place through different strategies.



Figure 3. Façade in the center of Mons. © David Bayle, 2016.

## Intervention Strategies

*Revealing memory through matter: Dvvt, The Kanunnik Petrus Jozef Triestplein in Melle (Belgium)*

[...] human activity should not aim at an eternal conservation of monuments created in the past, but constantly seek to highlight the cycle of creation and destruction [...]<sup>15</sup>

An adaptive reuse project where this postulate seems to be applied and where the age-value gains over other values is the project of Ghent's architects De Vilder Vink Tailleu for the Karus psychiatric center in Melle.

Architects found themselves working on a building that was already no longer a building. The Kanunnik Petrus Jozef Triestplein (the Jozef), dating from 1905, was in the middle of a demolition phase, in a state of ruin that caused the staff of the center, as well as the patients, to question the pertinence of its disappearance. In its new state, the building appeared like the repository of the memory of a place undergoing transformation. The psychiatric complex had been undergoing a redevelopment program for several years, which led to the demolition of several original buildings. On the pretext of developments in care, the buildings dating from the beginning of the 20th century gradually disappeared, replaced with new, more efficient and more suitable structures. It was in this context that the demolition was stopped to open the way for reflection on the future of this ruin, and to try to integrate it into the care program. A competition was launched with three selected teams. Dvvt won the competition with a proposal where the age-value seems to be respected literally. Their project preserves what was left of the building at the time of the competition, adding few elements to consolidate, make accessible and secure the access. In agreement with the nursing staff, the building has become an atypical place of care accessible to patients who can thus escape from the classic care setting by walking through those "old" walls.



**Figure 4.** Le Kanunnik Petrus Jozef Triestplein à Melle, detail of a window. © Chiara Fucelli, 2020.

The Jozef Triestplein is above all a project in the making, its current state not being considered definitive. It has been decided to carry out an annual evaluation to monitor its structure and to develop the project according to the demands and needs identified by the users. It is interesting to see how, through a participatory process, it was possible to keep a relic, not only for a nostalgic feeling of memory of the site, but to make something new out of it, to find a human dimension in an increasingly sanitized medical environment.

The intervention strategy consists in “keeping the status quo” with the introduction of elements where necessary. The building's advanced state of demolition, a status it had never known before, aroused the interest of the center's community and it was this status that was chosen to be preserved. It was not advised to put a roof back on, or to bring comfort inside the walls, the materiality was kept raw, as revealed by asbestos removal. The architects were not interested in reproducing the image of the building as it was before, the interest of the intervention lies in the stripped material. This stripping is reminiscent of the yellow house by Olgiati (Flims, Switzerland, 1997), even if here it is involuntary, because the object is “as found”. Lucan has welcomed Dvvt's ability to “metamorphose an ancient construction without seeking to erase its original identity”<sup>16</sup>, in this case we will not speak of metamorphosis, but rather of an *objet trouvé*.

This adaptive reuse allows us to see everything, old and new, to understand stratifications; the intervention is clear and does not try to imitate what was there before and it is not in opposition either. The structural elements are found where they are needed. Thus we will find concrete blocks in place of the missing masonry, metal beams and girders to reinforce the structure, a new concrete staircase, metal balustrades and grids to secure the site. The only exception to the rigor of the exercise was the use of the color green as the signature of their architecture, already used in their most emblematic project, *Les ballets de la C de la B* in Gent.

*Revealing Memory Through Space: Lacaton & Vassal, FRAC in Dunkirk (France)*

The *Lacaton & Vassal* office has made the “addition” its flagship concept. In its residential bar renovations, surfaces are enlarged thanks to added structures that are attached to the existing building, bringing qualities of space, thermal comfort and light. These units, designed to be economical and modular, cover the old façades entirely, giving a new identity to these buildings, most of which were built as a result of the massive urbanization of the 1960s and '70s in France.

At the *Frac* (Fonds régionaux d'art contemporain) in Dunkirk (2013), the addition takes on a different meaning. The aim is to keep the memory and therefore the identity of this place. The program requested from the architects, an art center, with exhibition rooms and offices, was to fit into the immense volume of the former naval hall, the AP2 (1949). Anne Lacaton and Jean Philippe Vassal explain that putting floors into this volume, nicknamed the “cathedral”, and segmenting it would have meant the loss of a quality inseparable from the memory of the place: the sense of space.<sup>17</sup> Hence there was the idea of creating an equivalent volume beside it to host the requested program and of leaving the hall empty. Following *Lacaton & Vassal*'s recognition that authenticity resided in the space, that the image of this space was the true, authentic one, to be preserved, the intervention strategy was based on the intention to make emptiness possible by moving the program elsewhere.



Figure 5. FRAC in Dunkerque © Nikita Itenberg, 2016.



As long as the choice was made to not/intervene in the hall, all that remained to be done was to find where to place the volume requested by the program. Doubling is a strategy that works when the forms are simple and isolated. It is certainly not the only possibility, but in this context and with the prior intentions, we can imagine that this solution seemed obvious, as a sort of no/choice to use the expression of Jacques Lucan in his investigations of architectural composition.

In the next stage, the definition of this new volume, another radical position seemed obvious to highlight the existing: opposition. The double would be filled with floors and paths in opposition to the emptiness of the “cathedral”, its façades would be transparent to oppose and to reveal (or rather not to create an effacement effect) the concrete mass in a principle of contrast.

*Revealing Memory Through Patina: Flores y Prats, Sala Beckett in Barcelona (Spain)*

Sala Beckett (2013) is certainly the most radical of the three adaptive reuse interventions analyzed in this paper. This former cooperative in Poble Nou district had already undergone transformations in the 1990s. For the new theatre project by the Beckett company, designed by Catalan architects Flores y Prats, the building has been retained in its entirety, but it has nevertheless been subject to major transformations, particularly in the finishing works. The architects decided to keep all the original elements from 1920, which are of excellent quality. The tiles, the 44 doors and the 35 windows were meticulously measured and reproduced in a model as well as all the elements present on site. These elements were disassembled, re-cut and restored when necessary and then reassembled elsewhere to find their place in the new project.

When preserved, the existing walls were left as they are, with their patina; here architects' decisions were so radical as to leave traces of an ancient fire. The new elements were of an assumed mannerism, the chosen colors were found on the site. The building has thus ended up in a state that it has never known before, but with all the elements that were present before. The result is a radical project due to its complexity and lack of compromise. Some elements are moved and diverted, while others remain in place unchanged, with their patina, like anecdotes that tell stories of the twenties.

There is not really a predefined project here. The strategy is to keep what can be preserved, in place or through extrapolating, in order to reintegrate and highlight existing elements in the new project, in a kind of memory trail. This explains the huge production of cardboard models on any scale and hand drawings, which it was possible to see in their "cabinet of curiosity" during the 16th Venice Architecture Biennale in 2018.



**Figure 6.** Sala Beckett model at the Venice Biennale © Chiara Fucelli, 2018.

### Conclusion

In these three examples of adaptive reuse, strategies change according to what is considered to be primordial in the transmission of the memory of the place. *Flores y Prats* in the Sala Beckett, for instance, recycles and transforms the matter in order to highlight it as a kind of emotional reconstruction, a theatre of memory where everything is arranged in a spectacular way; in *Lacaton and Vassal's* FRAC, the recognition of authenticity in the necessity of emptiness has generated a double opposite; while in Melle, the Jozef is treated as an *objet trouvé*, *Dvvt* respects the age-value through a strategy of non-intervention.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> It is thanks to the Romans that we have information on mnemonic with the *Ad Herennium* (work of an unknown author of the First Century BC) and the *De oratore* de Cicero (55 BC).

<sup>2</sup> Yates, Frances A., et Arasse Daniel. *L'art de la mémoire*. Paris: Gallimard, 1987. pp. 13-38.

<sup>3</sup> Riegl, Alois. *Le Culte moderne des monuments. Son essence et sa genèse*. Édition revue et augmentée. Paris: Le Seuil, 2013.

<sup>4</sup> Nora, Pierre. *Les Lieux de Mémoire*. Gallimard, 1972.

<sup>5</sup> Marino Bianca G. *William Morris. La tutela dei monumenti come problema sociale*. Napoli : Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1993.

<sup>6</sup> Morisset, Lucie K. *Des régimes d'authenticité : Essai sur la mémoire patrimoniale*. PUQ, 2009, p. 20.

<sup>7</sup> Zucchi Cino - *Conferenza organizzata dall'Ordine Architetti di Varese*. Varese: PRIMOPIANOITALIA WebTV, 2015. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YhvTHMfD\\_xk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YhvTHMfD_xk).

<sup>8</sup> Ruskin John. *Les sept lampes de l'architecture*. Paris: Klincksieck, 2008, p. 191.

<sup>9</sup> Riegl, Alois. *Le Culte moderne des monuments. Son essence et sa genèse*. Édition revue et augmentée. Paris: Le Seuil, 2013, p. 107.

<sup>10</sup> Mathieu, Jacques. *La Mémoire dans la culture*. Québec : Presse de l'Université Laval, 1995, p. 210.

<sup>11</sup> Bergson, Henri, et Quadrigue. *L'évolution créatrice*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France - PUF, 1981. p.189.

<sup>12</sup> Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Phénoménologie de la Perception*. Paris: Gallimard, 1945.

<sup>13</sup> Martin Steinmann, *Comprendre ce qui est déjà compris dans le sentiment, Approche phénoménologique d'une œuvre de Hugo Suter, Matières n8*, Lausanne, 2008.

<sup>14</sup> Francis Rambert, *Espaces trouvés, conversation avec Jacques Herzog*, dans *Un bâtiment, combien de vies ? : La transformation comme acte de création*. 01 éd. Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana Editoriale, 2014, p. 97.

<sup>15</sup> Riegl, Alois. *Le Culte moderne des monuments. Son essence et sa genèse*. Édition revue et augmentée. Paris: Le Seuil, 2013, p.79.

<sup>16</sup> Lucan, Jacques. *Précisions sur un état présent de l'architecture*, 1<sup>re</sup> éd. Lausanne: PPUR, 2015.

<sup>17</sup> Lectures at the 14<sup>th</sup> International Conference of DOCOMOMO in Lisbon, 6-9 September 2016.