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Façadism as Urban Taxidermy: All Skin and no Bones

This paper reconsiders the architectural phenomenon of façadism as a conscious attempt to appropriate and mis-translate buildings from one era and context to another - retrieving them from some past moment into the present. This may indeed be a somewhat risky proposition, as discussions around façadism typically throw up jaded arguments born out of postmodernist angst about history and heritage. But as a design tactic it has nonetheless been widely absorbed into commercial and domestic architecture and urbanism in Australian cities (as elsewhere) over the past thirty years or so, for better and worse. And as a theoretical discussion it usefully cuts to the core of the question: how should we preserve the past?

Arguments around this scenographic practice of preserving the front face of a building while demolishing and replacing the body are reconsidered in light of nineteenth and twentieth century architectural rhetoric. Local examples, drawn from the 1980s to the present and concentrating on the cities of Perth and Melbourne, are also discussed in terms of their varied approach. The paper's conclusion re-assesses façadism through analogy and metaphor as a postmodern practice. In particular, what may be termed 'architectural taxidermy', is explored as an apt term to describe the retention of built surface and skin without the flesh and bones. The tactic is problematized in light of international and local architectural critiques and heritage discourse around issues of authenticity, streetscape and function.

Definitions, Motivations and Historical Context

“... a series of tilt metres were installed on the façade during demolition to monitor any movement of the façade during demolition, excavation and construction. ... To secure the façade and to create a counterbalance for the excavation a steel frame or armature has been located on the western side and sits on a large concrete pad footing. The steelwork rises the full height of the façade and is secured through existing window and door openings to a series of permanent steel columns fixed to the rear of the façade.”¹

“The animal is now skinned, and the skin prepared in the usual manner, i.e., stripped entirely from the body, cured, and thinned down. The bowels are taken out, the flesh is cut off the bones, and the parts ... are copied by carving in lime-tree or beech wood. [Bones can be cast in plaster quite as easily as anything else, and often take the place of carved wood.]”²

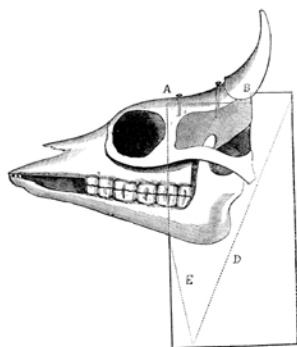


Fig. 1. Skull of Horned Head for Mounting.
Source: Brown, 1922.

Critical consideration of façadism in architecture conjures up jaded arguments born out of postmodernist angst about history and heritage. As an attempted solution to the perennial problem of how to preserve heritage-valued buildings without curbing development, it has nonetheless come to pervade urban design, commercial and domestic architecture in Australian cities, for better and worse, and deserves critical reflection. Mounting a renewed critique of this ongoing design tactic also re-opens discussion around the vexed relationship between a façade and body of a building. In light of the theme ‘translation’, this practice is cast as the attempted misappropriation and mistranslation of parts of buildings from one era and context to another.

There appears no universally agreed definition of façadism, as the practice refers either to architecture designed with an emphasis on the façade, or the retention of a preserved building

1 Stephen Georgalis, “ABP’s new building design: Focus on the Joseph Reed façade,” *ATRIUM* 23 (2013): 6-7.

2 Montagu Browne, *Practical Taxidermy, A manual of instruction to the amateur in collecting, preserving and setting up natural history specimens of all kinds* (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1922), np.

front while demolishing and replacing the remainder behind it.³ ICOMOS defines different types of façadism as: a) the preservation of a façade; b) a faithful reconstruction; and c) dismantling and reconstruction of a façade elsewhere from its original location.⁴ In another useful attempt to interrogate the practice through a form of typological definition, Sanford Wood has defined examples in Washington according to their perceived depth: a) 'Collage' - retaining a fragment of a façade and incorporating it into a new building; b) 'Sheet' - retaining a whole thin strip resulting in the appearance of wallpaper hanging off the building; c) 'Illusion 1020+' - maintaining an illusion of depth with 10 to 20 feet of depth; d) 'Illusion 2040+' - maintaining 20 to 40 feet preserved behind a façade; e) 'Incorporation' - maintaining over 40 feet; and f) 'Scoop' - preserving more than one façade by 'scooping' out the middle and inserting a new structure.⁵ In light of these definitions, this paper considers examples from an Australian context drawn from Perth and Melbourne, with some comparison to the UK.

Motivations that drive façadism as an acceptable design solution can be grouped as follows: cultural and architectural - motivated by a desire for the recognition of the historical context, and in no small part fuelled by a postmodern revival of interest in representing the memory of places through a collaged palette derived from existing urbanscapes; economic - motivated by solving pressures and demands of urban development and consolidation, or by realising the perceived 'prestige' of an old façade while modernising and boosting the host building; legislative - motivated as a solution to heritage and/or zoning and planning regulations and recommendations; and technical modernization - motivated by a desire to retain some semblance of an original building while updating the servicing and climatic performance of the structure.

As an urban design solution, the strategy has been justified as striking a realistic compromise between the ever-escalating economic pressures of redevelopment, and an awareness of the value of historical contexts in the wake of preceding decades of modernism and wholesale destruction. Compromise here suggests the settling of concessions on each side - the combining of disparate elements or qualities. However compromise also admits that such concessions can be reductive, awkward or undignified. As Paul Goldberger said in his key critique in *The New York Times* in 1985: "... façadism holds out a great temptation - it seems, on the surface, to give both sides what they want. The small, older buildings valued by preservationists appear to be saved, while the large new ones developers seek can still be built."⁶

In terms of sanctioned heritage practice, façadism is contemporaneous to a general turn towards conservation awareness in the 1960s and '70s onwards. For example, key events in the awakening of

3 Jonathan Richards, *Façadism* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 7.

4 Kerensa Sanford Wood, "Architecture of Compromise: A History and Analysis of Façadism in Washington D.C." (MADiss., Columbia University, 2012) 8.

5 Wood, "Architecture of Compromise," 21.

6 Paul Goldberger, "Façadism on the rise, Preservation or illusion," *New York Times*, 15 July 1985, <http://www.nytimes.com/1985/07/15/nyregion/facadism-on-the-rise-preservation-or-illusion.html>.

Australia's heritage conscience included the destruction of the Rocks area in Sydney; the annexing of the Barracks Arch in Perth to make way for a freeway; and the demolition of nineteenth century spines like Collins street Melbourne and St Georges Terrace Perth. Max Nankervis writes: "Urban development cut a swathe through what was left of nineteenth century Australian cities."⁷ In the wake of change, efforts were mobilized towards retaining remaining historic streetscapes and frontages. Yet the retention of only a part of a building or the moving of it from its original location, and the loss of original function, is regarded as a last resort in formative heritage guidelines such as the *Australian Burra Charter*. Article 9 states:

"A building, work or other element of a place should remain in its historical location. Relocation is generally unacceptable unless this is the sole practical means of ensuring its survival. ... if any building, work or other element is moved, it should be moved to an appropriate location and given an appropriate use...."⁸

As a general design strategy and source of debate, there is however nothing new about architecture investing all its firepower in its front face, which has often bared little relationship to what has been designed inside or out the back. At the height of historical eclecticism in the nineteenth century, for example, debates raged over the looseness of the relationship between functional planning and the language of elevations and external form - whether that language be classical or gothic in origin. Competitions and commissions for public buildings such as town halls, libraries, museums and clubs often threw up interchangeable stylistic solutions, with façades considered as clothing fit for symbolic purpose. Even John Soane, who was so highly regarded for the crafting of interior spaces, proposed a somewhat megalomaniacal series of arcaded loggias that would, if built, have created a plaster-thin façade addition to his house and later museum at Lincoln's Inn Fields in London which grew in stages between 1809 and 1824. While A. W. N. Pugin, for instance, accused John Nash of creating only thin plastered surface façades and effects ruled by 'whim and caprice':

"... we have only to look into those nests of monstrosities, the Regent's Park and Regent Street, where all kind of styles are jumbled together to make up a mass. ... Yet this is termed a great metropolitan improvement: why, it is a national disgrace, a stigma on the taste of the country; and so it will remain till the plaster and cement, of which it is composed, decay."⁹

With the rise to dominance of Modernism, and its appeal to material and functional transparency, this freedom of interchangeability between façade and interior became unthinkable. For instance Le Corbusier in *Towards a New Architecture* wrote: "A Building is like a soap bubble. This bubble is perfect and harmonious if the breath has been evenly distributed and regulated from the inside.

7 Max Nankervis, "Some recent directions in the conservation of the built environment," *Journal of Australian Studies* 30 (1991).

8 *The Burra Charter [electronic resource] : the Australia ICOMOS charter for places of cultural significance : with associated guidelines and code on the ethics of co-existence / Australia ICOMOS* (Burwood, Australia ICOMOS, 2013), 5.

9 Augustus W Pugin, *Contrasts, or, A parallel between the noble edifices of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and similar buildings of the present day : shewing the present decay of taste* (London: printed for the Author, and published by him at St. Marie's Grange, Salisbury, Wilts., 1836), 30-32.

The exterior is the result of an interior.”¹⁰ Anxiety about historical emphasis on the outward face of a building was also voiced by many critics and historians now steeped in Modernist ideals. For example, Gilbert Herbert wrote somewhat censoriously on ‘Façadism in Italian Architecture’ in 1960:

“To an architect schooled in the belief that the plan is the generator, and reared on the philosophy of honesty of expression, façadism and the screen façade are alien concepts. Yet throughout the entire history of architecture of the Italian peninsula they are regarded as a normal and legitimate expression.”¹¹

(Indeed Baroque Italian architecture had thrived on an inter-changeability between existing interiors and newer façades.) Yet façadism in France, for example, has been suggested as emerging contemporaneously to Modernism. Pierre Pinon identifies regeneration tactics for Parisian quarters in the 1940s that proposed a hollowing out of entire blocks to create courtyards and new interior constructions.¹²

Nor is it a new architectural strategy to keep or move entire or partial elevations of significant buildings to create other historically aggregated ones. In Melbourne, the façade of the former Bank of New South Wales on Collins Street, designed by Joseph Reed (1856), was relocated to the University of Melbourne campus and incorporated into the Commerce Building in 1939 after the bank was demolished in 1932. This case will be returned to later in the paper.

Contemporary Cases

“The usual way in which horned heads are skinned is to cut them under the throat right up to the jaw, turning the skin back, and then to skin upward to the horns. This, though perpetrated by people who ought to know better, is based on entirely false principles, for a head when finished being hung usually at some height, you have constantly before your eyes the hideous spectacle of a chain of stitches (which no art can successfully hide) running up the throat and under the chin.”¹³

However, façadism as we understand it today, did not really gain traction until the 1980s. Fuelled by motivations outlined above – i.e cultural, economic, legislative and technical – skyscrapers in dense American cities began to incorporate low-rise landmark heritage buildings at their bases, as exemplified at 712 Fifth Avenue, designed by Kohn Pedersen Fox Associates in 1991. While from San Francisco to Sydney warehouse redevelopments often retained little depth but their ‘character-filled’ façades.

10 Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture* (New York: Dover, 1986), 181.

11 Thomas Schumacher, “Façadism Returns, or the Advent of the Duck-orated Shed,” *Journal of Architectural Education* 63, no 2, (March 2010): 128-37.

12 Pierre Pinon, “Les origines du façadisme,” *Monumental Issue*, no. 14 (1996): 9-15.

13 Browne, *Practical Taxidermy*.

These strategies are alive and well today in Australian cities, as can be seen in Perth and Melbourne. In the Perth CBD, the award-winning faceted tower development of One40william, designed by Hassell Architects in collaboration with Lovell Chen, retains a collection of historic fragments wrapping a hefty new footprint encompassing several blocks over the now sunken railway station. Winner of the Walter Burley Griffin Award for Urban Design in 2011, the design has been described as “celebrating heritage”¹⁴ through “a sensitive response to the GPO, the Commonwealth Bank and the restored heritage structures along Wellington Street.”¹⁵ These ‘restored structures’ include the wafer-thin remains of the 1912 Mitchells Building façade on William Street, which was removed from the site in 2005 for protection and later reconstructed. The scars of this operation are not well disguised, with very visible joins in the now pristine-looking classical face. The Wellington Street elevation includes the retention of other thin pieces, and deeper inhabitable sections of building that bookend the northern street corners.¹⁶ Returning to Wood’s typological categories, façades at One40william are retained and integrated as collaged fragments, with the William Street corner holding pretensions towards “Illusion 1020+”. However this illusion appears broken by the otherwise fragmentary strategy



Fig. 2. Mitchells façade, William Street, Perth:
Source Lewi.

Walking around other city streets in Perth many other recent specimens abound, such as the collaged melange on the corner of Milligan and Hay streets, including a 1930s corner-piece and the delicate brick, gothic revival Read Buildings façade (a site close to the author’s past, as the upstairs - when it had an upstairs - housed low-rent studios for struggling artists and young architects). While further down the same street the WD and HO Wills Building, designed by Oldham Boas & Ednie-Brown in 1927 for the Wills Tobacco Company, has been exhumed from recent neglect

14 “Project description,” Hassell Studio, accessed 17 January, 2014, <http://www.hassellstudio.com/en/cms-projects/detail/one40william-186>.

15 “one40william,” National Architecture Awards Jury, accessed 3 November 2011, [http://www.architectureau.com/articles/one40william#View shared post](http://www.architectureau.com/articles/one40william#View%20shared%20post).

16 Philip Vivian, “One40william,” *Architecture Australia* 101, No 1 (2012), <http://architectureau.com/articles/one40william-1/>.

into mixed-use offices and apartments with an additional three-storeys added above the original structure in 2007.¹⁷ An example of compromises fought between heritage-listing and commercial pressure, here the original bones of the sturdy warehouse structure, including mushroom columns, are retained. The redevelopment has been celebrated as an example of successful adaptive reuse by the State Heritage Office of WA.¹⁸ With the highly visible addition above the old façade, the adaptation engages a “Scoop” strategy, in reference to Wood’s typology, where two street elevations have been kept along with some internal structure, while the guts of the building have been scooped out.

At the eastern end of the Perth CBD a very odd memento, in the form of the marooned classical portico front of St George’s Hall (1870s), has now been adhered to the new District Court complex. Retention of the heritage-listed portico (the rest of the hall was already demolished) posed a challenge to the architects Cox Howlett and Bailey Woodland,¹⁹ who have attempted to invoke the buildings dismembered body by inscribing a trace of the plan on the ground and installing a heritage interpretation board annotating a brief history. Again there is no pretence of illusion at play here, the plaster and brick portico entrance - which supposedly contributed architectural gravitas to the Courts - is abruptly glued to the mirror-glass front behind it.



Fig. 3. St George's Hall Portico, Perth:
Source Lewi.

In Melbourne, in an effort to formalize and encourage a more fleshy approach to façade preservation - favouring what Wood has termed “Illusion 2040+” and “Incorporation” (maintaining over 40 feet) - a 10-meter retention guideline was introduced in Melbourne in the 1990s. Earlier examples set this precedent for depth in Melbourne, including No 1 Collins Street, designed by Denton Corker Marshall (1983-84). Here an inhabitable entry loggia space was created from a low-rise heritage building and incorporated into a high-rise tower. The development was regarded as displaying sensitivity

17 “One Address Two Possibilities,” The Match Group, <http://www.thematchgroup.com.au/go/match-projects/completed-projects/home/design>.

18 “Heritage in Action: Adaptive Reuse: How State Registered heritage properties have been successfully adapted for new uses, 2012,” State Heritage Office, Western Australian Government, <http://stateheritage.wa.gov.au/docs/conservation-and-development/heritage-in-action-adaptive-reuse.pdf?sfvrsn=14>.

19 The District Court of Western Australia, 4, http://www.districtcourt.wa.gov.au/_files/DCB%20Booklet.pdf.

to conservation demands, alongside a knowing command of the ironies of postmodernism. Further down Collins Street, the Rialto tower development retained a 10-meter frontage composed of the Rialto Building (1889) designed by William Pitt and the Winfield Building (1890) by Debro & Speight. Most recently Bates Smart's redevelopment of 171 Collins Street retains some significant depth to the Chicago-esque Auditorium Building, designed by Nahum Barnet (1912-13). Other controversial instances of façade retention and building loss in Melbourne include the recent Myer redevelopment on Lonsdale Street. Away from the city centre, in Collingwood a piece of three-storey frontage (formerly 3 buildings) was kept in front of a supermarket in the 1980s, with the historical façade masking its new body - the empty upper-storeys forming an over-scaled cornice.



Fig. 4. FiftyAlbert development Melbourne.
Source: <http://elenbergfraser.com/#!/project/50-albert-road>.

Other recent examples in Melbourne can be grouped as all retaining a small fragment or memento of a former building, sometimes with depth and often demarcating an entrance foyer, but not in a manner that creates a unified surface illusion or wallpaper over the new façade. Examples include: 17-23 Wills Street, Melbourne (30-plus storey tower behind a two-storey corner art deco fragment); Silverleaf Apartments, South Melbourne (featuring an undulating design to envelope a heritage listed two-storey building); Fifty Albert Road Apartments, South Melbourne (bearing down over a terrace house corner, and described by the architects Elenberg Fraser; "this building is in love with its location"²⁰); and student housing in Carlton that retains a corner trophy building. Goldberger's critique of dwarfed old buildings becoming "literally a doormat for the tower, a small stoop cowering before a ponderous skyscraper ..." remains apt.²¹

As a final case of a different type, and one that may be called façadism 'twice removed', the former Bank of NSW façade at the University of Melbourne campus previously mentioned, is currently being integrated into the new Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning Building designed by John Wardle architects and NADAAA. Retrieved from its now demolished host, the façade is forming a centre-piece in the new monumental western elevation: "The symmetry of the façade and its siting

20 "Fifty Albert Road," Elenberg Fraser, accessed 30 January, 2013, <http://elenbergfraser.com/#!/project/50-albert-road>.

21 Goldberger, "Façadism on the rise"

reads as a stage set or a proscenium that faces the Union Lawn"²² Here the Bank tableaux is being consciously considered from both the exterior and inside of the new design. Existing openings are being extended and articulated into the interior - in part to perform as a didactic device in the educational context of the new building. The project architects liken this tactic to the Teatro Olimpico (1580-85) by Palladio and Scamozzi "where the proscenium of the theatre incorporates the use of false perspective to emphasise a greater depth of field."²³



Fig. 5. Bank façade, Architecture Building, University of Melbourne.
Source: *Atrium* magazine.

Taxidermy and other Uneasy Practices

"A little carbolic acid in the arsenic-water will help keep the skin from slipping the hair. Also keep unfinished parts wrapped in damp cloths wrung from carbolic acid water."²⁴

Just as the definitions of and motivations for façadism over the last 40 or so years have been multifarious, so too have critiques of the practice. As a strategy it can and has been described using many analogies, most of which have already been alluded to in the above descriptions and need unpacking.

Alongside the term 'collage' to describe the juxtaposition of both technique and product, other analogies that capture the thinness and screen-like qualities of façadism include 'wallpapering' - whether with an original material surface or increasingly a digital image as copy of that original surface; and the creation of a 'tableaux' or 'stage-set' - not an ignoble pursuit in the history of architecture as seen from Palladio to Inigo Jones, to Australia's Peter Corrigan even. Other descriptors and critiques emphasise the retention of a façade as a found object or 'ready-made' (devoid of the scepticism of a Duchampian ready-made),²⁵ or a recognizable 'specimen' detached

22 Georgalis, "ABP's new building design," 6-7.

23 Georgalis, "ABP's new building design," 6-7.

24 Leon L. Pray, *Taxidermy* (New York: Outing Publishing, 1913).

25 Herbert Molderings, "Objects of Modern Scepticism," in *The Definitively Unfinished Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Thierry De Duve (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 244-65.

from both its original era and its material host, and in so detaching often acquiring nostalgic sentiment. These fragments, typically much smaller than the redeveloped host, become 'badges' 'mementos', 'door-mats' or jewellery. Goldberger again for example writes: "Buildings should be not be entombed as 'sentimental objects': for the city is not a place of make-believe, a place of illusion where little buildings exist to be pinned, like brooches, on the front of bigger structures to which they been only the most distant of relationships."²⁶

The most prevalent and powerful critiques of façadism have invoked bodily allusions, in particular skin and facial preservation as in the practices of taxidermy; literally defined as the 'arrangement of skins'. And 'death-masking'; defined as taking a facial cast of the deceased - also referred to in the American context as 'Halloween preservation' .²⁷ As modern preservation techniques dating from the mid eighteenth century,²⁸ they have been motivated by scientific research and preservation from extinction, art and curiosity, and commercial enterprise.

This contrasts with other bodily analogies at play in the formative years of postmodernism, for instance the expression of the architectural 'skeleton' of the city by Rossi and Eisenman in their exploration of enduring historical typologies. Here the skeleton becomes an analogue to history as it 'serves as a measure of time' and 'bears the imprint of the actions that have taken place and will take place in the city', at once both artefact as 'structure' and 'ruin'.²⁹ Unlike the skeleton, architectural taxidermy and the mask imply quite a different relationship to history, as neither structure nor ruin. Describing façades akin to animal skins detached from structure again is nothing new in architecture; Ruskin described the surface variation of a building as like the patterned stripes of a zebra and spots of a leopard.³⁰ And indeed it has resurged in the contemporary era of digital fabrication. Yet façadism and masking imply a wilful degree of illusion and unreality. In these terms, Rossi would characterise the practice as 'pathological'; embalmed or 'mummified' body parts that 'gives only the appearance of being alive'.³¹ Schumacher writes of the collaged element or mask as "calling attention to its fiction": "Its affectation is a kind of knowing wink, a secret handshake, and as such it is at least theoretically acceptable to even the most stringent modernist."³²

Subtle and morbid distinctions in indexicality also present between the death-mask and the preserved skin, for the death-mask as relief mould of the face of the deceased is a trace, whereas the preserved skin of a stuffed animal is some actual part of the deceased in an embalmed state. Rachel Poliquin argues that it this proximity of the index in taxidermy that creates a more haunting

26 Goldberger, "Façadism on the rise."

27 Steven Semes, *The Future of the Past: A Conservation Ethic for Architecture, Urbanism and Historic Preservation*, (Norton: New York, 2009), 238.

28 Modern taxidermy was given great profile at the Great Exhibition of 1851. See Browne, *Practical Taxidermy*.

29 Peter Eisenman, introduction to *The Architecture of the City*, by Aldo Rossi (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992), 5.

30 John Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1849).

31 Eisenman, introduction, 6.

32 Schumacher, "Façadism Returns," 131.

souvenir than the totally manufactured copy: "By staving off the finality of material dissolution, preservation endows bodily souvenirs with an impoverished yet resolute immortality."³³

Whether dealing with dead buildings or dead animals, any clear distinction of the indexical relation of the copy or the preserved element to the original is problematic. Arguably when severed, preserved, cleaned, propped and re-presented as a small part of a new building, the façade always reads as a mis-translation of the past; a copy and object of its own reference. Poliquin again captures this "strange duality of presence and absence ... dead but not gone, refashioned but fundamentally still available."³⁴ While Nathaniel Prottas similarly explains on the art of taxidermy: "Rather than acting as a physical marker of that which was once present but now gone, this skin traces the contours of an animal that remains physically present, albeit in attenuated form."³⁵ It is this strange duality that explains, perhaps, the unsettling presence of the cases of façadism as explored in this paper, and many strident critics of the practice who have alluded to its production as simulation and Disneyland false fakery.³⁶

There is no doubt that some progenitors of façadism - in appealing to postmodern disruptions of historical truths - have been in full command of the jangling possibilities of dissonance, pastiche and simulation. Yet although the idea is well received by some heritage and conservation authorities as one mode of resurrection, this exterior focus cannot but reduce historical buildings to nothing but cosmetic facsimiles.³⁷ For keeping only a damaged façade, no matter the strategy, inevitably denies the preservation of the collective memory and functional workings of a building's internal blood and guts;³⁸ the experience, say, of light, sound and scale of a complete space.³⁹

And at street level it may be regarded by many as an innocuous solution to creating good urban design attributes such as human scale, rhythm, texture and detail (as argued for example at the Lonsdale Street Myers redevelopment in Melbourne), but too often the results are architecturally and historically vacuous.

33 Rachel Poliquin, *The Breathless Zoo: Taxidermy and the Cultures of Longing*, (Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 2012), 206.

34 Poliquin, *The Breathless Zoo*, 204.

35 Nathaniel Prottas, "The taxidermy arts, or why is taxidermy not an art?," *Philosophy of Photography 2*, no. 3 (2012): 264.

36 Goldberger, "Facadism on the rise;" and Arthur Cotton Moore, *The Powers of Preservation*, (New York: McGraw Hill, 1998), xi.

37 Federica Goffi-Hamilton, "Skin Deep Conservation," *Interventions/Adaptive Reuse 40*, no. 1 (2009): 40.

38 "Most places that we look upon as whole, or unimpaired, arouse memories or unconscious meanings in our minds which may have to do with childhood, ancestry, nationhood, ideals or traditions." Angus Stirling, "In Search of Integrity" (Address to 7th International National Trust Conference, Amsterdam, 1995).

39 Is there not something equally valuable and irreplaceable about historic interiors - as evident in the popularity of events like Open House Melbourne, or European Heritage Days, where themes such as 'Hidden Heritage' facilitate the opening up of hundreds of historic interiors?



Fig. 6. Carbuncle Cup winner, Islington, London. Source: *The Guardian*

Finally, two unfortunate exemplars in London demonstrate the practice is alive and well elsewhere. A development in Spitalfields, East London, has been honoured as a recent case of heritage-skinning, with the sole remaining mute corner now pinned at arm's length to the new building: "If those responsible had spray-painted 'we only left this because they made us,' across one wall and 'we hate old buildings' on the other, the message would hardly be less subtle."⁴⁰ And second, the winner of the ignoble Carbuncle Cup 2013 has been awarded by *The Guardian* newspaper to a student housing project in Islington, London, designed by Stephen George & Partners. Here a brick front from the 1870s has been partially retained and mis-aligned clumsily onto the new housing block behind, ensuring complete blockage of natural light into some of the new student flats. Catherine Bennett writes of:

"...a building created purely to expose the sentimentality of letting decaying frontages frustrate living creatives. Fine, the new building says to conservationists, you wanted to keep your crappy old façade: see how much you like it now we've used a few metal prongs to bolt it to a zinc-clad tenement and replaced the original pediment with an extra storey."⁴¹

The compromise of façadism ultimately leaves the lurking unease that the preservation of heritage fronts in urban streetscapes, whether skin-deep or fleshy, is like the preservation of native tree strips along rural Australian highways: reassuring only when experienced at speed, but upon closer inspection bound to unsettle and disappoint in its sham containment of complex and messy histories.

40 "London's ugliest example of façadism?," *Caroline's Miscellany*, accessed 15 October 2012, <http://carolineid.blogspot.com.au/2012/08/londons-ugliest-facadism.html>.

41 Catherine Bennett, "The Winner of the Carbuncle Cup looks like a joke," *The Observer*, 31 August 2013, accessed 1 September 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/aug/31/winner-carbuncle-cup-joke>.