JOELHO
#09

REUSE OF MODERNIST BUILDINGS: PEDAGOGY AND PROFESSION

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Exhibition
2nd RMB Workshop, Coimbra

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Reuse of Modernist Buildings: pedagogy and profession

As the story goes, the once-famous Dutch architect Piet Blom liked to take an evening stroll around the sites of buildings of his under construction to critically reflect on the day's results. If dissatisfied with some beam, column or other part, he would not hesitate to write an instruction in oil crayon on the offending component for the workers, such as 'perhaps better not' (a euphemism for remove!). For Blom, the architect who had coined the term of structuralism, to design was to solve a puzzle, in which all the pieces should fit regardless of style. Later on in his career especially, the decisions he took had nothing to do with fashion; he crafted, planed and sliced on his own half-finished buildings. Whether new or existing, finished or unfinished, it made no difference to him.

When designing new constructions, architects tend to blithely go their own way with regard to style. When working as a designer with building stock, however, you have to take a stance on dealing with the style of your predecessor(s). For a very long time, the correct 'stock attitude' was shaped by methodologies developed in the late 19th century. Until recently, within the German-speaking context, the debate was strongly coloured by opinions developed by the art historian Georg Dehio (don't restore,

preserve!) and interpretations of the standpoints of the Austrian Alois Riegl, who was also an art historian, and his pleas for a cautious, respectful interaction with different style epochs without favouring one over the others. This was in fact all very modernist, honest and clear, and provided a counterbalance to the 19th-century eclecticism. Similar discourses and attitudes dating from this time can be found in most European countries. Two well-known representatives of this school are Heinz Döllgast (restoration of the Alte Pinakothek in Munich) and Carlo Scarpa.

The huge number of interventions and the increasing importance of reusing buildings together with the changing nature of the type of interventions in building stock call for a broader repertoire and perhaps more effective approaches, particularly when working with modernist buildings from the post WW2 era. Architects need a multiform repertoire of tools and methods to deal with themes such as substance, originality, honesty, and identity.

Of course, many architects have already adopted a critical position towards overly reverent interaction in handling our building stock, especially when the building to be transformed falls under the majority category of 'everyday modernism'. Jacques Herzog and Pierre de

Meuron, for instance, refer to Eugène Viollet-le-Duc, representing the opposite camp of 19ᵗʰ-century thinkers on preservation. They describe their method as 'non-dialectic' with regard to juxtaposing the new with the old, proposing 'a pinch of Asian martial arts, the Aikido strategy of using the opponent's energy to gain the upper hand' (Ursprung, 2003). In their opinion, these tactics should 'lead to something new which, ideally is twice as effective.' In his publication entitled 'Preservation is overtaking us' (Koolhaas, Otero-Pailos, & Carver, op. 2016), Rem Koolhaas warned against too much protection and preservation. The collage technique as practised by OMA in many of its transformation projects is a powerful architectural tool for dealing with reuse.

These two examples, which could be supplemented with many more comparable attitudes, show how the obligatory beautiful-not beautiful question can be avoided in decisions on reuse, restoration or demolition of our younger building stock as well as an excessively reverent dialogue with this younger heritage, which can easily frustrate or block successful reuse.

The works of Bernard Tschumi, especially his writing and works from the 1970s, offer a more theoretical background that could support innovation in architectural tools and

methods – especially when applied to the reuse of building stock – and also play a role as a catalyst in the debate on the role and function of architecture related to reuse.

In the preface to his book Architecture and Disjunction (Tschumi, 1996), Tschumi reflects on his essays from the early 1970s until the early '90s, concluding that what retroactively binds these essays is that ʹ*While their common starting point is today's disjunction between use, form, and social values, they argue that this condition, instead of being a pejorative one, is highly "architectural".* Architecture is ʹa sometimes violent confrontation between spaces and activitiesʹ. This is of great interest to those who are constantly working on the changing relationship between the use and form of a building.

Tschumi goes on to examine the role of the architect. One conclusion drawn at the end of the 1960s concerned: ʹthe adaptation of space to the existing socio-economic structureʹ. Thirty years later, for many, this might not have changed all that much. Of course, this was, and still is not very satisfying. Tschumi, alongside many others, kept on searching to find out how architecture can function in other ways, and how to understand the issue of architectural change and the effect it might have on society and vice versa.

To do so, it is necessary to go beyond the obvious and the known, because ′Education and "the advice of experts" are means of maintaining the traditional structures, and questioning them is a necessary step towards any new approach′. One should bypass these limitations and avoid the trap of developing a new architectural language because: ′If it is doubtful that the development of a new formal language ever had an effect on the structure of society, it is clear that the destruction of the old language had.′

In his 1975 text ′Architecture and transgression′ (Tschumi, 1976), Tschumi takes a term from Georges Bataille — ′transgression′— and places it in an architectural context.

> *Transgression opens the door into what lies beyond the limits usually observed, but it maintains these limits all the same. Transgression is complementary to the profane world, exceeding its limits but not destroying it.* (Georges Bataille, *Eroticism) (Bataille & DALWOOD, 1962).*

To transgress these rules, we need to find tools to do so. According to Tschumi, there is a paradox in how architecture works. There is the experience of space. This space is real, it can be touched, we can move through it, but that can never

be at the forefront of architectural development. Then there is a concept of space. This space is in our mind, in words and drawings on paper. These are experiments in thought and form like the experimental and speculative spaces by Piranesi, Ledoux or Lebbeus Woods. Architecture misses either the ʹreality or the conceptʹ. But instead of accepting, as an alternative to the paradox, ʹsilence, a final nihilistic statement that would provide modern architectural history with its ultimate punchline, its self-annihilationʹ, Tschumi, however, suggests taking ʹanother way around this paradox, to refute the silence the paradox seems to imply, even if this alternative proves intolerable.ʹ

He does so in three ʻcorrespondencesʹ.

The first correspondence is on eroticism. ʹArchitecture is the ultimate erotic object, because an architectural act, brought to the level of excess, is the only way to reveal both the traces of history and its own immediate experiential truth.ʹ

In the second correspondence, he writes, ʹ*In the paradox of architecture, the contradiction between architectural concept and sensual experience of space resolves itself at one point of tangency: the rotten point, the*

very point that taboos and culture have always rejected. This metaphorical rot is where architecture lies. Rot bridges sensory pleasure and reason.'

Tschumi illustrated his ideas on this part of transgression very convincingly in his famous Ads for Architecture (Tschumi 1975), showing a photo of Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye in a ruinous state, accompanied by the text: 'The most architectural thing about this building is the state of decay in which it is in. Architecture only survives where it negates the form that society expects of it. Where it negates itself by transgressing the limits that history has set for it.'

In the third correspondence called, 'Part Three: The Transgression', he recaptures the essentials from the first two in seven steps. Tschumi concludes that at the point where a building has collected traces over time, where it shows life and death, this is where concept and real space might join; he repeats and explains the text used in the 'Advertisement for architecture: *'it negates itself, where it transcends its paradoxical nature by negating the form that society expects of it. In other words, it is not a matter of destruction or avant-garde subversion but of transgression'.* This is even followed by concrete examples from the early seventies on how transgression can work: *'While recently the*

rules called for the rejection of ornament, today's sensibility has changed, and purity is under attack. In a similar way, while the crowded street of the turn of the century was criticised by CIAM's theories of urban fragmentation, today the ruling status of the social and conceptual mechanisms eroding urban life is already the next to be transgressed.

Whether through literal or phenomenal transgression, architecture is seen here as the momentary and sacrilegious convergence of real space and ideal space. Limits remain, for transgression does not mean the methodical destruction of any code or rule that concerns space or architecture. On the contrary, it introduces new articulations between inside and outside, between concept and experience. Very simply it means overcoming unacceptable prevalences.'

It may not be precisely how Tschumi meant it, but working in existing buildings, on-site, in participation processes, working directly on a 1.1 scale, experimenting with them to the max is working with transgression in real time. They could be opened up for new uses, including temporary use, occupation with guerrilla actions – such as Tschumi himself once practised – while constantly developing new tools and methods for transgressing the existing state of buildings. In fact, a perfect way to fuse, to merge concept

and reality, thus challenging the rules and nature of architecture and its role in society.

We need the down-to-earth 'Piet Blom Style', together with a (large) pinch of Tschumi. Exploration and experimentation in existing buildings can open up new possibilities, new qualities in architectural space, in technology, and a sustainability impossible to achieve in new constructions and with traditional tools and methods. In the great diversity of contributions to this 9th Joelho, the authors all describe, contemplate, propose, provoke and thereby transgress the limits that society, history and architecture has set for them.

Reuse of modernist buildings, chapter by chapter

This Joelho No. 9 consists of a combination of contributions from three different sources: the 2nd RMB Conference, the 2nd RMB Students' Workshop, and a Joelho 9 Call for Papers, which challenged participants to explore pedagogical or professional practices. The proposals focus on one of four themes - Tools, Methods, Interdisciplinarity and Research – all with a link to the reuse of buildings, enabling a discussion of the contributions regarding the reuse of modernist buildings.

The journal is structured around four chapters, offering the reader a clear and comprehensible journey through the texts. The 'Projects' chapter includes articles by ZUS and Corvo, both of which are linked to the keynote talks on professional practice that they gave at the 2nd RMB Conference in Coimbra. Here we have two collective ateliers working in completely different contexts – ZUS in the north of Europe, in Rotterdam, a truly modernist city; Corvo in the south, in Miranda do Corvo, a village close to Coimbra, a truly traditional city. Both are transgressing the status quo of architectural practice, either with citizen engagement processes or with design tools, as diagrams or large scale models. The third text in this chapter is a careful and critical reflection by Tilemachos Adrianopoulos on the renovation of an outstanding project – The Athens Conservatory (1959-1978) – originating from former Bauhaus student Jan Despo.

The chapter on 'Methodologies' offers a transversal approach to the reuse issue, stressing the methodology of research in and on design and reuse. Albena Yaneva conducts an almost anthropological survey on the ins and outs of OMA and the design history of the extensions of the Whitney Museum in New York, Carlos Fortuna discusses the role of the old in the new through the story of

Brasilia and Kurokava's tower, Christian Gaenshirt focuses on the fixed and changing design tools of the architect, and Dieter Leyssen's contribution look at temporality, 'the meanwhile' and the (re)use of buildings. These approaches are complemented by the chapter entitled 'Case Studies', in which the authors explore and describe their respective approaches in research and design through analyses of modernist urban projects: António Carvalho with Alvalade in Lisbon, Marta Peixoto on the changing positions of Brazilian modernism, and Carolina Coelho on students' use of the modernist José Falcão school in Coimbra. This chapter also includes two other types of case studies, pedagogical experiences, that show methods that architecture students can use to work with the challenges of the reuse of modernist buildings: Els de Vos describes the transnational RMB project on reuse of modernist buildings, while Anna Giovanelli shows how students work with innovative concepts for reuse in her design studio at Sapienza University in Rome.

Joelho dedicates the last chapter, 'Exhibition', to students' projects and their contributions to the themes. Within the framework of the RMB project, the 2nd Workshop took place in the abandoned Santa-Clara-a-Nova convent

to spark a dialogue with the surprising modernity of structures that were built for the everyday life of 16th-century nuns. In a 5-day workshop, the students' projects challenged the preconceived ideas of the city for its modern neighbourhoods, and proposed transgressive strategies.

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