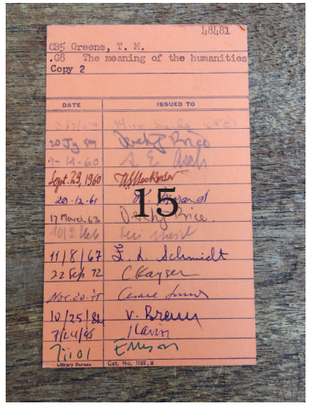
Trace

Notes on adaptive reuse

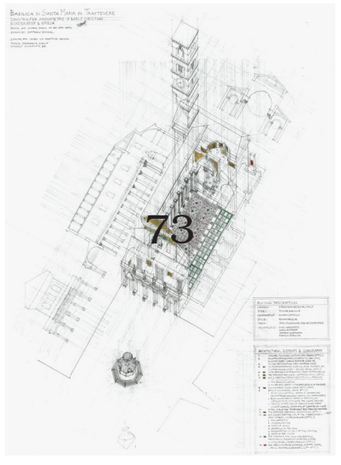
N°4 On Iconology











# Preface

*S. Devoldere*

It is with due pride that I offer you, our valued reader, the fourth edition of the Trace cahier. Originating as a log of our research line on adaptive reuse, the cahier has grown into a research journal in its own right, with peer-reviewed contributions that go well beyond the boundaries of our faculty at Hasselt University. In addition to the contributions by our own researchers, the present edition also contains articles by professor Barbara Baert from KULeuven and professor Sally Stone of the Manchester School of Architecture. In her text, Baert discusses the research potential of the visual, thus outlining the scope of this issue's theme. Sally Stone elaborates on the narrative of a design and how it can shift or strengthen positions.

A beautiful drawing or a well-told story can unlock unsuspected knowledge and reveal unexpected possibilities. This cahier contemplates the intentions of architectural projects and the meanings that are given to them. Iconological research can disclose hidden layers of interpretation, regardless of the author's intentions. These intrinsic meanings of drawings or buildings can in themselves then inspire new designs. The power of signs and drawings in iconic modernist developments, in government architecture, in quick sketches... it adds new layers to the academic field of adaptive reuse and to the research on heritage that we have been developing at our faculty over the years.

The designer's view plays a pivotal role in this research. The connection with our international master on Adaptive Reuse therefore remains essential. Nikolaas Vande Keere props up his reflections on contentious heritage, and how its original intentions can turn within a shifting timeframe or in light of a historical perspective, with design exercises by our international students. Saidja Heyninck and Stefanie Weckx also use student work as a basis for their observations on rational and emotional techniques of representation in architecture. Our educational courses are a tool that we consciously use to enrich the research at the Faculty of Architecture and Arts. They help us look at issues of reuse and heritage from a variety of (international) perspectives. They help us explore the space that exists between artistic imagination and scientific metier.

# Editorial
# Iconology of the Palimpsest

*K. Van Cleempoel* . . . . . .

**What else than a natural and mighty palimpsest is the human brain? Such a palimpsest is my brain; such a palimpsest, oh reader! is yours. Everlasting layers of ideas, images, feelings, have fallen upon your brain softly as light. Each succession has seemed to bury all that went before. And yet, in reality, not one has been extinguished.**[1]

Thomas De Quincey, *The Palimpsest of the Human Brain*, 1845

**Things outlast us, they know more about us than we know about them: they carry the experience they have had with us inside them and are – in fact – the book of our history opened before us.**[2]

W. G. Sebald, *Unrecounted*, 2004

## The marked canvas

This cahier explores the multitude of meanings of places: a dynamic process with deep historical traces. Remodelling historical sites often entails interventions that change initial meanings and introduce new ones. Sometimes specific narratives and associations completely independent from their original programme, motif and use become part of sites. Rudolph Machado used the metaphor of a marked canvas to visualise this hermeneutic process: how the past becomes a package of sense-making – of built-up meaning to be accepted, maintained, transformed, suppressed or refused.[3] Historical sites often include iconographic elements such as ornaments, reliefs, sculptures and mosaics. However, the ground plans and elevation also articulate their original programme and architectural motif. As functions change over time, these iconographical traces and intended meanings are re-interpreted with the new functions, and new layers of meaning are introduced, with or without the clear intentions of an architect. The beauty and attraction of historical sites are, therefore, not necessarily the product of one master: 'they are ruined, stolen, or appropriated. They flit away and reproduce themselves, evolve and are translated into foreign languages. They are simulated, prophesied, and restored, transformed into sacred relics, empty spectacles, and *casus belli*'. Not one of the buildings whose secret lives recounted here has lost anything by having been transformed. Instead they have endured in a way that they would never have done if no one had ever altered them. Architecture is all too often imagined as if building do not – and should not – change. But change they do, and have always done. Buildings are gifts, and because they are, we must pass them on'.[4]

1 Thomas De Quincey, 'The Palimpsest of the Human Brain — a meditation upon the deeper layers of human consciousness and memory' in his *Suspiria de Profundis*,1845 (essays.quotidiana.org).

2 Teju Cole, 'W.G. Sebald's poetry of the disregarded', *The New Yorker*, 5 April 2012.

3 Rodolfo Machado, 'Old Buildings as Palimpsest. Toward a Theory of Remodelling', *Progressive Architecture* 11, no. 72 (1976): 46–49.

4 Edward Hollis, *The Secret Lives of Buildings. From the Ruins of the Parthenon to the Vegas Strip in Thirteen Stories* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2009), 12.

The metaphor of the marked or re-written canvas does not reduce architecture to an 'image' in the same fashion that 'iconology' does not reduce a painting or sculpture to a mere symbol. Instead, architecture, as the visual arts becomes part of a larger cultural landscape. In this cahier, we want to situate these concepts – marked canvas and iconology – alongside one another: the continued lives of buildings and their changing meanings over time. Indeed, we have developed our hypothesis to read these layered semantics of heritage sites via the well-established and widely recognised art-historical methodology of 'iconography-iconology' first described by Erwin Panofsky (1892–1986) in 1939[5] as an intellectual inheritance of Aby Warburg (1866–1929). Panofsky differentiated an iconographical analysis – defined as the first layer of meaning but more focussed on a formal analysis – from an iconological interpretation, which he associated with exploring intrinsic meaning. This iconological level communicates 'things that the creator of the image may not have consciously been thinking about'. The built-up meaning can thus become independent from the initial one, marking it as a dynamic process. In this cahier, we will negotiate with this notion of 'intrinsic meaning', arguing that the layered meanings of heritage sites are capricious and partly subjective.

For Warburg, architecture was both medium-specific and a carrier of meaning.[6] His design choice to include an elliptical-shaped reading room in his Hamburg library[7] is a clear example: it is a metaphor alluding to Kepler's discovery of the orbit of Mars, as Warburg intended for his reading room to serve as a 'Thinking Space'.[8] *Nachleben* is how Warburg described the cultural transmission of images throughout time and across cultures: a continuous path or, rather, a cycle of images. The underlying pattern is memory; thus, 'Mnemosyne' was written above the entrance to the elliptical reading room.

For Panofsky, too, architecture was material (e.g. 'style') and immaterial (e.g. 'meaning'), and like painting and sculpture, he defined the discipline as part of a broader cultural framework. This understanding would lead to his famous essay 'Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism' (1951), which compared architectural ordering systems to intellectual ordering systems.[9]

We want to expand this generous reading of architecture and its intimate relationship with words and interpretation to the experience of time – the longue durée of our built environment.

Further, we introduce a novel approach: the association of iconology with adaptive reuse. All mentioned authors consider paintings or architectural sites as a singular historical subject with no – or very limited – later alterations or interventions. In our case, the subject has been remodelled considerably in the past, and it remains open-ended: new architectural strategies enter into a formal and conceptual dialogue with the past. This conceptualisation creates new conditions for reading and understanding Panofsky's and Krautheimer's models. In the first cahier, we used the concept of the *Iconology of the Palimpsest* to describe these layers of built-up meaning.[10] This fourth cahier further elaborates on this condition and seeks – albeit tentatively – to define the boundaries of an iconological method in relation to an architectural engagement with the past.

Therefore, Barbara Baert's essay should open this cahier as she explores new paths in the landscape of 'iconology' in post-Panofsky generations. She speaks of iconology as a multiple-layered methodology, stretching over interdisciplinary fields such as: 'Theology, the Art Sciences, Anthropology, Architecture and, in a certain manner, as proven along the way, Psychoanalysis. This gaze upon the depth and width touches the capacity of the Human Sciences to open themselves up to the sensorial experience of knowledge and art, and thus touches on an epistemology that integrates intuition and emotions'.[11]

As Baert's essay negotiates with the traditional conceptual boundaries of Panofsky's methodology, the other authors also explore various possibilities by focusing on the built-up meanings of historical sites.

Two examples in the cahier illustrate this process: Marie Moors and Elke Couchez describe how the intended meanings of the integrated sculptures by architect Renaat Braem for his social housing estate 'Arena' (c. 1960), become more layered as immigrants began moving into the estate from 1990 onwards and 'read' those integrated statues differently. A large star, for example, was intended by Braem as a non-dogmatic symbol: 'Just as nature creates flowers, we make stone flowers. They, too, are resting points on the path of eternal evolution'. Nevertheless, for many new inhabitants, the star serves as a reminder of the Moroccan flag. Braem's abstract sculptures have become bridges for identification, regardless of the author's intentions and each observer's cultural background. Nikolaas Van de Keere's essay 'Subtle act of resistance – Contentious national heritage and adaptive reuse' develops a different angle: the spatial legacy of Belgian's colonial past and the long shadow of Leopold II. The debate over the removal of his statues is coined as contemporary iconoclasm,

5 Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology. Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939).; R. Klein, 'Considérations sur les fondements de l'iconographie', in La Forme et l'intelligible (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), 353–74; J. Białostocki, 'Iconography', in Dictionary of the History of Ideas, ed. P. P. Wiener (New York: Macmillan, 1973), 442–524.

6 On the role of architecture in Warburg's legacy, see Caroline van Eck, 'The Warburg Institute and Architectural History', *Common Knowledge* 18, no. 1 (2011): 131–45.

7 The transfer of the library from Hamburg to London, due the rise of the National Socialist (Nazi) government in Germany in 1939, forced the Jewish banking family to relocate its contents to the Courtauld Institute in London. See https://warburg.sas.ac.uk/about-us/history-warburg-institute/transfer-institute.

8 Lisa Robertson, *Thinking Space* (New York: Organism for Poetic Research, 2013), 11.

9 A series of two essays by Daniel Sherer explore the role of architecture in the intellectual discourse of Erwin Panofsky, particularly its relationship to iconology. See Sherer's 'Panofsky on Architecture, Part 1: Iconology and the Interpretation of Built Form, 1915–1956', *History of Humanities* 5, no. 1 (2020) and 'Panofsky on Architecture, Part 2: Mental Habits, Disguised Symbolism, and the "Spell of



and Van De Keere reads them as 'tokens of the afterlife of colonialism and its deliberate contamination with nationalism in Belgium'. He then explores the urban and architectural footprint of Leopold II and focuses on *Parc du Cinquantenaire* in Brussels, which was developed for various exhibitive functions on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Belgium (1880). The site was the subject of the design studio at the International Master in Adaptive Reuse, and the students were invited to dialogue with the contested heritage from 'within' by tackling 'iconographical voids'. The strategy was not to 'decolonise the museum' using a top-down approach with a strong ideological perspective but through surgical interventions motivated by clear intentions. Consequently, students embraced a more nuanced approach, contributing with separate pieces of the often-sophisticated puzzle to decolonise. They became aware of the possibilities of adaptive reuse as a vehicle to alter meanings and to enter into dialogue with the past to envisage its fragile continuity with the present.

### Fragments as citations from the past

There is a rather interesting line of thinking that has fed the debate of iconology in architectural theory, most famously by Richard Krautheimer[12], Rudolf Wittkower[13], Colin Rowe[14] and Marvin Trachtenberg[15], all of them associated, directly or indirectly, with the Warburg Institute in London. Further, all have invoked a cyclic notion of time as a primary condition in the development of architectural meaning instead of the more traditional linear understanding of time in architectural history. Furthermore, architecture-specific elements such as plan, elevation and typology were added to the arena of 'signifiers' or 'symbols'. Krautheimer, for example, addressed questions of the symbolical significance of the layout or of the parts of a structure, including how its shape relates to a specific dedication or purpose. The 'content' of architecture, he argued, seems to have been one of the most important problems in mediaeval architecture. As such, Krautheimer found a direct form/contents link, close to the initial methods of Warburg and Panofsky, but projected on the discipline of mediaeval architecture.

The essay by Christoph Grafe and Bie Plevoets elaborates on this angle by introducing the concept of *spolia* as carriers of meaning. They introduce us to the work of Dale Kinney, a student of Krautheimer and a leading expert on spoliation, who used the early Christian church of Sta. Maria in Trastevere (4th–12th century) to show that several (eight) pre-mediaeval capitals can be traced to the libraries of the Baths of Caracalla. Kinney characterises the meaning of these *spolia* as 'a deliberate demonstration of the imperial prerogatives of the basilica's papal founder, and that the demonstration was meant to impress the founder's status upon the viewer'.[16] Plevoets and Grafe subsequently explain how abt Suger, too, attempted to acquire columns from the Baths of Diocletian for the construction of the abbey church at St Denis (1137) not for strictly utilitarian reasons but to inject meaning and historical continuity into the project. Hans-Rudolf Meier is quoted on how '*spolia* as a medium mediates between presence and absence; it is a sign representing that which is absent, but at the same time creates a new, transformed presence of the absent through its materiality'.[17] Convincingly, the authors stretch this negotiation with architectural fragments through time into contemporary practice, including well-known cultural citations (e.g. the Ningbo History Museum by Amateur Architecture Studio) and as part of ecological reasoning (e.g. the interiors of the Generale Bank in Brussels and role of Rotor architects).

### Tracing a multitude of pasts

Intrinsic architectural meaning can also be embedded in other media, such as drawings and oral narratives. Drawings are primarily intended to represent an architectural condition, whether real or virtual. However, drawings can also be charged with additional meanings, or they can become mediators between the past and new design proposals, from representation to innovation. For example, on 2 July 1956, Colin Rowe sent a thank you letter to Louis Kahn for a dinner party in Philadelphia a few weeks earlier with a copy of the *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism* by Rudolph Wittkower as a gift. In a postscript of the letter appears yellow tracing paper with three colours of various possible readings of a floor plan of the Vitruvian villa of the Ancients, Plate LI of Palladio's 1570 *Quattro Libri dell'architettura* [Figs. 1 and 2]. Below the drawing, he typed: 'Sorry I didn't have any more coloured pencils because one could go on doing this sort of thing. Don't you really find it fantastic the way all the spaces here fluctuate, are alternately positive and negative, etc. Also the way in which you could almost turn the plan inside out because everything is entirely constructed?' Rowe's letter better explains his intentions by referring to an earlier discussion he had with Kahn on the concepts of Growth vs Composition:

> I remember that something of our conversation in Philadelphia revolved around principles which we designated as GROWTH and COMPOSITION. Principles which are opposed.... You deplored

Circularity"', *History of Humanities* 5, no. 2 (2020).

10 Koenraad Van Cleempoel, 'A Short Note on Traces and Memory', *Trace. Notes on Adaptive Reuse*, n°1 On Tradition (2018), 11.

11 See p.18 in this cahier.

12 Richard Krautheimer, 'Introduction to an Iconography of Medieval Architecture', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 5 (1942): 1–33. See also Catherine Carver McCurrach, 'Renovation Reconsidered: Richard Krautheimer and the Iconography of Architecture', *Gesta* 50, no. 1 (2011): 41–69.

13 Rudolf Wittkower, *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism* (London: The Warburg Institute, 1949). See also Henry A. Millon, 'Rudolf Wittkower, "Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism": Its Influence on the Development and Interpretation of Modern Architecture', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 31, no. 2 (1972): 83–91.

14 Colin Rowe, 'The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa: Palladio and Le Corbusier compared', *Architectural Review* (March 1947): 101–104.

15 Marvin Trachtenberg, *Building-in-Time: From Giotto to Alberti and Modern Oblivion*, (London: Yale University Press, 2010).

> COMPOSITION because it appeared to be no more than a manipulation of forms for the sake of effect. You wanted to GROW a building.... For me, your cubes, our hexagonal cells, are objective data with a life of their own in which one can't intervene. They are independent, aggressively so, irreducible, intractable phenomena. This I like. At the same time, although they are independent, they are in fact the acts of your volition. Once born you can't violate their mode of being. But you are in a position (since they are independent) to argue with them.... [T]o me your cubes are a very powerful system of ordinance that would like nothing better than to bring into some sort of dialectical relationship with parti.

It is argued that this discussion and the tracing paper of the Palladian plan influenced Kahn's drawings for the Jewish Community Center and his consequent design, shifting away from his paradigm of Growth towards that of Rowe's Composition.[18]

This reflection on architectural principles in its past and contemporary conditions, through a tracing paper, reveals a powerful *design possibility*. There is no representation of the past on the tracing paper, as its intrinsic meaning lies within the design options it opens for the future. This mediating power could show us another layer of how iconology can operate in architecture and how intrinsic meanings hidden in drawings enter the creative process and become an active mediator for a design.

The essay of Stefanie Weckx and Saidja Heynickx also addresses the concepts of iconography and iconology in relation to drawings. Through the work done by students in the seminar 'Tactics' for the International Master in Adaptive Reuse, the different strategies and drawing techniques to capture an atmosphere of a site are introduced. The authors connect the act of drawing and a system of coding with the expression of qualities at a site. Drawing can be seen more broadly – in addition to the introduction of the red and blue pencil, the collage creates an anachronistic combination that results in new images.

The trajectory in the seminar started at a common place: the museum Z33, which was extended delicately by Francesca Torzo[19] and the former beguinage that will be remodelled by Bovenbouw and David Kohn Architects.[20] When expressing their chosen details, students had a certain freedom to include a personal reading and wonder for the space. This connection between emotion and scientific reflections remains suffused with the perfume of taboo and scepticism.

Baert's essay also elaborates on this paradox, and she refers to a lecture by Gertrude Bing (1892–1964) on Warburg at the Courtauld Institute in 1962, saying, that 'we are here treading on dangerous ground. Perhaps nothing has been as hotly disputed as the power of the Fine Arts to render emotions'.[21] Yet, we seem to agree that intrinsic meaning cannot be separated from personal conditions and that, indeed, there is a 'locus' situated between the artistic imagination and the scientific métier, a condition that Baert calls 'the *Zwischenraum*', or third space, inspired by Siri Hustved [cfr. infra, p.18].

The enclosed poster in this cahier also dwells in this third space. An alumnus of the International Master in Adaptive Reuse, Matthew Moskal, was invited to address the built-up meaning in the early Christian church of Santa Maria in Trastevere, Rome. Gifted with artistic and poetic skills, his rendering of the church oscillates between an accurate axonometry and rendering of the space and a personal, intuitive reading of it. The North facade is peeled away to expose the elements of the interior and reveal the relationship between the horizontal (Cosmatesque floor) and vertical plane (*spolia* columns from the Roman baths of Caracalla). However, one cannot merely describe this drawing as an archaeological or architectural rendering; its delicacy and *personal reading* of the layered meanings add value to the artistic appearance of the drawing. The elegant drawing thus explores the boundaries and limits of its genre in an attempt to visualise a multitude of pasts and a wealth of meanings, focusing on the subsequent representation of the Holy Virgin throughout the centuries.

The essay by Sally Stone explores yet another medium to reflect on the intangible aspects of built-up meanings: storytelling is presented as a research tool to reveal the complex relationships between residences and those who occupy them. Stone explains how analogies in stories uncover the inherent meaning embedded within the physical building but also the virtual narrative that supports it. Often, these stories need to be sought out and uncovered – they are not easy to find, and equally, they are not straightforward to read. *The story does not solve the design problem, but it identifies it.* Contained within all buildings are individual narratives, again alluding to the mentioned third space of Siri Hustved and Barbara Baert: 'Whether these are benign tales of domestication or orderly work, fanciful fables of strange and wonderful occupation, or despairing stories of oppression, exploitation and woe, these chronicles are embedded within the very being of the structures. As with all narratives, there are many tales to tell, and some are more hidden than others'.

16 Dale Kinney, 'Spolia from the Baths of Caracalla in Sta. Maria in Trastevere', *The Art Bulletin* 68, no. 3 (1986): 379–97, 390.

17 Hans-Rudolf Meier, *Spolien: Phänomene der Wiederverwendung in der Architektur* (Berlin: Jovis, 2021), 208.

18 Michael Merrill, *Louis Kahn: The Importance of a Drawing* (Zurich: Lars Muller Publishers, 2021). An essay from this volume is available online at https://drawingmatter.org/growth-or-composition-colin-rowe-to-louis-kahn/.

19 Bie Plevoets and Shailja Patel, 'Z33 Hasselt: Hortus Conclusus as a Model for an Urban Interior', *Interiority* 4, no. 1 (2021): 79–94.

20 Koenraad Van Cleempoel, 'Memory as a Design Studio: The Transformation of the Hasselt Beguinage into a Faculty of Architecture', *Trace. Notes on Adaptive Reuse*, n°3 On Collectivity (2020): 65–74.

21 Gertrude Bing, 'A. M. Warburg', in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 28 (1965): 299–313, 310.

22 T. S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1919), published in *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Methuen & Co, 1920). Eliot redefines 'tradition' as a need to read 'the historical sense' not only by considering the 'pastness of the past' but also its 'present'. For a poet, 'the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past'.

23 Lina Bo Bardi, *Propaedeutic Contribution to the Teaching of Architecture Theory* (São Paulo, 1957). In the preface, Bo Bardi writes that 'there is no difference between "modern" and "history"; his history is not seen as a "*cosa da forbici e colla*" (cut and paste) but as something alive and present, a history revived with fundamentals endowed with the capacity to transmit fruitful lessons. It is clearly not the history of textbooks, monotonous and second hand, merely capable of suggesting that the "past" is past and no longer valid, suggesting that the world began today, and man, alone, has the task of reconstructing a "paradise lost". It is a history that is not "History" as a mere abstraction, but, like life itself, concrete and fecund'. See Catherine Veikos, *Lina Bo Bardi: The Theory of Architectural Practice* (London: Routledge, 2014), 50.



**Conclusion**

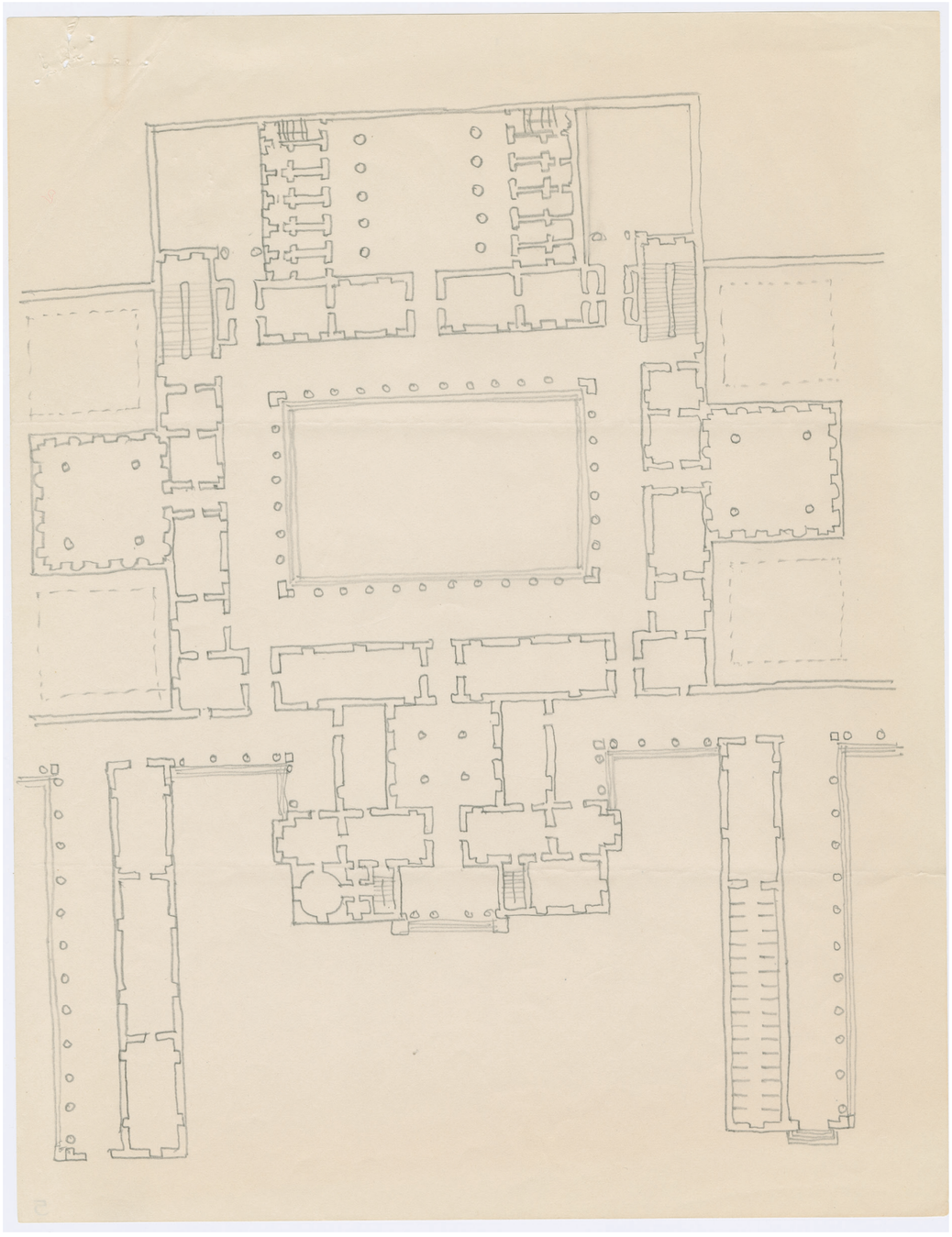
This cahier presents several approaches for reading and interpreting the multitude of pasts and meanings in our built environment and the memories that have been left behind. Albeit tentatively, the notion of palimpsest and its attached meanings in architecture are evaluated alongside the methodological boundaries of iconology. Through notions of memory, *spolia* and the marked canvas, and via media such as hand drawing, storytelling and academic reflections, we aim to show the *ampleur* of hermeneutics in relation to adaptive reuse. There is a clear challenge to systematically peel off the layers of meaning that lay hidden in our built environment; it feels like looking into unmeasurable depths. Where to start?

This vertigo cannot be tackled with so-called established scientific methods alone, but its complexity may benefit from exploring other media and the personal conditions of the observers. Indeed, addressing intrinsic meanings and rhetoric in the built-up meanings of historical sites to develop an iconological reading will benefit from inclusive attitudes. This gaze upon the depth and width of our architectural memory will also need to include a sensorial experience of knowledge, touching on an epistemology that integrates intuition and emotions. The marked canvas of our architectural environment invites an inclusive approach to not only show its relevance as an historical object of the past but equally *as a subject with potential for the future*, as shown in the Palladian drawing by Colin Rowe for Louis Kahn. This Janus-like condition of built-up meaning in architecture is essential for a new, inclusive association between iconology and architecture.

We have therefore tried to move from an iconographical reading in architecture – mostly dealing with a *descriptive* attitude – towards an iconological one, which we associated with a *designerly gaze*. Panofsky's definition of iconology with 'intrinsic meaning' does not stop with an advanced historical analysis of architecture. We argue that an iconological reading of an architectural past in relation to adaptive reuse cannot be indifferent to future design options. That is the difference between an iconographical and iconological or designerly phase. There is no *pastness of the past* (T. S. Eliot[22]) but an *historical present*, as Lina Bo Bardi calls it, inspired by Sigfrid Giedion's (1888–1968) view of history as a 'dynamic, ever-changing process'.[23]

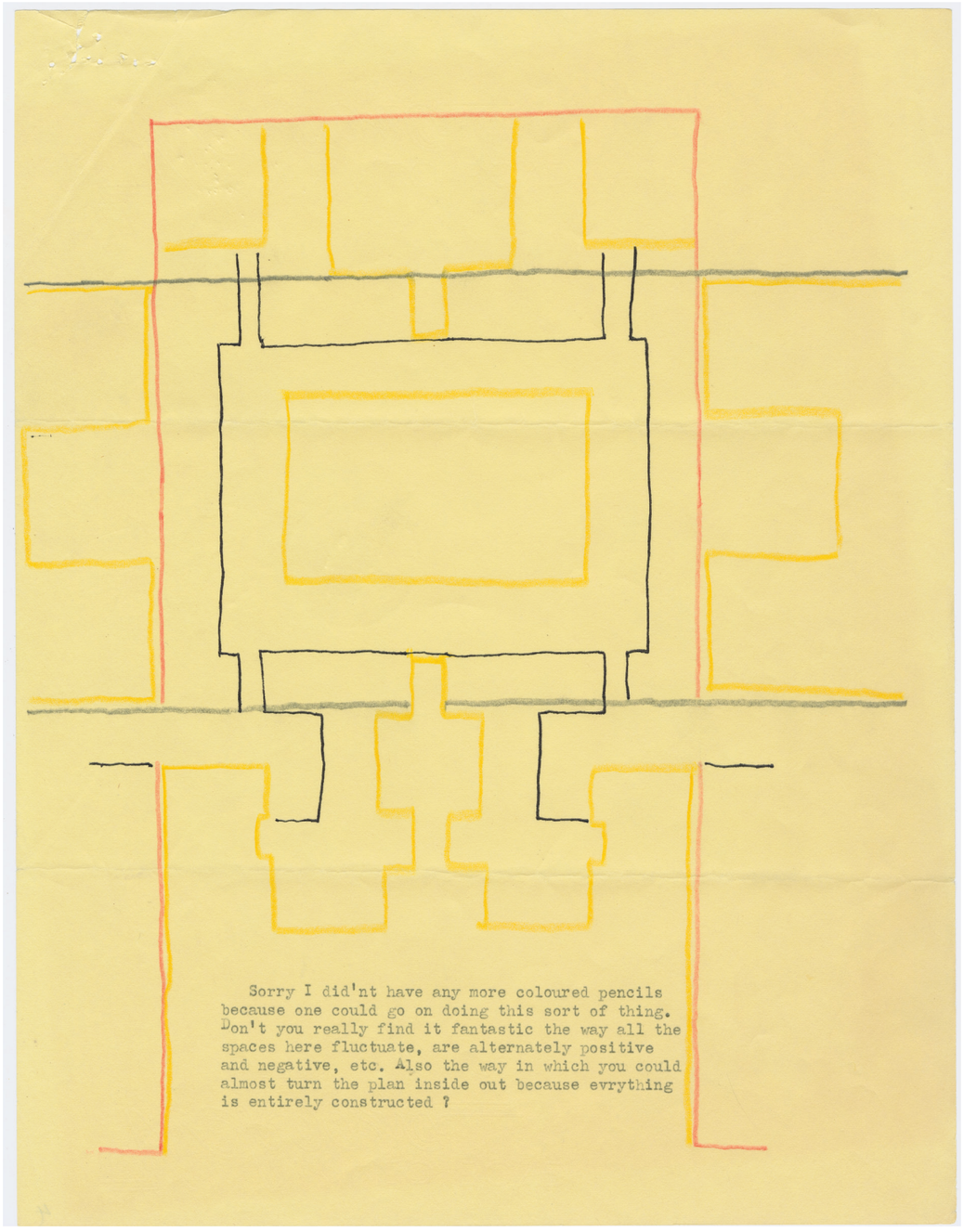
As such, the past can be considered a reservoir of possibilities and a refined and 'thick' reading of that landscape as part of a creative process similar to sketching and model-making. There is no remote past under a linear chronology but a neighbouring past following a capricious cyclical chronology. The vastness of a multitude of architectural pasts begs for a generous reading – one that includes intuition and emotion in addition to more orthodox approaches.

Future architectural practice in a saturated built landscape will increasingly have to confront the tabula scripta instead of a tabula rasa, which was the norm for centuries. Negotiating wisely in a qualitative fashion with meanings and memories embedded in that vast reservoir will become a much-desired competence in the field of architecture. This cahier represents an attempt to argue for a 'thick' iconological reading of that built memory as part of a careful designerly gaze.



[1] Drawing by Colin Rowe tracing the floor plan of the *Vitruvian villa of the Ancients, Plate LI of Palladio's 1570 Quattro Libri dell'architettura*, for Louis Kahn, in a letter dated 2 July 1956). Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission and the University of Pennsylvania.






[2] Drawing by Colin Rowe tracing contours of Palladio's *Vitruvian villa of the Ancients*, Plate LI of his 1570 *Quattro Libri dell'architettura*, included in a letter to Louis Kahn dated 2 July 1956. The intrinsic meaning of the drawing relates to a discussion between Rowe and Kahn on the architectural principles of 'growth' and 'composition' and would eventually influence Kahn's design strategy. Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission and the University of Pennsylvania.

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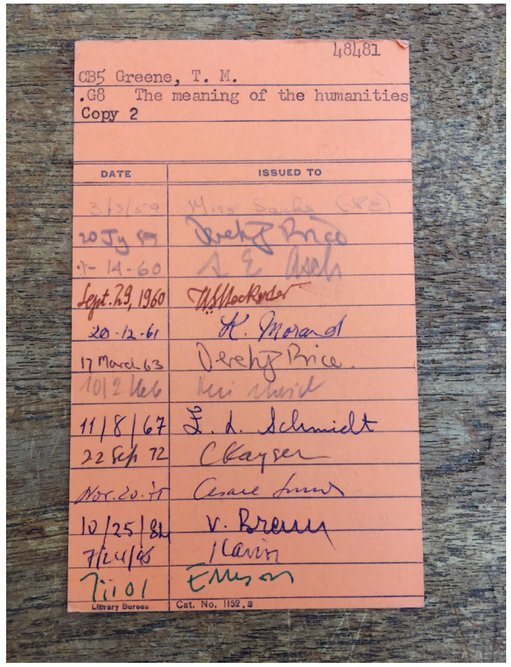
[1-2] Drawing by Colin Rowe. Source: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission and the University of Pennsylvania. Courtesy of the Architectural Archives of the University of Pennsylvania.



# Iconology or *La scienza senza nome**

*B. Baert* . . . . . .




[1] Readers' book log of Theodore Meyer Greene's (1897-1969), *The Meaning of the Humanities*, Princeton-London, 1938 (recto). Princeton, Institute for Advanced Study, Library of Historical Studies, in which Panofsky Published his seminal 'The History of Art as a Humanistic Discipline' for the first time.

**When…**

Hans Belting wrote his famous essay entitled *Das Ende der Kunstgeschichte?* in 1983, he stood at the cusp between a crisis and a new future for the study of art and the visual medium:[1] so-called 'visual studies' or the 'visual turn'.[2] 'Visual studies' emerged in the context of a growing awareness of the impact of visual media on society and culture.[3] The very beginnings of 'visual studies' can be situated in 1997, with W. T. J. Mitchell's article on the 'visual turn': *What do Pictures Want?*[4] In Mitchell's article, the 'visual turn' is defined as an energy that overwhelmed Art History in the realm of a visual interest in disciplines that – to say the least – were outside the visual arts, including Linguistics, Literature, Sociology, etc.[5] From the Nineties onwards, art historians no longer had an exclusive patent on the study of the visual medium. The humanities as a whole became part of the broader study of the image as a complex interplay of 'visuality', technology, institutions, and discourse and the body.

'Visual studies' is now a recognised discipline in academic departments, with its own journals, textbooks, and readers, and recent historiographical overviews and revisions. Some art historians still have the impression that 'visual studies' pushes back the relevance of an older term, iconology – the study of the historical and literary context of art as exemplified in the work of Erwin Panofsky (1892-1968)[6] – or, at least, that 'visual studies' swallows other image-interpreting theories and practices. Other scholars are convinced that Art History, often limited to the sole decoding of the legible in the visible, could indeed benefit from a set of pointed questions pertaining to the 'period eye', namely systems of representation and their underlying ideologies. Whatever one's view, the premise of 'visual studies' that vision is not a natural given but a cultural one draws attention to the social construction of the visual and the visual construction of the social. This complex body of visual culture, cutting across many fields of research, is the most important challenge to today's study of humanities and the visual medium

**Another seed…**

… planted in the Eighties by the post-Panofsky generations was 'historical anthropology'. In fact, classic Panofskian iconology was seriously lacking in engagement with low art and performativity. It is important to question the exclusive attention that has been devoted to vision, to the detriment of other senses which are nonetheless active in the experience of images, and more generally, in the multi-sensory relationship to the world. Interest in the artefact as part of a social network of rituals and bodily interactions such as touching, kissing, dancing, joined with the study of the object in the context of its gendered, ethnographic, and intercultural archetypes is today an accepted part of Art History and iconology in terms of both research and teaching. It was in fact Belting's own answer to his 1983 question.

Hans Belting's *Bild-Anthropologie* treats the image from the perspective of its mediating role with regard to the bodily: the viewer, and the viewer's body, but also the artefact as body or body-part. According to Belting, this relationship is ultimately rooted in death. "Der Widerspruch zwischen Anwesenheit und Abwesenheit, den wir auch heute noch an den Bildern feststellen, besitzt Seine Wurzeln in der Erfahrung des Todes der anderen. Man hat die Bilder vor Augen, so wie man Tote vor Augen hat, die dennoch nicht da sind."[7] In the French-speaking research world, an analogous trend translates into Georges Didi-Huberman's *anthropologie visuelle*.[8] His concept of *l'image ouverte* sees the visual as an uncanny opening, a pulsating set of traces, mysteriously playing upon our own bodily conditions and spiritual phantasms.

Hans Belting, Georges Didi-Huberman, and in the Low Countries, Paul Vandenbroeck, are the fathers of a paradigmatic shift that we might call the 'anthropological turn'.[9] The rise of sensitivity to gender from the Nineties onwards is not to be under-estimated as a factor in the 'anthropological turn'. Paul Vandenbroeck's *Hooglied* in 1994 pioneered the contextualisation of artistic production by women religious.[10] This production is by nature 'impulsive' and 'wild'. Reconstituting nuns' art and their collections brought out their multimedia characteristics.[11] Objects were discovered made up of textile, embroidery, stitching, combined with rolls of paper (*paperolles*), breadcrumbs, papier-mâché, and so forth. The 'recycling' work, ingeniously combining materials, and often applying them in whimsically complex afigurative patterns is also characteristic of the production of relics. Confrontation with these objects revealed the short-comings of classic Art History and demanded

* Parts of this essay are borrowed from Barbara Baert, *Interruptions & Transitions. Collected Essays on the Senses in Medieval and Early Modern Visual Culture* (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

1 See the recent companion by Colum Hourihane, "Medieval Iconography: An Introduction," in id. (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Medieval Iconography* (London/New York: Routledge, 2017), 1-8, at 5, listing the prominent scholars in the field, as I will discuss them below too.

2 Hans Belting, *Das Ende der Kunstgeschichte?* (München: Beck, 1983).

3 James Elkins, *Visual Studies: A Skeptical Introduction* (New York/London: Routledge, 2003); Deborah Cherry (ed.), *Art: History: Visual: Culture* (Malden, MA/Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005); W. J. T. Mitchell, "The Family of Images," in *Images: A Reader*, ed. Sunil Manghani, Arthur Piper and Jon Simons (London: SAGE, 2006), 296-299.

4 W. J. T. Mitchell, "What Do Pictures Want? An Idea of Visual Culture," in *Visible Touch: Modernism and Masculinity*, ed. Terry Smith (Sydney: Power Institute Publications, 1997), 215-232; reprint in *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 28-56.

5 With special thanks to Prof. Dr. Ralph Dekoninck, Université catholique de Louvain (U.C.L.).

6 Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 5-9; W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago, IL/London: University of Chicago Press, 1986); Irving Lavin, "Panofsky's History of Art," in *Meaning in the Visual Arts: Views from the Outside*, ed. Irving Lavin (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 3-8, at 6; Barbara Baert, *Signed PAN. Erwin Panofsky's (1892-1968) "The History of Art as a Humanistic Discipline" (Princeton, 1938)*, Studies in Iconology, 18, (Leuven-Walpole-Paris-Bristol: Peeters, 2020).

7 Hans Belting, *Bild-Anthropologie: Entwürfe für eine Bildwissenschaft* (München: Fink, 2001), 143.

8 Georges Didi-Huberman, *Ce que nous voyons, ce qui nous regarde* (Paris: Minuit, 1992), applies the concept of the 'open image' or 'portal'. The first glance is the descriptive look before the portal, the second the metaphysical, looking through the portal and not at the portal itself, the third combines the view of the portal and the view through the portal.

9 Paul Vandenbroeck, *Utopia's Doom: The 'Graal' as Paradise of Lust, the Sect of the Free Spirit and Jheronimus Bosch's So-called 'Garden of Earthly Delights'*, Art & Religion, 8 (Leuven: Peeters, 2017).

10 Paul Vandenbroeck, *Hooglied: De beeldwereld van religieuze vrouwen in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden, vanaf de 13de eeuw*, exh. cat. (Brussels: Snoeck/Ducaju, 1994); Barbara Baert, "The Glorified Body: Relics, Materiality and the Internalized Image," in *Backlit Heaven: Power and Devotion in the Archdiocese Mechelen*, ed. Paul Vandenbroeck and Gerard Rooijakkers (Mechelen: Lannoo, 2009), 130-153.

11 The work of Jeffrey Hamburger was also a fundamental contribution to the opening up of 'convent art'. Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists: The Visual Culture of a Medieval Convent* (Berkeley, CA/London: University of California Press, 1997); id., "Body vs. Book: The Trope of Visibility in Images of Christian-Jewish Polemic," in Ästhetik des Unsichtbaren: Bildtheorie und Bildgebrauch in der Vormoderne, ed. David Ganz and Thomas Lentes (Berlin: Reimer, 2004), 113-145; id. and Robert Suckale, "Zwischen Diesseits und Jenseits: Die Kunst der geistlichen Frauen im Mittelalter," in *Krone und Schleier: Kunst aus mittelalterlichen Frauenklöstern*, exh. cat. (München: Hirmer, 2005), 21-39.

12 The conjunction of low art and high art had already provided the grounds for the



an approach that went beyond a hierarchy between 'low art' and 'high art', an impulse inspired by social anthropology.[12]

The 'anthropological turn' and the restitution of convent art gave impetus to a new focal point in research concerning Christian material culture: 'performativity'. In his *Ikonologie des Performativen*, Christoph Wulf initiated this specific aspect of the research. "Die Erzeugung und Wahrnehmung von Bildern ist gebrauchs- und kontextgebunden, d.h. sie ist historisch und kulturell bedingt und differenziert. Wenn Bilder im Gebrauch in Erscheinung treten, dann sind sie performativ. Sie sind an die Bewegungen des menschlichen Körpers und an sein Begehren gebunden."[13] Art-historical research was extended to the actions and the sensors in which artefacts play a role. This brought the dimensions of time and space into consideration as fundamental bearers of meaning.

**The focus on spatiality and temporality…**

…is an immanent given in Greek and Slavic research milieus, but has only recently been rediscovered by Western Art History.[14] In Byzantine material culture a direct link has been preserved between icon, sacred space, and ritual. These three parameters inform one another and unite the visual, the spatial and the performative in a single dimension, a dimension that Alexei Lidov characterised with a new paradigm: *hierotopos*. "Hierotopy is creation of sacred spaces regarded as a special form of creativity, and a field of historical research which reveals and analyses the particular examples of that creativity."[15] In the most recent interest in Christian art it is becoming increasingly clear how Eastern and Western Europe can complement one another's expertise. Any historian of Christian art working today is almost obliged to carry out comparative research in the worlds of both Latin and Greek Christianity.

The rise of 'visual studies' and the re-evaluation of Anthropology have contributed to a favourable climate for interdisciplinary research in the humanities. With regard to the basic focus of this book – medieval visual culture and the senses – a strong new pact was forged between Theology and Art History. Carefully calibrated methodologies were developed to unite the world of the word and the world of the visual medium as a truly interdisciplinary research object. I would distinguish, here, a synchronic and a diachronic level of interdisciplinarity. The synchronic level, or the visual exegesis, requires cross-fertilisation between textual and visual analysis. Analyses of texts, concerning their structure, their rhetoric, and their intertextuality, are tested against their visual translation. The textual analysis will, as it were, bring forth a newer, sharper eye for the textual moments that the artist has chosen to portray, for the intertextual undertone, but also for textual dimensions that have been left out, showing where the visual medium emancipates itself from the medium. In brief, the close collaboration between exegesis and iconography provides a heightened sensitivity to the singularities of the medium that even transcends the particular moment on the historical timeline.

Conversely, the most recent developments in 'visual studies' have encouraged exegetes to come to the text looking for qualities that one would more readily attribute to the visual. Texts have a point of view, or even appeal to sensors relating to sound, smell and taste. The discipline of iconology will enable texts to be more sensually present than ever to the reader. In this way, an interdisciplinary melding of 'visual exegesis' is made possible.

'Visual exegesis' also contributes to the image enigma of Christianity: the image is the *logos* made flesh. We have already seen how this mystery can be grasped through the concept of the veil. In the pact between word and image, a third archetype is hidden: that of textile. This archetype opens up the hidden 'tangibility' of the image: its capacity to veil and unveil.

The diachronic level of interdisciplinarity – the visual *Wirkungsgeschichte* – remains loyally faithful to the *Sitz im Leben* method. The collaboration of word and image remains anchored in the context of creation and reception of other texts and artworks of the time. This diachronic vision, related to the iconology mentioned, is in fact inherent to the historical development of art. But under the impulse of the 'anthropological turn', texts and artefacts can also become operators that refer to the body and to performative acts. This is certainly the case with regard to Christian art, for there is no more intense meeting between visual and textual spaces as in the drama of the liturgy. Furthermore, as we have already seen, the anthropological approach obliterates the distinction between higher art forms and

13 Hans Belting, *Das Ende der Kunstgeschichte?* (München: Beck, 1983), 13.

14 Alexei Lidov, "Hierotopy and Iconography: Space, Time and Image in Byzantine Culture," in *Hierotopy: Creation of Sacred Space in Byzantine Culture*, ed. Alexei Lidov (Moscow: Indrik, 2006), 32-58; Alexei Lidov, "Hierotopy and Iconography: Space, Time and Image in Byzantine Culture," in *Hierotopy: Creation of Sacred Space in Byzantine Culture*, ed. Alexei Lidov (Moscow: Indrik, 2006), 32-58.

15 Alexei Lidov, "Hierotopy and Iconography: Space, Time and Image in Byzantine Culture," in *Hierotopy: Creation of Sacred Space in Byzantine Culture*, ed. Alexei Lidov (Moscow: Indrik, 2006), 32-58, at 32.

lower objects of popular devotion, so that an often hidden undertow again becomes visible, broadening the interdisciplinary study of the Bible and of the visual medium to non-Christian sources, to hybrid zones of religion and magic, to the world of the remnant, and to works of 'low art' that had until recently been completely neglected, such as textiles, and convent art.

In short, historical exegesis, ecclesiastical history, iconology and cultural anthropology together provide foundational support for knowledge of broader visual themes, and the functions of works of art.

**If we consider the Art History…**

…as a history of artistic solutions in the broader sense of the meaning, then they describe the wondrous approach between the artistic imagination and the scientific *métier*, and they create a new space in between: the *Zwischenraum*, where humans and their artistic expression can meet existentially. These meetings in the third area navigate between intuition and emotion, between instinct and epistemology, and cause new conceptual schemes.
On this subject, Siri Hustvedt writes the following: "The potential or imaginative space is where the child plays and the artist works; it is a 'third area' … Transitional phenomena necessarily mingle self and other. They are the product of development and have a symbolic function as representations of a connection with the maternal body."[16] Within this 'third area', we are able to question the statute of the visual *in se*, and we reach the research on the boundaries and limits of the Human Sciences and Art Sciences as such, whether they are called *Bildwissenschaften, anthropologie visuelle*, or 'visual studies' these days.[17]

Iconology is a multiple layered methodology, which stretches out over interdisciplinary fields such as: Theology, the Art Sciences, Anthropology, Architecture and in a certain manner, as proven along the way, Psychoanalysis. This gaze upon the depth and width touches the capacity of the Human Sciences to open themselves up to the sensorial experience of knowledge and art, and thus touches on an epistemology that integrates intuition and emotions. That integration is also defended by writer and essayist Siri Hustvedt.

One can argue that there is a synesthetic quality to all art experiences, that art revives a multimodal-sensory self. While looking at a painting, for example, don't we feel the brush? Studies have shown that mirror systems are active when people look at visual art and are also activated by written accounts of actions or emotional situations. If we do not feel our way into works of art, we will not understand them. I do not sense the touch of persons depicted in paintings, but I do have strong felt responses to the marks left by the painter's brush, but then arguably this is a common experience, one hardly limited to people with mirror touch.[18]

**And yet,…**

…the connection of poetry and emotion in the sciences still vacillates between bold and taboo. Still, the integration of sensuality in a world that is built on the sensible is met with scepticism. Gertrude Bing (1892-1964), in her lecture on Warburg at the Courtauld Institute in 1962, already knew this: that "we are here treading on dangerous ground. Perhaps nothing has been as hotly disputed as the power of the Fine Arts to render emotions."[19] Yet, the potential of the discipline to spread out and the freedom to keep the subject matter close some of the time and to expand it over its complete breadth on other occasions is one of the most delightful choreographies that the Human and Art Sciences can create. The dynamics of open and closed, of landscape and focus, of archetype and details – and everything in between: the thinking, seeking, trying, hesitating, failing, the creative solutions, and so forth – are more than just a spontaneous reflex: they form the *ampleur* of an actual describable hermeneutics in the *Zwischenraum* or 'the third area'.

Again, I'll let Siri Hustvedt speak her mind.
"I believe art is born in the world of the Between, that is bound up with the rhythms and music of early life, as well as in a form of transference that moves from inner life out onto the page, from me to an imaginary other. My story tells emotional, not literal, truths."[20]

But how shall we 'name' what we do in that 'world of the Between': between the potential to expand and hesitation, this intuitive pattern of artistic expression and the plastic translations of *pathos*, 'emotional truths', and the limitations of the senses in the 'fleshing out' of the image?

How can we understand that which isn't understandable: the iconogenesis of the visual medium, when prehistoric humans used their own two hands to depict the owl of Minerva at nightfall on the wall of the caves of Chauvet (so fast, so spontaneous, so strong, so performative, that never again has there been a closer merging of body and imagery, between fingertips and lines)?[21] Is it possible to denominate this endless collection of thoughts that welcome the image as a witness to the history of thought, from prehistoric times to present day?

Let us define it as *la science sans nom*, just like Giorgio Agamben carefully described Aby Warburg's œuvre (1866-1929) out of fear to suffogate its meaning.[22] *La science sans nom* is "un diagnostic de l'homme occidental à travers ses fantasmes. Le cercle dans lequel se dévoilait le 'bon dieu' caché dans les détails."[23]

Elsewhere, I have written:

> Basically, Aby Warburg is describing a history of polarities that results in an anthropology of the history of western civilization in which philology, ethnology, history and biology converge into the *Zwischenraum* where the turbulences of the magical and symbolic thinking of cultural memory are at work. Only within this interspace will it be possible to find any basis for understanding and curing the schizophrenia of human culture. Imagery is precisely where the *polarité pérenne* of history – this *psychomachia* of the Warburgian method[24] – and energy are unearthed and left behind.[25]

**Indeed,…**

…in his "illustrierte psychologische Geschichte des Zwischenraums zwischen Antrieb und Handlung"[26] Warburg himself described the need to surpass dualistic hermeneutics *(Contrasto-Spiel)* between *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa*.[27] Davide Stimilli recognises this urge for the 'in-between' in his 1926 conference about Rembrandt, where he ends with the suggestion to listen to the *Atempause* (the interval between impulsion and action, between breathing in and breathing out). In short to listen to Kairos' occasion again…![28]



This makes me remember a specific moment some years ago.

On 27 May 2015, Georges Didi-Huberman presented a keynote lecture at Charles University in Prague, during the *Dis/Appearing* conference organised by the *Internationales Kolleg für Kulturtechnikforschung und Medienphilosophie* (IKKM) (Bauhaus Universität Weimar)[29], and subsequently published this paper in the IKKM Journal *Zeitschrift für Medien- und Kulturforschung*.[30] As an observer and former fellow of the IKKM, I was profoundly touched by the personal depth Didi-Huberman had instilled on his paper "Glimpses: Between Appearance and Disappearance." It consisted of some ten reflections concerning the meaning of the image as a Flaring and Fading. During his talk, Didi-Huberman used evocative images – recollections – which he had collected during the years; impressions while walking streets, melancholic musings about love, and thoughts gathered from literature en route. These were all Interruptions & Transitions of what he calls: "'Aperçues', in the feminine, necessarily."[31]
I vividly remember the moment a PhD student inquired about expanding the associative approach of the theme. The reply of the master was that the particular beauty of the discipline of art history can be seen through the embracing of multiple genres.

**If we together…**

…with Aby Warburg and Georges Didi-Huberman expand the interruption of the passing-by, the poetic mysterious interval of *Atempause* to a visual anthropological perspective, we reach an alternative hermeneutics that takes into account the ontology of the imagery – an iono*genesis* instead of an iono*logy* – as 'interruption'. The interruption lies at the level of breathing and wind, of the bipolarity that is part of life and its destiny, and finally of the gateway to the chthonic world. Iconogenesis – the quick flash of the 'something' we call imagery – requires further research. My perspective opens the recognition of iconogenesis as the kairotic moment stemming from *rythmos* (the imagery breathes), from the duality of appearing and disappearing, and from art as *Trauerarbeit*, as a crack leading to the gate of the *Khora*.

13 Christoph Wulf and Jörg Zirfas (eds.), *Ikonologie des Performativen* (München: Fink, 2005), 17.
14 Jean-Marie Sansterre and Jean-Claude Schmitt (eds.), *Les images dans les sociétés médiévales: Pour une histoire comparée*, Bulletin de l'Institut historique belge de Rome, 69 (Bruxelles/Roma: Institut historique belge de Rome, 1999).
15 Alexei M. Lidov, "Hierotopy: The Creation of Sacred Space as a Form of Creativity and Subject of Cultural History," in *Hierotopy: Creation of Sacred Spaces in Byzantium and Medieval Russia*, ed. Alexei M. Lidov (Moscow: Progress-tradition, 2006), 33-58, at 32.
16 Siri Hustvedt, *A Woman Looking at Men Looking at Women: Essays on Art, Sex, and the Mind* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2016), 374.
17 See my statements on this subject in Barbara Baert *et al.*, *Iconologie of "La science sans nom,"* Standpunten, 50 (Brussel: Uitgaven van de Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie van België voor Wetenschappen en Kunsten, 2017).
18 Siri Hustvedt, *A Woman Looking at Men Looking at Women: Essays on Art, Sex, and the Mind* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2016), 375.
19 Gertrude Bing, "A. M. Warburg," in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 28 (1965) 299-313, at 310. See also Aby M. Warburg, *Die Erneuerung der heidnischen Antike: Kulturwissenschaftliche Beiträge zur Geschichte der europäischen Renaissance*, Gesammelte Schriften, 1, ed. Gertrud Bing (Leipzig: Teubner, 1932); ET: *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity*, transl. David Britt (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1999); Laura Tack, *The Fortune of Gertrud Bing (1892-1964). A Fragmented Memoir of a Phantomlike Muse*, Studies in Iconology, 16, (Leuven-Walpole-Paris-Bristol: Peeters, 2020).
20 Hustvedt, *A Woman Looking at Men Looking at Women*, 133.
21 In the 2014 documentary (Christian Tran) for Arte, *Les Génies de la Grotte Chauvet*, which examines the ambitious project which aims to copy these spaces and their murals, the Catalan painter Miguel Barceló talks about both the artistic qualities and techniques of the murals. The owl of Chauvet is here a remarkable paradigm: she was drawn in a few seconds by moving ten fingers from top to bottom. The *genius loci* of this hand as well as its tender iconography may constitute the deepest and most moving *ekphrasis* of both wisdom and plastic beauty that man has ever realised. Or as Barceló says: *tout est déjà là*.
22 Giorgio Agamben, "Aby Warburg et la science sans nom," transl. Marco Dell'Omodarme [Paris: Hoëbeke, 1998], in id., *Image et mémoire, écrits sur l'image, la danse et le cinéma* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 2004), 9-43.
23 *Ibid.*, 27.
24 Georges Didi-Huberman, *Science avec patience*, in *Images Re-vues* 4/1 (2013) (e-journal: http://journals.openedition.org/imagesrevues/3024), 8.
25 Barbara Baert, *Nymph. Motif, Phantom, Affect*. Part II: *Aby Warburg's (1866-1929) Butterflies as Art Historical Paradigms*, Studies in Iconology, 4 (Leuven: Peeters, 2016).
26 Aby M. Warburg, *Der Bilderatlas: Mnemosyne*, Gesammelte Schriften, II/1, ed. Martin Warnke and Claudia Brink (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, ³2008), 3.
27 Aby M. Warburg, *Tagebuch der Kulturwissenschaftlichen Bibliothek Warburg*, Gesammelte Schriften, 7, ed. Karen Michels and Charlotte Schoell-Glass (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2001), 429.
28 I quote Aby Warburg from Davide Stimilli: "L'ascension vers le soleil avec Hélios et la descente dans les profondeurs avec Proserpine symbolisent deux étapes qui appartiennent aussi inséparablement que les alternances de la respiration au cycle de la vie. Tout ce que nous pouvons emporter dans ce périple, c'est l'intervalle toujours fugitif entre impulsion et action (die ewig flüchtige Pause zwischen Antrieb und Handlung); il nous appartient de prolonger plus ou moins longtemps cet espace de respiration avec l'aide de Mnémosyne (Aby Warburg): Davide Stimilli, "L'énigme de Warburg," in *Revue française de psychanalyse* 79 (2015) 1100-1114, at 1110; See also Gombrich, *Aby Warburg*, 237-238; *From Kairos to Occasio along Fortuna. Text / Image / Afterlife. On the Antique Critical Moment, a Grisaille in Mantua (School of Mantegna, 1495-1510) and the Fortunes of Aby Warburg (1866-1929)* (Turnhout: Brepols & Harvey Miller, 2021).
29 The entire lecture can be seen at https://vimeo.com/163985507.
30 Later he published this paper as Georges Didi-Huberman, "Glimpses: Between Appearance and Disappearance," in *Zeitschrift für Medien- und Kulturforschung* 7/1 (2016) 109-124.
31 *Ibid.*, 110.

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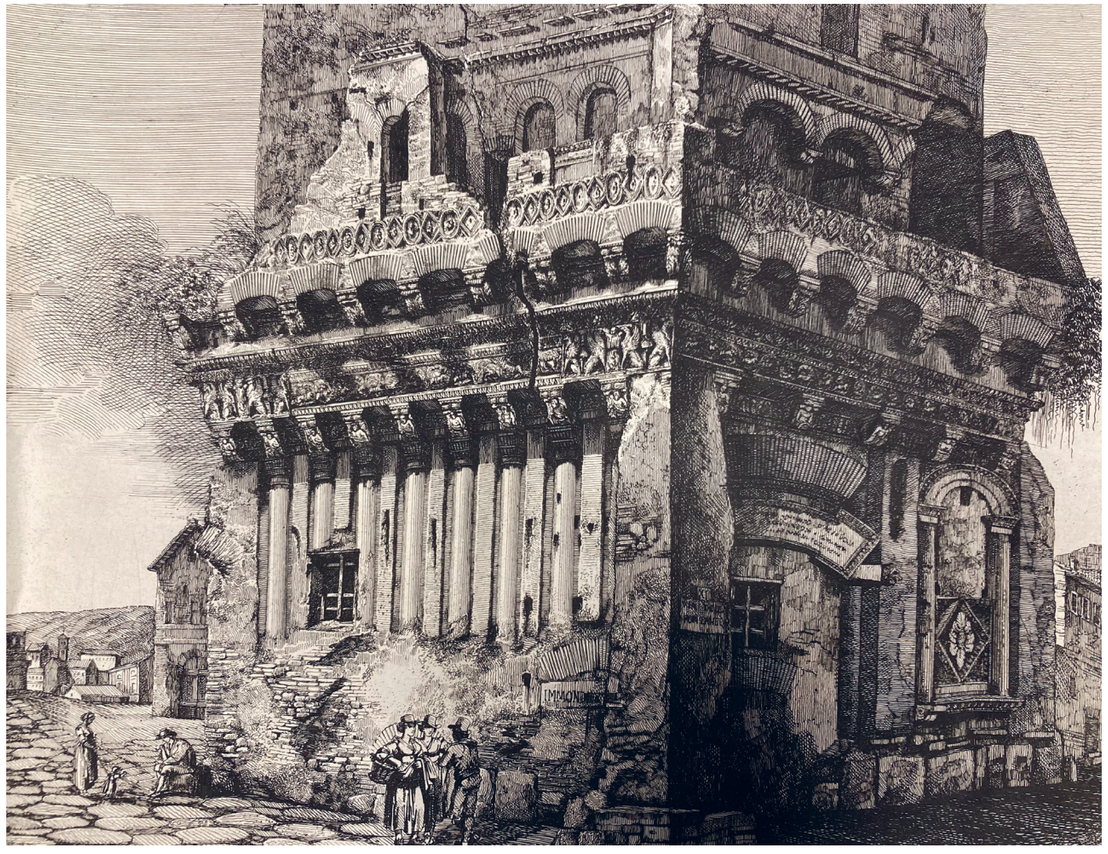
# The iconography of spolia
## Meanings of material reuse in contemporary architecture

*C. Grafe & B. Plevoets*



[1] Casa dei Crescenzi.

**‘As fragments of ruin, spolia are decontextualised and metonymic to their sources. And yet, as fragments, they carry certain value as the essential and the authentic: they are what they are wherever they are’.**[1]

## Introduction

Can buildings belong to more than one era? Should they not always be taken as a manifestation of that moment which coincides with the one in which they are conceived and realised? In *Space, Time and Architecture*, the canonical operative history of the ‘Modern Movement’, Siegfried Giedion states that architecture is an ‘index to a period’. This assertion implies exclusivity (there is only *one* index to a *single* moment); there is only one handwriting through which ‘the character of the age’, in Giedion’s terminology, can be identified and recognised.[2] The analogy of handwriting and architectural language or style may be questionable. Entertaining the possibility of such a similitude, other questions arise: what if handwriting is a collage of mannerisms, formal quotations, and references to a variety of codes? In the eyes of the self-appointed graphologist, such inconsistencies would undoubtedly have been interpreted as signs of personal instability or lack of stamina, if not moral deficiency. Yet, other, less judgemental readings would also have been possible: malleability may be a sign of intellectual flexibility, apparent insecurity one of healthy doubt. Perhaps the changes in the conduct of the nib are simply explained by external circumstances: a different writing instrument, a modified body position, or a well-considered decision to adjust one’s identity.

If consistent handwriting is a concept replete with cultural assumptions, so is Giedion’s analogy with history and architecture (and the history *of* architecture). It entails the notion of a direct, exclusive process of translation between a historical situation (possibly a *zeitgeist*) and its manifestation in the forms of architectural languages and styles. The quest for an architectural expression indicative of its time presupposes eliminating elements of ambiguity by allowing their attribution to another moment. The new must be unequivocally so. Permitting the presence of elements that would undermine the attribution to a time and its spirit would imply a betrayal of the historical task of architecture – or any art – to be an index to its time. A building would become a synchronous intertextual object – with elements suggesting different yet indistinguishable narratives. However, what if the reuse of elements or materials in a new building made sense? The history of construction is full of examples: foundations have been used to support new (and usually grander) religious or secular visions; materials were retained and re-employed for their structural value; decorative elements were recycled or repurposed for their representational potential. The reuse of old building materials is as old as the building practice itself. Most often, reusing materials or elements resulted from pragmatic and economic considerations. During the Late Roman Empire, however, a new attitude towards reuse developed in which fragments of older buildings, mainly marble columns and decorative features, were integrated and exposed in new constructions. This more selective and conscious practice of dismantling and reuse is referred to as *spolia.*

One of the most well-known examples is the Arch of Constantine, constructed in 315 CE and decorated with reliefs produced more than a century before for the arches of Trajan, Hadrian, and Marcus Aurelius. This reuse of the reliefs has been explained by a lack of time and the erosion of craftmanship in late Antiquity. The perception and the reception of

1 Susan Stewart, *The Ruins Lesson: Meaning and Material in Western Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020), 66.
2 Siegfried Giedion, *Time, Space and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1941), 19–20.
3 Hans-Rudolf Meier, *Spolien, Phänomene der Wiederverwendung in der Architektur* (Berlin: Jovis, 2020), 36.



employing existing carved stones also pertained to the effect of the material surfaces. As Hans-Rudolf Meier has noted, ‘there remains an incongruence between the intention and the reception of the arch: if an analysis of the latter leads to an emphasis on distinguishing aspects, the former ensures that integrative moments are emphasised’.[3] The first Christian Basilica in the Lateran, built around the same time as Constantine’s Arch, also included spolia: its 18 uniform columns and capitals in green breccia probably originated from a single, unidentified structure, while its two bronze columns may have come from the Temple of Solomon. Even if the actual origin of these bronze columns is uncertain, the narrative of the relationship between both constructions is illustrative of the ambition of early Christian architecture to appropriate the spiritual powers of Antiquity (or of other religions). As Suzan Steward maintains in *The Ruins Lesson*, it is precisely the replacement of the old form with the new one that is key to the process of appropriation of the meaning of the spolia – a source of imaginative reconstruction.[4]

In early Christian Rome, the use of spolia became a common feature of early Christian architecture, and over time the spolia were more explicitly presented as such, as the variety of fragments reused in a single composition increased. The combination of spolia that varied in material, colour, and ornamentation in one composition produced a particular and novel architectural expression. Santa Maria in Cosmedin (772–795) is illustrative of this practice: the 18 columns in the nave of the church vary greatly with regard to the types of stone, colours, surfaces, and treatments of the shafts, and the ornamentation of the capitals. They also are of very different ages. The dimensions of the fragments demonstrate that the combination of capitals and shafts is not original but came from different sources.[5]

The reuse of older building materials and fragments was practised in Rome continuously throughout the Middle Ages and up to the Renaissance. Whereas the marble supply had seemed ‘eternal’ in Late Antiquity, the stocks decreased during the Middle Ages and proved insufficient to meet the increasing demands.[6] Repairs of urban infrastructures instigated by the popes, such as bridges and fortifications, were executed using ancient materials. This practice did not only involve reusing ornamental marble elements and columns but also less precious stones and bricks, roof tiles, and even strictly decorative elements such as mosaics. These large-scale public

[2] Interior of the Sta. Maria in Trastevere.

4 Stewart, *The Ruins Lesson*.
5 Maria Fabricius Hansen, *The Spolia Churches of Rome: Recycling Antiquity in the Middle Ages* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2015).
6 Dale Kinney, ‘Spoliation in Medieval Rome’, in *Perspektiven Der Spolienforschung 1. Spoliierung Und Transposition*, eds. Stefan Altekamp, Carmen Marcks-Jacobs, and Peter Seiler (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013).

works, combined with increasing private construction and the growing export of marble fragments to other parts of Europe – including France, England, and the German-speaking regions north of the Alps – led to the unregulated or even 'illegal' exploitation of ruins for spolia. Another effect was the excavation or 'mining' of ancient sites that were (partly) covered by new layers of the city, as the street level had been raised several metres over the centuries.[7]

Although the Medieval practice of reuse may have been predominantly utilitarian[8], other issues were undoubtedly also at stake. Every re-discovery of Antiquity essentially implied a re-activation of memories and narratives of the ancients in order to stimulate the *Erinnerungsvermögen* – the capacity to remember – energised by images or building fragments. Richard Krautheimer argues that the use of pagan iconography in early Christian architecture probably served ideological objectives, at least primarily. By the 13th or 14th century, however, as the memory of Antiquity grew remote, religious connotations and the meaning of these fragments – and their essentially pagan content – had mainly become irrelevant; instead, the spolia were understood as purely decorative.[9]

Dale Kinney, a student of Krautheimer and a leading expert on spoliation, concurs, suggesting that the original iconographic meanings of ancient spolia were unknown at the time. He argues, however, that their purpose was not strictly decorative. In an article on the spolia used to rebuild the church of Sta. Maria in Trastevere (1140–1143) by Pope Innocent II, Kinney notes that 18 pre-medieval capitals were sought, eight of which can be traced to the libraries of one of Rome's most famous ruins, the Baths of Caracalla. Kinney characterises the meaning of these spolia as 'a deliberate demonstration of the imperial prerogatives of the basilica's papal founder, and that the demonstration was meant to impress the founder's status upon the viewer'.[10] Similarly, abt Suger's attempt to acquire columns from the Baths of Diocletian for the construction of the abbey church at St Denis (1137) was undoubtedly not strictly utilitarian, given the abbot's ambition with this project.[11]

Towards the end of the Middle Ages, the perception of ancient architectural vestiges intensified. For Renaissance artists, the urban landscape of Rome was transformed into a panorama of memory in which the history associated with these objects was vividly evoked. As Aleida Assmann writes, the fragments of the past and the ruins bear witness, following here a formulation by Walter Benjamin that '[h]istory wanders into the scene'.[12] Assmann adds: 'Insofar as this history continues to be handed down and remembered, the ruins remain the supporting pillar of memory, and this also applies to the stories that are invented for them, and that wrap themselves around the ruins like ivy'. However, this very approach also facilitates a new distanced view of the objects of memory: 'The ruins, separated from their stories and left to oblivion, can then again appear in a secondary way as picturesque'.[13]

In his famous 1912 lecture on the allegorical frescoes of the months in the Ferrarese Palazzo Schifanoia, Aby Warburg explores the surreptitious sources of the reuse of motifs and themes from Antiquity.[14] Their re-activation could take the form of quotations or of appropriating images. Warburg uses the term *Pathosformel* (pathos formula) to describe such recurring motives of bodily gestures and expression in visual arts.[15] In his *Mnemosyne Atlas*, groupings of images illustrate the migration of the *Pathosformeln* across time and cultures. However, the meaning of these signs could change, and a single gesture could be used for different expressive purposes. Warburg describes this as *energetische Inversion* (energetic inversion).

Warburg's argument on the memory of images might be adopted to reflect the integration of physical elements recuperated from ancient buildings. The presence of physical remnants and immaterial and sometimes clandestine traces and figures were inherent in the many reverberations of Antiquity in daily life, and perhaps in 'social memory', a concept Warburg developed in his later years.[16] Employing formal reference and the reuse of building elements often went hand in hand, and both could be described as the architectural equivalent of the *Pathosformel*. Kurt Forster has noted that the recurrence of what might be described as formal incidents – gestures, body language, expressions, or movements – is part of a continuous evolutionary process of the invention of forms and narratives, exerting 'its control over existing figurations in a way that endows them with new, "sign-giving qualities"'.[17] 'It was the vulgar Latin of the pathos of the gestural language which was understood across the nations and everywhere with the heart, where there was a desire to burst the medieval expressive shackles'.[18] If we were to extend Warburg's understanding of visual incidents or *Pathosformeln* to architecture, we might also discern less overt forms of manufacturing references: through the experience of line and volume, the *chiaroscuro* effect on the sculptured elements or the delicacy of carving and smoothing the stone.

7 Kinney, *Spoliation in Medieval Rome*; Stewart, *The Ruins Lesson*.
8 Anna Frangipane, 'From Spolia to Recycling: The Reuse of Traditional Construction Materials in Built Heritage and Its Role in Sustainability Today: A Review', *Geological Society, London, Special Publications* 416, no. 1 (2016): 23–33.
9 Richard Krautheimer, *Rome: Profile of a City, 312–1308* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980).
10 Dale Kinney, 'Spolia from the Baths of Caracalla in Sta. Maria in Trastevere', *The Art Bulletin* 68, no. 3 (1986): 379–97, 390.
11 Marvin Trachtenberg, 'Suger's Miracles, Branner's Bourges: Reflections on "Gothic Architecture" as Medieval Modernism', *Gesta* 39, no. 2 (2000): 183–205.
12 Aleida Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume: Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2003 [1999]), 315. For the reference to Walter Benjamin, see *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1963), 197.
13 Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume*, 197.
14 Aby Warburg, 'Italienische Kunst und internationale Astrologie im Palazzo Schifanoia zu Ferrara (1912)', in *Nachhall der Antike*, ed. Pablo Schneider (Zurich: Diaphanes, 2012), 15.
15 Cf. Gertrud Bing, 'Aby M. Warburg', *Rivista storica italiana*, LXXII (1960), 109.



[3] Arch of Constantine.

In what way might the distinction between iconology and iconography help to establish an understanding of the role of spolia in architecture? Might this role be less associated with correct attributive interpretation than with narrative opportunities? To some degree, the distinction seems to imply a certain rigidity: one (iconography) is the clearly delineated study of the materiality and form of the object; the other (iconology) is the contextualisation and historicisation of the object, which, as Erwin Panofsky suggests, was a necessary key to a precise interpretation.[19] 'Iconology, then, is a method of interpretation which arises from synthesis rather than analysis. And as the correct identification of motifs is the prerequisite of their correct iconographical analysis, so is the correct analysis of images, stories and analogies the prerequisite of their correct iconological interpretation'. Iconology, in this definition, is to be understood as the study of cultural connotations and secret or hidden references, allowing a fuller or 'more correct' understanding of artworks and their elements. There is, however, also the much more open approach of Aby Warburg, whose critical iconology establishes connections that disregard correctness in favour of the synchronous coexistence of narratives.

What to think, for example, of the application of spolia in the Casa dei Crescenzi, also apocryphally known as Casa di Cola di Rienzo, a three-storey brick building probably built in the 11th century and situated in the Forum Boarium, near the Tiber River? Here the positioning of the fragments suggests a vaguely tectonic logic as to where particular elements ought to be placed. Consoles with bacchanalian scenes, originating from a Late Antiquity building, support a sculpted marble cornice above the ground floor. The consoles appear to perform a residual structural purpose, even if the entire composition appears somewhat picturesquely out of scale. Below the somewhat frenzied juxtaposition of styles and elements evident in the brick capitals above the half-columns, the remains of a cantilevered structure reveal the numerous renovations of the building. The picturesque appearance of the house, which appears to be a ruin but is not, was not lost on artists who were probably intrigued by the apparent lack of logic, as the house became one of the subjects of Roman *vedute* in the 18th and 19th centuries. This gallery of fragments – one is also reminded of Warburg's panels for the Mnemosyne Atlas – seems to follow architectural logic and, at the same time, stretch it into the absurd. Like the panels, the array of elements on the façade is by no means pure collage. Instead, there seems to be a shared physical nature common to the architectural images, which, precisely through their hanging, allow for new references and interferences to emerge. Their extreme density lends the building a weight of meaning that its function and size do not warrant.

The Casa di Rienzo also illustrates that the use of spolia does not solely imply a reading of the historical connotations of the fragments. Here, the fragments work together to create a new 'difficult whole', to use a term coined by Robert Venturi. Moreover, as Hans-Rudolf Meier notes, 'spolia not only transpose meanings attributed to them, but also prove to be vehicles for generating such meanings'.[20] He adds another significant observation: 'Spolia are generators of meaning, however, especially when they are visibly different from the rest of the architectural fabric and insofar as their otherness becomes clear and leads to the question as to why this is so'. Finally, Meier emphasises the crucial importance of the materiality of the fragments, which pertains to their intrinsic value but also the traces of former use and the effect of weathering or historical events. He writes: 'It is the very concrete physical presence of the element from a building from another time that distinguishes spolia from architectural quotations and other forms of referencing'.[21]

### Modern forms of material reuse

Are the spolia inserted in such a way that they are virtually absorbed into the new building; is the new building planned in such a way that it thoroughly blends in with the spolia; or do the spolia deliberately aim to create a rupture, or at least a difference, and show that something alien has been inserted? As stones and artefacts, spolia initially have no meaning beyond themselves – meanings are ascribed to them based on their material composition, their appearance, or their origin. In line with

16 Cf. Ernst Gombrich, *Aby Warburg, eine intellektuelle Biographie* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1984), 348.
17 Kurt W. Forster, 'Aby Warburg: His Study of Ritual and Art of Two Continents', *October* no. 77 (1996): 5–24.
18 Aby Warburg, 'Dürer und die italienische Antike', in *Werke*, eds. Martin Treml, Sigrid Weidl, and Perdita Ladwig (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2018), 181.
19 Erwin Panofsky, *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (London: Penguin 1970), 58.
20 Hans-Rudolf Meier, *Spolien: Phänomene der Wiederverwendung in der Architektur* (Berlin: Jovis, 2021), 93.
21 Hans-Rudolf Meier, *Spolien*, 127.

Warburg's notion of *energetische inversion*, when reused, the spolia – although usually not changed in form – take on a different meaning in their new context. The emerging theory of conservation and the protection of monuments in the late 19th century also implied a recognition of the different criteria for evaluating fragments, their artistic value, their age value, their sensual qualities and the craftsmanship bound in them, to refer to Alois Riegl's nomenclature. Nevertheless, as Akos Moravánszky explains, the boundaries between pragmatism and ideology tend not to be clear and impact judgements of the reuse of spolia. Moravánszky wonders if the use of beautifully worked stones, of fluted antique column drums in substructures and retaining walls, implies 'a deliberate degradation or is it a gesture of preserving history'?[22]

At the end of the 19th century, the use of spolia occasionally seems to have been viewed as an alternative to the eclectic and historicist languages of contemporary architecture. The use of original elements, with an aura of the past and patinated by their history, provided an authenticity that machine-produced ornaments mostly lacked. Examples can be found in museum interiors, where fragments were assembled in 'period rooms' that became absorbed into the museum's collections.

The practice of using spolia in new buildings in a historical context seems to have been less frequent. One interesting example, however, is the practice of architectural salvage and the strategic use of spolia in Bremen, which culminated in the construction of a new building for a variety of gastronomic uses between 1905 and 1911. The project's gestation has to be viewed against the background of rapid changes to the historic fabric of the medieval city and its representational core, the Market Square with the medieval town hall adorned by a sumptuous early 17th-century Northern Renaissance façade, the Romanesque cathedral and the guild halls and burgher houses from various centuries.[23] Yet, it also testifies to the detachment from historicism and a turn to a new attitude aimed at authenticity in the public architectural discourse, which can be generally discerned in the Netherlands, Belgium, and Northern Germany around 1900. In 1905, the architect Rudolf Jacobs was selected for the project of the 'Rathscafé', a new building directly opposite the town hall that provided the background to tourist postcards showing the Roland (an early 15th-century sculpture symbolising the autonomy of Northern Europe's oldest city republic). Immediately, he found himself confronted with influential observers demanding that spolia should be used to establish an authentic Hanseatic architecture. Indeed, the use of remnants from discarded merchant houses, which had been stored, was explicitly supported by Gustav Pauli, the later director of the Bremen Kunsthalle and an advocate both of contemporary European art and increased attention to the city's architectural traditions.[24] As the assistant curator of the local history museum (where they were stored in the courtyard) noted, these fragments were available to be used to their greatest effect: '… for as they are lying there, they are dead stones'. Instead, reusing them 'could bring this dead asset to life again there and thus perform another exemplary work in the spirit of monument conservation'.[25] In the final design, Jacobs entrusted the spolia would establish historical associations with the new building and refrained from any attempt to add new ornaments or sculptural details. Using the remains of defunct houses permitted a renunciation of historicism and an approximation of a contemporary architectural language.

'The spolia as a medium mediates between presence and absence; it is a sign representing that which is absent, but at the same time creates a new, transformed presence of the absent through its materiality'.[26] In some cases, spolia address a sense of loss, as Rudolf Schwarz originally planned for the preserved portal of St Anna's Church in Düren. As Schwarz inspected the ruins, 'there were still the masses of the old stones, and we wanted to set them into the new building again, in order for the sacred stone to become the building material of a new work and for the old to rise again in the new'.[27]

Twenty years before, in 1918–1922, the theologian and professor of psychology Armand Thiery commissioned the construction of a new wing for the Monastery of Saint Gertrud in Leuven. The ensemble is a collage of fragments reassembled to form a unified whole from the rubble of 17th- and 18th-century houses lost during the brutal destruction of the city by the German army in 1914.[28] Perhaps it would be more accurate to describe the building as a patchwork of elements, somewhat comparable to the Casa dei Crescenzi. The many deformed and only half-preserved fragments present themselves as a thin façade layer, in the fashion of a Mannerist lacework, so brittle and fragile that they seem just able to stand upright. Thiery had wanted to preserve the past or at least a memory of it. What we see, however, is rather the futility of the endeavour and, thus, a highly precise expression of the modern condition of the 20th century. This Mannerist bricolage, consciously or unwittingly, appears as the architectural equivalent of Elliot's *Waste Land* or Pound's *Cantos* – an expression of destruction, despair, fragmentation, and unbridled imagination.

[4] 'Rathscafé' Bremen.

[5] Armand Thiery wing, Monastery of Saint Gertrud in Leuven.

Incorporating remnants of the past in new buildings (or even constructing them out of debris or a bygone tradition) was an antidote to the very essence of mainstream modern architecture in the 1920s and well into the post-World War II period. The emphasis on abstract 'space' or technical 'structure' as procedural results of 'function' did not seem to allow the presence of elements of figuration or tectonic representation, often excluding them as a matter of principle. The essence of architecture – either defined as the play of light on volume or as a Neoplatonist composition – and the metaphor of the building-as-machine could permit figuration if it were kept at a conceptual distance, to magnificent effect for both architecture and sculpture.
The placing of Georg Kolbes's sculpture 'Alba' in the Barcelona pavilion takes this principle to its elegant extreme point – the human image detaching itself from the building and thereby heightening the suppressed anthropomorphism as it is embedded in Mies's architecture. Sculpture, 'used' in this way, assumes the role of spolia and that of sublimated decoration. It becomes 'a way of making historical connections', as Penelope Curtis has noted in her discussion of Mies's deployment of Neo-Classical images.[29] Indeed, the presence or absence of the human body in architecture may also support the association of architectural space with figurative sculpture – and Warburg's concept of the *Pathosformel*. If the figurative may be an antidote to space, there is also a reading of tectonic elements as bodies. Vitruvius' association of the orders with the assumed physical characteristics of men, women and girls respectively, and with the introduction of the mimetic into architecture, springs to mind. On the other hand, as Curtis suggests, a building constitutes a space anticipating the presence of bodies, and, thus of gestures. One could argue that the identification of the *Pathosformeln* in traditions of sculpture has an analogy in architecture: do spaces and their images not carry cultural associations outside and beyond stylistic or typological references? Are not Roman frescoes of temples and villas also mnemonically charged set pieces of emotions and gestures that transcend their time and remain tangible as experiences the onlooker, even today, would understand? Is it not that our imagination introduces bodies, their movements and gestures, into the images of spaces, and lend them a presence that is both speechless and timeless; as a *Nachhall der Antike*, an after-echo of the Ancients?

### Spolia in contemporary architecture

Against the background of growing awareness about the ecological effects of a culture of overconsumption and overproduction and the contribution of the building industries to generating waste, a renewed interest has emerged in reusing materials from demolished buildings. However, most of the reused elements in construction are standardised and industrially produced materials without a clear historical value, which seems limiting. Can we consider these contemporary forms of reuse of fragments as a cultural expression? Further, to what extent can the

22 Akos Moravánszky, 'Der Kreislauf der Bausteine: Stichworte zu einer Ökologie des Bauens', in *Bauteile wiederverwenden: Ein Kompendium zum zirkulären Bauen*, eds. Eva Stricker, Guido Brandl, and Andreas Sonderegger (Zurich: Park Books, 2021), 19.

23 The building has been studied in a monograph that discusses the various aspects of its design and construction history. Jörn Tore Schaper in particular contributed a detailed analysis of the competition history and the use of spolia. See Jörn Tore Schaper, 'Entstehung des Rathscafés: Straßenkorrektur und Wettbewerb', in *Rathscafé und Deutsches Haus: Zum Umgang mit der Bremer Altstadt*, eds. Volker Plagemann and Eberhard Syring (Bremen: Aschenbeck, 2009), 49–83. The author also surveyed the positions of the various elements in the building's façade.

24 Gustav Pauli, son of a *burgomaster* and president of the Senate of the Free Hanseatic City of Bremen, is most known for his acquisitions in 1911 for the Kunsthalle, which included paintings by Paula Modersohn-Becker, who was wholly underrated at the time, works by French Impressionists and Vincent van Gogh's painting of a poppy field, leading to accusations of a lack of patriotism. In the 1930s, he was one of the major supporters of exiled German-Jewish art historians including Erwin Panofsky (whose habilitation he had supported in 1920) and their efforts to establish themselves in the United States. His dissertation on the Northern Renaissance tradition in Bremen is one of the earliest studies on the subject. With respect to the relationship between Pauli and Panofsky, cf. Uta Nischke-Joseph, A Fortuitous Discovery, 'An Early Manuscript by Erwin Panofsky appears in Munich', *IAS Historical Studies*, 2013, accessed 25 February 2022, https://www.ias.edu/ideas/2013/nitschke-joseph-panofsky.

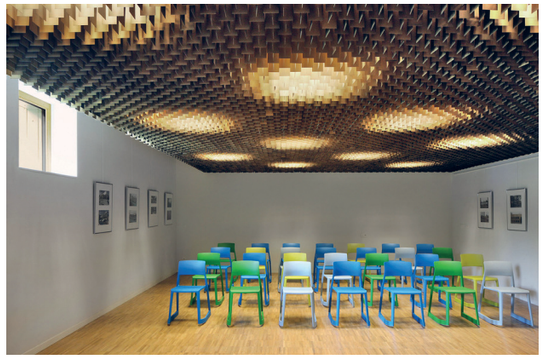
25 Schaper, 'Entstehung des Rathscafés', 60.

26 Hans-Rudolf Meier, *op. cit*, p. 208.

27 Rudolf Schwarz , *Kirchenbau, Welt vor der Schwelle*, Heidelberg; Kerle Verlag, 1960, p. 22.

28 Cf https://inventaris.onroerenderfgoed.be/erfgoedobjecten/126779, accessed 31 January 2022.

29 Penelope Curtis, *Patio and Pavilion: The Place of Sculpture in Modern Architecture* (London: Ridinghouse/Karsten Schubert, 2008), 19.



[6] Study room library, Sint Pieters Woluwe, Plusoffice.

[7] Ningbo History Museum, Amateur Architecture Studio.

(modern/industrial) fragment have a signifying role in the architectural ensemble? To which past(s) do these spolia refer – if referencing any period at all?

Particularly in recent years, as Hans-Rudolf Meier has noted, the use of spolia or materials from demolished buildings is interpreted as a critical approach to destruction and societies based on disposability.[30] This reality is nowhere more poignant than in countries such as China, which have embarked on a dynamic development process, materialising in a building boom of unprecedented proportions. In such a context, the use of spolia may be viewed as an act of commenting on current building practices and as cultural critique. The reuse of debris from demolished buildings for new constructions, as found in the work of the Amateur Architecture Studio, may exemplify such an approach. For example, to construct the exterior walls of the Ningbo History Museum, Amateur Architecture Studio used materials from the debris of demolished villages in the region. These materials, including various types of natural stone, brick, and ceramics such as roof tiles, were stacked according to the principle of *wa pan*, a vernacular building technique traditionally used by villagers to reconstruct buildings after the destruction caused by typhoons. In an interview with Christian Schittich, Wang Shu explains that at the time of the construction of the Xiangshan campus, new materials were scarce.[31] Hence a contractor proposed working with pre-used materials. What was at first a pragmatic consideration steered the architect's interest and led to an examination of local traditions and techniques for reusing building materials. In later projects, the choice to work with debris became a conscious one – a cultural statement regarding the destruction of traditional cultures and their heritage.

The characteristics and the rationale of the reusing fragments in the work of Wang Shu may be substantially different from the historical applications of spolia. However, they equally perform an essential role in the iconographic reading of the new building. Unlike the ancient Roman spolia used in the Arch of Constantine or Santa Maria in Trastevere, the fragments do not refer to a specific, well-known source. Yet, as an abstract reference to the demolished buildings and villages, they are not entirely anonymous. Hence, the reused fragments or 'spolia' here can be read as a critique of the rapid urbanisation and modernisation in China, a tribute to the traditional culture that produced them, or simply as a sign of nostalgia.

Moreover, whereas ancient spolia usually had an iconographic role in their original setting, which was appropriated in a new context, the materials in the examples by Wang Shu were not unique or intrinsically valuable. They included bricks and stones that, in their original context, were mainly utilitarian and part of the quotidian building methods in rural China. It is only as a fragment, brought into a collage with fragments from a different origin, that they stand out as an individual piece and become an ornament and an iconographic feature.

The projects by Amateur Architecture Studio use fragments of older buildings as a cultural emblem, connecting the past to the present. Most examples of recent architectural projects that employ reclaimed materials, however, do so also, or even primarily, for ecological reasons, to reduce the material waste produced by the construction industry. The work of Rotor, a Belgian architectural collective specialised in the organisation of second-hand materials flows, occupies a prominent position in this discourse. One of the first large-scale operations of Rotor was the dismantling of the interiors of the Generale Bank in Brussels and the distribution of its fragments

[30] Hans-Rudolf Meier, *Spolien*, 209–210.
[31] Christian Schittich, *China's New Architecture* (Birkhäuser, 2019).



in 2014–2015. The building, constructed in 1968–1971, was not only a fine example of post-war architecture but also housed spaces styled by renowned Belgian interior designers of the period. The decision to demolish the structure to construct a new office building on the site sparked a debate on the ecological impact of this operation, the heritage value of the building, and the appreciation of post-war architecture in Brussels in general. In the demolition process, most of the construction materials were down-cycled. However, due to the initiative of Docomomo Belgium, the most valuable interiors were inventoried and decomposed for reuse. Rotor conducted the inventory, carried out the dismantling of the interiors, and organised the distribution of materials. The ceiling panels designed by Jules Wabbes, for instance, were installed in the municipal library of the Brussels suburb of Sint Pieters Woluwe, where they provide a reminder of the tradition of craft and virtuosity in post-war Belgian architecture and the cultural ambitions of this period. In another context, the ice cream parlour Glacier Gaston, the same reclaimed ceiling panels exert a slightly melancholic atmosphere, catering to patrons' desire for a bohemian existence. The effect of the presence of these elements also resides in their selection: the exceptional quality and craft, which is unavailable in new materials and under the conditions of construction in the early 20th century, provide a reminder of the luxuries of the post-war years. However, the tropical hardwood also echoes the reckless exploitation of nature in the Global South that would be deemed unacceptable today.

The theoretical and practice-led research of reusing elements has also been at the core of the work of the Swiss collective In situ, which defines itself as a *Baubüro* (an office focussed on building) rather than as a conventional architectural office, and its founder Barbara Buser. The regeneration of the Lysbüchel area, a former storage and distribution centre for the supermarket chain Coop, into commercial and residential functions was the first major project to pioneer the usage of reused elements, which Buser had started to collect in a *Bauteilbörse*, a commodity exchange for building elements, as early as 1995. Buildings with no particular architectural or historic quality were preserved and adapted instead of being demolished. Second-hand materials reclaimed on the site or in the immediate surroundings were then employed in the new structures. An important aspect of the reconversion was to bring additional daylight into the building, for which an interior courtyard was created, its façades being constructed exclusively from salvaged materials. In situ,

[8] K.118 in Winterthur.

responsible for the design, collected 200 windows from the surplus stock of manufacturers in the area. The fact that all windows are different in size, material, and colour defines the appearance of the façade.

In situ used another project, K.118 in Winterthur, to reflect the fundamental changes that a consequent use of existing elements imposes on the process of designing and building.[32] The reports on the work reveal the challenges of recuperating – 'hunting for building elements' – and saving building elements. The authors emphasise that it is not a question of using components 'one to one' but of creating something new from the old components and materials, combining them into innovative building elements and inventing ways of working with them. This process is labour intensive, involving the discovery and identification, the precise description and measuring of the found building components, and, eventually, the creation of an inventory to be used as a catalogue for new buildings and their designers. The development of online platforms proved essential in this process, as they allow potential users to view what is available.[33] Michel Maasmünster, whose detailed account of the various steps is part of the report on the K.118 project, notes: 'The process is characterised by a constant going back - or rather, by ongoing circles. From the idea that arises in a draft and is usually already oriented towards an existing material or an ideal, the process moves to finding and further on to testing the material and finally to revising it, through which new ideas for further needs arise. It is a constant establishing of a hypothetical image that remains abstract for the time being and is only concretised with the found material and revised if necessary'.[34]

Maasmünster gives an illustrative example. The profiled sheets envisaged for use in the 118 building turned out to be different in width. In order to find greater flexibility, the design was adjusted to use different sheets on each floor, which required a new detail, fundamentally changing the appearance of the entire building. The façade now can be read as a range of horizontal bands, each overlapping each other from bottom to top by approximately 6 cm. Designing with existing elements, or the strategies of sampling and joining together, requires flexibility, both intellectually and concerning the technologies used.

[32] Cf. Eva Stricker, Guido Brandl, and Andreas Sonderegger, eds., *Bauteile wiederverwenden: Ein Kompendium zum zirkulären Bauen* (Zurich: Park Books, 2021).
[33] Michel Maasmünster, 'Reportage K.118', in *Bauteile wiederverwenden*, eds. Stricker et al., 37.
[34] Maasmünster, 'Reportage K.118', 39.

## Reflective remarks: Spolia in reverse

The long history of spolia and their application undoubtedly acquire a new significance as the end to resources is becoming evident, and the waste of grey energy absorbed in existing buildings has become unacceptable. It would be a reduction of the significance of spolia, however, to frame the reuse of building elements solely within a pragmatic and technical perspective. Activating the existing fabric and elements is essential and inevitable. For the cultural practice of architecture, the incorporation of fragments from a variety of periods – a 'multitude of pasts' – affords additional and equally significant possibilities. The presence of these fragments has always been more than a reminder of former civilisations or cultural traditions but also an act, within architecture, to give form to a productively diffuse sense of continuity throughout human endeavours. Spolia provide parts of speech to a language of architecture – as they do in any language – that is applied within a contemporary context but is simultaneously aware of its roots. The use of existing elements – a pragmatic necessity – becomes a form of engaging with the multiple modernities and traditions that characterise current cultural conditions.

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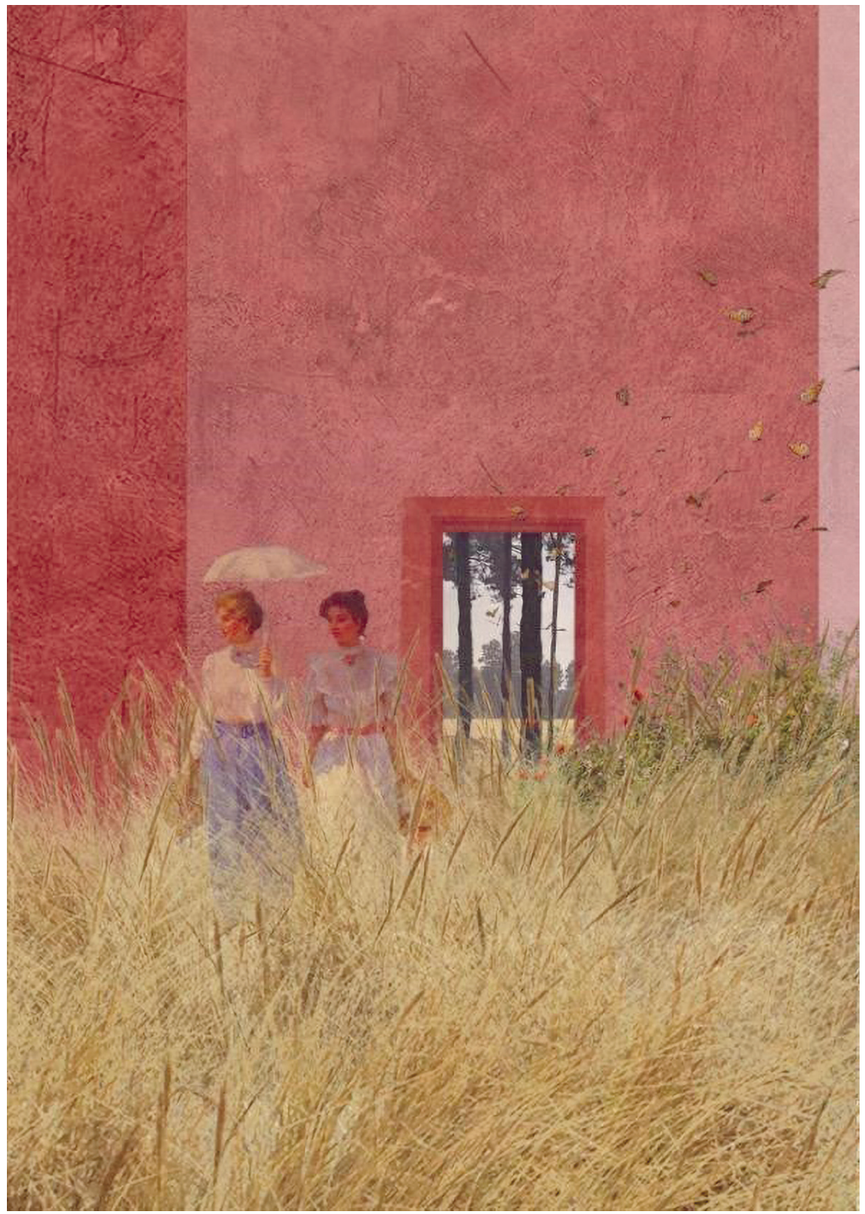
# Drawing parallels
## The iconography of a prosaic axonometry and an intimate collage
*S. Weckx & S. Heynickx* . . . . . .



[1] Tine Huysmans, Nostalgic Collage of Torzo's Z33, Z33 in Hasselt.

**Architecture is judged by the eyes that see, by the head that turns, and the legs that walk. Architecture is not a synchronic phenomenon but a successive one, made up of pictures adding themselves one to the other, following each other in time and space, like music.**
Le Corbusier, *The Modulor*, 1

**You cannot separate emotion from intellectual meaning. They come together. These are the meanings which art and architecture try to convey. The understanding of architectural meaning is fundamentally emotional. It speaks directly to the heart.**
Alberto Perez-Gomez, McGill University, 2021

## Introduction

Throughout history, the representation of architecture has consisted of two extremes: pursuing meaning through a prosaic (strict, linear, and controlled by measurements) approach or via a more phenomenal one (activating the senses, not always linear, and with no fixed proportions). The co-existence of opposed systems, which could be considered paradoxical, raises questions about what architectural drawings can actually convey and how richly they can express meaning. Can the reality of architecture be captured through drawing, whether prosaic or phenomenological? Do these parallel alternatives ever meet, and can the discipline of adaptive reuse benefit from the reconciliation of both approaches? These oscillating challenges in architectural representation marked the starting point of the research seminar *Drawing Parallels* 2020–2021, aimed at students in the International Master in Adaptive Reuse programme at the University of Hasselt. As Alberto Perez-Gomez argues on the importance of both perceptions in drawing and making architecture, 'you cannot separate emotion from intellectual meaning, they come together'. *Drawing Parallels* addresses both characteristics simultaneously, translated in a series of accurate axonometric drawings and intimate collages, as instruments to portray a specific place: the sensory completion by Francesca Torzo of the old Wing 58 of Z33 at the centre of Hasselt (B).

## Perception in a prosaic world

In the Renaissance period, architects – next to cartographers and artists – struggled with the new perception of architecture, questioning the meaning of buildings in a prosaic world.[1] The axonometric view as the preferred form for architectural representation – introduced by William Farrish in his 'Isometric Perspective' (1820), Joseph Jopling in 'The Practice of Isometric Perspective' (1835), and Auguste Choisy – was perceived as the answer to that question. However, if this mode of representation places objectivity over poetic intentions, the question arises: How can architectural qualities – transcending the tangible – then be captured? To start the thought process into the potential associations between poetic and geometric drawings, we must also look at the interaction between the images.

*Adding themselves one to the other, following each other in time and space, like music*, as Le Corbusier reflects on the successiveness (and perhaps collectiveness) of architecture, it is often judged through a sequence of well-chosen images. The main question in the seminar was: Can architecture be understood through the visual confrontation between axonometric drawings and the more *delusive* collages? In this essay, we reflect on the results of the exercise in the representation of the beguinage site and Z33 in particular by explaining the qualities and iconography of the drawings in relation to the iconology of the place.

The search for an iconographic sense of truthfulness and how to capture it lingers through the ages. The revolution of modern science – with Mongé's *Descriptive Geometry* as a representational resource – once again introduced a conflict between mathematical and poetic worldviews:

> There has been a progressive shift away from the individual human body as a reliable agent for recording spatial information, towards dependence upon instrumentation as the guarantor of accuracy and objectivity in survey data.[2]

For example, describing Rome with only polar coordinates, Leon Battista Alberti's map demonstrates this specific shift in the history of (architectural) representation: from *portraying* a place to *mapping* it. Living at the beginning of the Renaissance, medieval influences – distinguished by their craftsmanship, were still present. Alberti mastered both – the authentic arts of a medieval courtier and the awareness of a Renaissance intellectual.[3] However, Alberti's Roman work marks only the beginning of this shift, which later evolved into the art of picturing machinery and *Descriptive Geometry* (cf. Albrecht Dürer, Auguste Choisy). Consequently, the practice of architecture, henceforth a liberal art, became a mathematical activity, ordering lines and angles. One-point perspectives, enhancing phenomenological qualities, were perceived as delusions that would distort reality.

In contrast to earlier beliefs, during the 18th century, the conception of the relationship between architecture and its representation moved in yet another direction. Boullée and Ledoux were explicit in their rejection of mathematical reason as the foundation for theories of architecture. Addressing a poetic discourse, the two architects considered the role of drawing as an embodiment of architectural ideas. They claimed that the drawing *was* architecture.[4]

Looking at the paradigm of architectural representation through a historical lens, different discourses emerge: from mathematical accuracy to one-point perspectives playing with the eye to the drawing as an isolated entity free from the built world, entailing its own meaning. In other words, from iconographies of architecture to an iconography of the drawing itself, they prove that the initial arguments for drawing are not always the reasons why we return to it later. Original meanings and intentions of architecture and the drawing change simultaneously and constantly in time and offer new perspectives to new audiences.

Regarding the educational aspect, architectural education in Europe has for centuries valued the tacit knowledge embodied in making surveys and drawings.[5] Considering this notion that measuring, observing, and estimating are as much part of the discipline as the making of a design, the students of the International Master were asked to survey a particular structure first with tools at hand, and in a second phase, they were asked to portray the qualities of the building in pencil (red and blue) through a collage technique.

One of the first goals of the assignment was to expose potential qualities in the collectivity of architectural surveys and drawings. Individually, each drawing is a singular survey or sketch, but, taken collectively, they contribute to a complex understanding of the specific architecture and meaning of a place – the selection of images balances between accuracy and lust for the eye. Discussing the iconographic language and the interwoven connection with the iconology of the image, we aim to demonstrate the incorporated intentions and how one can read them – together in the seminar – as an analysis of the space and adaptive reuse by Torzo in particular. Adaptive reuse is not only about the building and its spatial quality but also about the embedded position of architecture in the landscape, the historical context, and the stories of a place. The connection with iconographic elements (drawing systems and choices of perspective) relays new iconological images. The case of the beguinage is a complex, layered project: medieval structures, 20th-century additions and a 21st-century makeover. We will demonstrate that the process of adaptive reuse can benefit from surrealist and even anachronistic imagery used as a form of critical observation through drawing.

## The continuity of nostalgia

Landscapes change. In the present urban context of Hasselt, for example, grain fields can no longer be found. However, there are a few places where greenery is still present. These green lungs provide oxygen and open space within the city fabric of Hasselt. The former beguinage has always been one of these places. In this image [Fig. 1], the nostalgic figure of a grain field is adopted to convey this meaning. In terms of its composition and colour structure (the accentuation of colour by the figures in a relatively uniform environment), the image is very reminiscent of the Impressionist paintings typical of the 19th century, e.g. Franz Binjé, Isidore Verheyden, and Maurice Hagemans. The nostalgic component – the impression of a world that no longer exists and perhaps never did – contrasts sharply with the grand figure of the new museum wall.

Furthermore, the nostalgic component of the overall image emphasises the conceptual nature of the thoughtful facade design of the new extension. By placing the facade in a new setting with

1 Dalibor Veseley, *Architecture in the Age of Divided Representation* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2004), p.113.

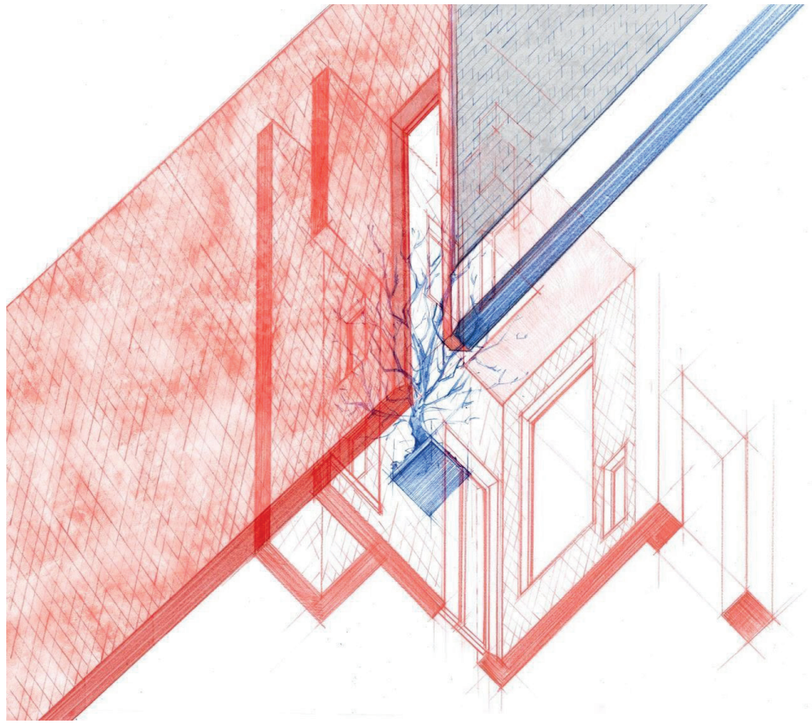
2 Denis E. Cosgrove, *Geography and Vision: Seeing, Imagining and Representing the World* (IBTauris, 2008).
3 Naomi Miller, *Mapping the City* (London, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2003), 159.
4 Alberto Pérez-Gómez, 'Architecture as Drawing', *JAE* 36, no. 2 (1982): 2–7.
5 Matthew Wells and Sarah Handelman, eds., *Survey: Architecture Iconographies* (Park Books, 2021), 35.

anachronistic figures, the interpretation of the image, as a part of a bigger picture, is forced towards a deeper meaning. As we mentioned, contextual awareness in adaptive reuse must be highlighted, and here the iconological effect of nostalgia is key.

*A re-presentation of Wing 58*

Francesca Torzo's empathic approach towards the original *Vleugel 58* can be felt throughout the whole extension; its thoughtful partition, which enhances the sacred atmosphere of the *grand chambers* (exhibition spaces) and the gentle surfaces of the facade and ceilings, merges the old building with the new as a patchwork of delicate textiles. The axonometric perspective complements the collage to formulate an image of the building's atmosphere [Fig. 2]. The axonometric view addresses its Euclidean characteristics (parallel lines that never meet) to isolate the subject from its broader context. As Theo Van Doesburg states, 'the new architecture has no form and it recognises no fundamental or immutable types and it doesn't distinguish front from back, left from right and, and if possible, neither up from down …, axonometry is the method most appropriate for designing the new spatial architecture'.[6]

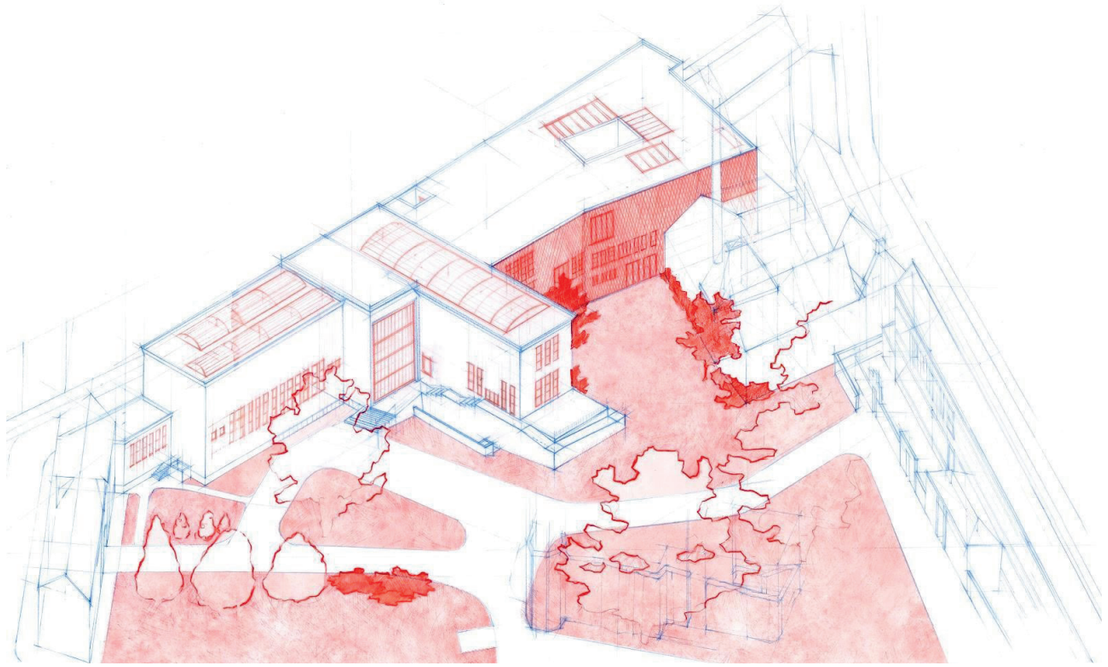
The building's patio is drawn in the very centre of the overall composition, giving the impression that it is also the centre of the building. By projecting the patio onto the three Euclidean planes (length, width, height), the patio becomes autonomous, free from gravity, and free from the overall building and the city. This method demonstrates the prominence of the patio: providing an entrance, alluring passers-by, and welcoming a shower of light into the surrounding chambers. Although the patio is a generous space, it is too small to be captured with a one-point perspective drawing. Mastering objectivity and comprehensiveness, the axonometric perspective is additive.



[2] Iryna Korzh, Axonometry of the Entrance Patio, Z33 in Hasselt.

6 Alberto Pérez-Gómez, *Architectural Representation and the Perspective Hinge* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press), 318.





[3] Iryna Korzh, Aerial view of beguinage Hasselt.

The choice Torzo made to introduce a solitary tree into the design at this particular spot is not accidental. The tree stands in the only recess of a long urban wall of tiles, initiating a conversation and inviting the passengers to enter. One's journey to discover the building starts here.

The author of the drawing communicates through two character codes, red and blue: red, referring to the tiling of the new facade, is also used to contrast with the old, depicted in blue. On the other hand, the entrance hall is drawn transparently, prioritising the long wall towards the street. The codes are used to plot a narrative about the old and the new and seem interchangeable within the drawing. While the intentions of the axonometric drawing are known, we must not forget that it embodies not only the implementation of a systematic perspective theory; it also addresses iconographic codes, which might be interpreted differently tomorrow. As Mathew Wells states, 'a survey need not only be a representation of the world, but can also be a representation of it to a new audience'.[7]

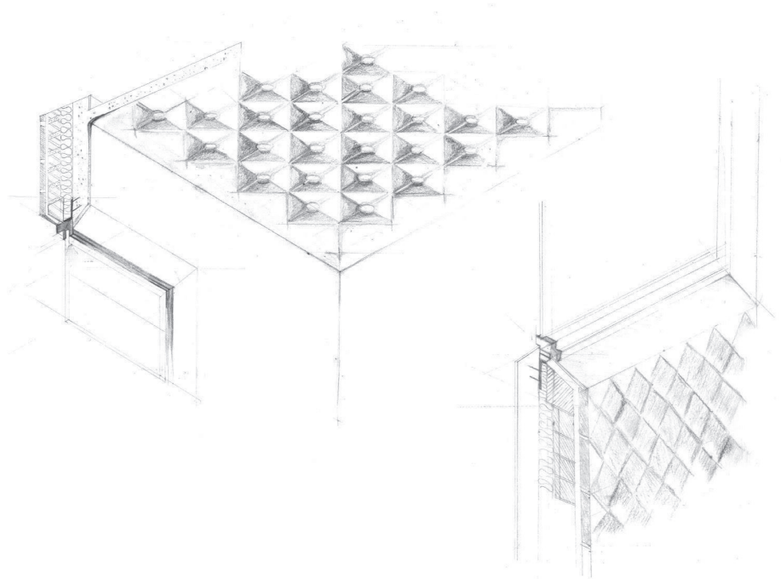
The depicted friction between old and new – walls in the street and the gap in between – consolidates the idea of integration and adaptive reuse of the old wing. The drawing does not connect with nostalgia but demonstrates the iconological effect of a consequent drawing technique.

**Symbolising the context**

When creating architectural drawings, the viewpoint is the first decision that must be made. In this image [Fig. 3], the birds-eye view reinforces the scale and cohesion of the complex, while the red-blue code here structures the image.

The patchwork of gardens, enveloped by the building, is a miniature of its broader context – the city centre with modest streets and squares framing picturesque views. Furthermore, Francesca Torzo demonstrates that this iconological association – between the city and the site – guided the design of the new wing. The red coding suggests the cohesion

7 Wells and Handelman, *Survey*.



[4] Danelle Dreyer, The Poetics of Construction, Z33 in Hasselt.

[5] Vahid Ashkari Kasan, Anachronistic Collage, former beguinage church in Hasselt.

of the sub-areas within the enclosed garden, whereas the church ruin, in blue, ruptures the middle zone. The ancient trees and greenery, contributing to the nostalgic experience of the place (cf. the intimate collage), are either contoured or shown in full. The contoured trees, revealing parts of the underlying building, connect the horizontal plane with the vertical one, ensuring balance within the drawing. One can say that the iconographic language is the same as in Figure 2, but the iconological meaning is different. Rather than the colour-coding system, the isolation of meaningful areas (garden, ruin, building, wall) structures the drawing and explains the quality of the adaptive reuse–based thinking in the city.

### *The poetics of a construction drawing*

The materialisation of Francesca Torzo's Z33 indicates an empathic understanding of the previous structure: *Vleugel 58*. The gentle geometry of the pattern and the thoughtful colours used in the new building's brickwork envisage the continuity of the old facade.

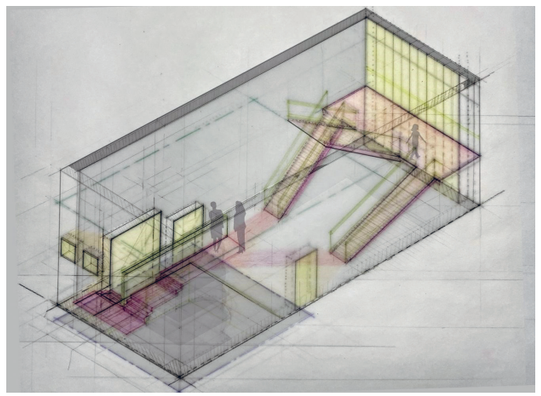
Although axonometric views are characterised by a certain objectivity towards its subject, the delicate pencil drawing succeeds in communicating geometric information and the atmospheric qualities of the façade and cassette ceilings [Fig. 4]. As Perez-Gomez mentions beautifully, 'you cannot separate emotion from intellectual meaning. They come together'.[8]

This drawing assimilates the exactitude of a constructional drawing – communicating construction details – and simultaneously captures phenomenological characteristics.

### *Envisaging autonomous meanings*

Upon viewing a ruin, one of the first questions that come to mind is: *What happened here?* The overgrown corner in the beguinage reveals only a fragment of the old church.

Whereas an old photograph and the imprint of the remains are the only witnesses of the vast scale of the demolished building, the collage constructs an imaginary of its former state [Fig. 5]. It addresses the concept of *anachronism* – a manipulated time frame – to invoke historical information with the actual appearance of the site. Although the overgrowth of the ruin is relatively recent, the introduction of the war scene and the staging of the drawing stimulates the narrative. Representing a scene from the First World War, and contrary to the church being bombed during the Second World War, the scene depicted is historically inaccurate. The trench scene is not a literal evocation of history but aims to enhance certain peculiarities of that time, such as the church being a strategic shelter during the war. The conception of potential reuse lines can be linked to an imaginative history. The image of the heroic deed – one that did not take place – reinforces the signal to celebrate and preserve the remains in their current state, autonomous in time and space.



[6] Maria Regina Alfaro, Axonometry, staircase Z33 in Hasselt.

[8] Alberto Perez-Gomez, discussion at McGill University in Canada, 2021.



### *Enhancing objectivity*

To map a building's structure, circulation, and partition, an axonometric perspective seems the ideal approach, pursuing an objective and organising eye [Fig. 6]. The final image is a superimposition of drawings on tracing paper, starting with the floor plan by Francesca Torzo. The construction lines are inseparable from the final drawing, which focuses on the new staircase. Starting from the outer walls and converging in a second gesture, the staircase reverts to the original staircase in *Vleugel 58*. The transparency indicates that the floors are interconnected. In between the layers, colours appear as a code to signify walls, circulation, and floor levels. The drawing acts as an X-ray of the building and especially of the circulation space. However, this graphical strategy starts from a technical approach. The direct citation of the staircase by Torzo forms the core idea of this drawing. The iconographic language of transparency in the drawing explains the logical circulation and intervention by Torzo in a didactic way.

### *A translation of the façade design*

This collage addresses the superlative of reality, typical of the literary movement of *magical realism*, and a Surrealist impression to demonstrate the qualities of the new building [Fig. 7]. Magical realism allows for the depiction of unimaginable scenes as if they are part of reality. People can fly or see through walls. Without a strict separation between dream and reality, time is relative. The atmosphere in this image has similar tensions as in Surrealist paintings, e.g. the train stations of Paul Delvaux. The presence of a person in a tranquil setting expresses desolation and tension. Moreover, the inaccessibility of the figure, standing at a certain distance, appears as a tripartition of the setting: the highly detailed foreground (focusing on the textures of brick and cobblestones); the middle ground, with an extension of the time frame (showing scenes from the time of the construction); and a suggested horizon of Hasselt. All are shown through an impression of an enveloped façade, referring to the intentions of Francesca Torzo's design concept. The collage defines the new wall –identifying Torzo as an important part of the strategy of adaptive reuse.

## Conclusion

We believe that it is not only the confrontation but rather the incorporation of both perceptions – prosaic and phenomenological – that is relevant

[7] Iryna Korzh, Collage of Textures, Z33 in Hasselt.

when developing an understanding of a building or structure. As demonstrated, symbolic elements and surrealistic combinations are possible paths.

From the romantic fluttering skirts of ladies of leisure to the overcast skies hanging gravely over someone wearing a COVID-19 mask, architectural representation grasps much more than only the physical information about the building. The sequence of images shows that divergent values can be captured through drawing, although the meaning of the drawing and the architecture itself might change over time, and only the authors know the initial arguments. Perhaps the truth only emerges for a moment when the author finishes their work and is, from then on, free from its initial meaning.

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# Small talk about stone flowers
## Reading transient icons in Renaat Braem's Arena District

*M. Moors & E. Couchez* . . . . . .

[1] Architectural iconography by Renaat Braem as part of the Arenawijk representing love and luck: a flower growing through an abstract representation of a head.


[2] Master plan of the Arenawijk. The northern blocks will be demolished (red), and the southern blocks will be regenerated (blue). The central part of clustered small apartment towers will not be adapted; its residents will stay. Photos indicate the different icons on the site, implemented in the southern blocks (blue).

## Introduction

During the past three years (2020–2022), the Belgian photographer Elisabeth Broekaert has documented the Arenawijk in Antwerp. The Arenawijk was built between 1960 and 1964 by Belgian modernist architect, urban planner, theorist, and educator Renaat Braem (1910–2001) in a progressive brutalist vocabulary.[1] In his built and written oeuvre, Braem was firmly committed to social housing and criticised the post-war spatial chaos in Belgium.[2] In 1946 – when the need for housing in Antwerp was acute – Braem, together with urban planner Octave De Koninckx (1914–1967), engineer August Mennes (1884–1953), and architects Geo Brosens (1891–1967), Flor Laforce (1902–1973), and Louis Kuypers (born in 1923), was commissioned to design a social housing development on an unbuilt plot of land in Deurne. This new assignment was the last social housing project in Braem's momentous career [Fig.1], in which he strove for the full implementation of sculptures. Like many other modernist housing ensembles, a recent feasibility study of the Arenawijk has shown that the buildings do not meet contemporary housing requirements and, as a result, the northern development of the site will soon be demolished. As part of a new master plan, residents are currently moving out of the apartment blocks in the north and south of the site. In 2019, the Arenawijk was still considered an icon of Flemish post-war social housing and praised for its heritage values – material and immaterial alike.[3] Today, it is covered in a rugged blanket of negativity.

Broekaert's lens has registered the materialisation of time through slow decay. In one picture of an interior, for instance, wallpaper is peeling off from the walls [Fig. 3]. Where paintings and pictures once hung, now only a yellowed void reminds the viewer that these interiors were inhabited not long ago. In the room next door, dozens of flies are lying dead on their sides on a greyish worn-out vinyl floor. With their legs up in the air, they seem to have suffered a sudden death [Fig. 4]. The feeling of 'abrupt' abandonment and frozen time is prominent. This perception of decay is precisely what one might expect from a documentary photographic series on a brutalist housing ensemble, reminiscent of the Smithons' *Golden Lane Housing* competition entry (1951–1952) and Jack Lynn and Ivor Smith's *Park Hill* (1957–1961) in Sheffield, both grounded in socialist theories. Architects have recently praised projects like these as landmarks of the modernist 'street in the sky' concept – aerial walkways, spacious flats, surrounding green areas – yet they have also been scorned by the public, tenants, and officials as 'brutalist failures', characterised by 'austere' and 'inhuman' design, a 'monstrous appearance', and failed 'utopic visions'. More often than not, this negative perception has led to decisions to demolish such ensembles.[4]

The photographs shown here are only some of an entire series in which Broekaert captured how residents have appropriated the space in the private interior and the semi-public exterior [Fig. 5]. However, our focus in this paper is not on the private spaces, but on how residents interpret and give meaning to their homes, the building, and its unique artistic iconography. Furthermore, we question how these added layers of meaning – deviating from the original messages conveyed by the architect – contribute to the appropriation of space; and what role they can play in the light of a site's regeneration.

One image in Broeckaert's series led us to this specific focus. In that picture [Fig. 6], a woman walks her dog. Braem's building is in the background. Broekaert photographed her twice: in one shot, she is under a sculpture of an abstracted head supported by a concrete buttress; in the other, she is walking away. Her orange coat and the loose green leash contrast strongly with the monochrome concrete walls, which have turned green and appear dirty at the edges. While the woman is looking away, the sculpture is shown frontally with a four-petal flower traversing the eyes. The stone face, covered with flowers, stares right at us.

We took this provocative glance as an invitation to re-read Braem's sculptures, which are spread over the site and integrated into the buildings in the southern blocks (indicated in blue in Fig. 2). Those blocks will not be demolished but regenerated as a housing cooperative.[5] For Braem, the 'formal expression' of the building – such as the organic contours of the structures and the integrated sculptures discussed in the next section – was more important than the dimensions of the floorplans as well as the thermal and acoustic insulation.[6]

Because the current discourse on the transition of modernist complexes is primarily focused on technical and economic needs, we want to dive deeper into the contemporary meaning of those sculptures on-site by evoking and examining the use of architectural iconography. In the first part, we will outline the historical development of the site through the lens of iconography. In the second part, we will dive deeper into the symbolical meanings these sculptures carried out when they were erected by Braem and compare them with some of the other sculptures made by the architect and the broader debates on architecture and art. To do so, we will build on the notions of iconography and iconology developed by art historian Erwin Panofsky (1892–1968). In a third section, we will explore the transient meaning of the icons through the current residents' eyes via informal interviews[7] introduced here as 'small talk', in situ observations, backed up by the photographs of Elisabeth Broekaert we described above. In the conclusion, we will return to the notions of meaning, interpretation, and appropriation and reflect on how these could broaden the debate on the adaptive reuse of modernist ensembles.

[3] The yellowed wallpaper with the white void – a trace of its former inhabitation – is peeling.

[4] Dead flies found in one of the emptied apartments in the northern part of the Arenawijk.

## The iconographic history of the Arenawijk

The Arenawijk's history dates to the mid-19th century, as the housing blocks are organised around the (former) 'Fortress of Deurne'. This fortification complex was built by the Belgian state around the Spanish ramparts in 1852 and was supposed to function as an armoured camp for Antwerp. Nonetheless, the fortress never fulfilled its initial purpose; instead, it was used as a refuge during the Second World War. In 1946, the military domain was recategorised as a residential zone. What is remarkable is that the iconography of the fortress architecture remains visible today. Braem placed the more rigid apartments in the north and the expressive two-storey duplex residences with galleries in the southern part, on the outer circumference of the plot – supposedly to embrace the green park. Yet, the yellow contour lines in [Fig.2] colour the interface of the new housing blocks of Braem with the anterior Fortress of Deurne. As a result, the historical (and iconic) pentagonal scheme is still legible.*

1 Jo Braeken, *Renaat Braem 1910–2001* (Brussels: ASA Publishers, Vlaams Instituut voor het Onroerend Erfgoed, 2010). On his work as an educator, see Elke Couchez, 'The Antwerp (Stair) Case: How a Modernist Architect Staged His Educational and Ideological Programme', *Paedagogica Historica* 53, no. 6 (2017): 799–826.

2 Braem's most cited work is *Het lelijkste land ter wereld* [The Ugliest Country in the World], published in 1968. Renaat Braem, *Het lelijkste land ter wereld* (Asp / Vubpress / Upa, 2010).

3 In 2019, the Flanders Heritage Agency classified the Arenawijk as architectural heritage.

4 These discussions are especially lively on social media. The role of photography in the evaluation of brutalist architecture has been discussed in Hamish Lonergan, 'Meme, Memory or Critic: Revaluing Brutalism on Social Media', in *Valuing Architecture: Heritage and the Economics of Culture*, eds. Ashley Paine, John MacArthur, and Susan Holden (Amsterdam: Valiz, n.d.).

5 The implementation of art in architecture was identified as a unique artistic value by the Flanders Heritage Agency. We assume that these sculptures played a role in the decision to not demolish the southern blocks.

6 Francis Strauven, *Renaat Braem Architect* (Brussels: Archief voor moderne architectuur, 1983).

7 The first author walked around the site for more than eight hours spread over three days with photos [Figs. 6, 10] of the icons and a map of the site (Fig. 2) in hand. She sporadically addressed passers-by (approximately 15 people) and asked if they knew the story of Braem and his 'stone flowers'. In many cases, this opened the conversation in an informal and comfortable way, using so-called 'small talk'. Sharing this titbit of historical information and asking passers-by about their thoughts in an informal way rather than organizing a large-scale survey, allowed them to respond in a more spontaneous way.

* We want to thank Nikolaas Vande Keere, for the informal moments where we could challenge our ideas on iconography in the context of the Arenawijk.

In his early sketches, the fortress was to be reused as a community centre – through new organically shaped openings, adaptations, and additions – to serve public cultural facilities. Today, it is only used as a private sporting complex.[8] Was the opening up of the fortress to the public a literal expression of his socialist agenda? We cannot say with certainty. Yet, the integration of concrete sculptures into the architecture of the complex definitely was intentional. Three abstract sculptures – Braem called them 'social accents of love and happiness' – can be found in the southern part: more specifically, one in the sawtooth formation and two in the elongated, delineated building block. The first [Fig. 6] is the flower that grows through the head with the centred eye, described earlier. Another sculpture of flowers blossoms on a star, and a representation of a flower rising from the sun is placed as a crown on the staircase turret providing access to the first gallery. Initially, the sculptures were intended to be painted in bright colours, but that never happened.[9]

[5] Interior view of one of the apartments in the northern part of the Arenawijk. This interior brims with replicas of famous artworks, bucolic scenes, and figurines of young boys holding umbrellas. A woman, standing under a candelabrum with fake candles and a small macrame dreamcatcher, is resting her hand on a heavy wooden cabinet.

[6] Architectural iconography by Renaat Braem as part of the Arenawijk representing love and luck: a flower growing through an abstract representation of a head.

**Tracing intentions and symbolic layers: An iconographical reading**

If we are to develop an iconographic reading of these icons in a Panofskyan way, we have to reveal the symbolic content of the artworks by describing them and comparing them to other works of art (both in literature and in the visual arts). In a subsequent iconological reading, these observations can be connected to social and economic factors of a certain period, allowing the observer to see the artwork as marking an era and expressing its underlying ideological strains.

The first job of an iconographer is to decode represented symbols.[10] A brief glance at Hans Biedermann's *Dictionary of Symbols* (1994) tells us that the eye has been considered the most important organ of the senses throughout European art history, functioning as a receptive organ and a transmitter of inner spirits.[11] Looking at Braem's biography, the connection to Freemasonry can be made here as well. Being a member of the Freemason lodge 'Droit Humain', Braem might well have derived the reference to the eye from this context.[12] In his work, the eye is depicted as a mediating organ between humanity and nature, shifting between the physical and the spiritual realm. A drawing of his murals in the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) Rectorship building (1972) shows the same idea: only through seeing can one come to reason and an 'enlightened' state of being [Fig. 7A-B].

[7A-B] Murals on the upper floor of the VUB administration and the rectory, depicting humans in total harmony with nature and reaching an 'enlightened state of being', by Renaat Braem, 1971–1976, Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB).

Consequently, the star is a frequently used symbol that allows for multiple interpretations: it appears both in Indian and Abrahamic religions and is widely used on flags and military and police insignia. According to another dictionary of symbols, stars can indicate notions of supremacy, consistency, guidance and guardianship, vigilance and aspiration.[12] In Freemasonry, the five-pointed pentagram is referred to as the 'blazing star', and it is used as a symbol for the 'mystic centre', signifying regeneration. Braem used these symbols in a non-dogmatic way and only referred to them in marginal notes next to drawings. He wrote, 'just as nature creates flowers, we make stone flowers. They too are resting points on the path of eternal evolution'.[14]

Braem's biography and architectural oeuvre provide some insight into how we can understand 'evolution', demonstrating that much of his work was inspired by socialist beliefs. His father was a member of the *Frontpartij* (Front Party) and belonged to the pacifist and socially committed left wing of the Flemish Movement. Hence, Braem's social awareness and commitment began at an early age. He finished his architecture studies at the Academy for Fine Arts in Antwerp in 1935, where he was introduced to socialist literature. During his education, Braem was inspired by the revolutionary momentum of Russian constructivism. Subsequently, he wanted to integrate the visual arts, responding to the socialist society, into an architecture symbolising liberated humanity. He aspired a civilisation where solidarity would not be affected by individual differences and defined architecture as follows (1934): 'Architecture is the art of organising the living environment to liberate mankind both physically and spiritually.'[15]

Like many of his contemporaries, Braem joined the Belgian Communist Party (KP) but left it around 1950 because he – and many like him – thought that the KP uncritically followed the Russian Stalinist model.[16] Braem later declared that he was a party of his own, 'a Braemist, a loner in politics and architecture, committed exclusively to the social re-orientation of art and architecture'.[17] For Braem, civilisation could be transformed by the concept of a 'classless society'. The role of modern architecture was to anticipate this mission. Braem was convinced that architecture should be perceived as

8 Similar to his other architecture commissions, Braem had ambitious ideas that eventually were dismissed in the execution phase. Further, his intentions to flank the fort with seven high-rise towers remained hypothetical.

9 Jo Braeken, *Renaat Braem 1910–2001* (Brussels: ASA Publishers, Vlaams Instituut voor het Onroerend Erfgoed, 2010); Marie Moors and Bie Plevoets, 'Re-Reading the Visions of the Modernists of CIAM', in *REHAB 2019 - The 4th International Conference on Preservation, Maintenance and Rehabilitation of Historic Buildings and Structures* (Guimaraes, Portugal: Green Lines Institute, 2019); Marie Moors, 'Reviving Modernist Housing: Arena District of Renaat Braem' (paper presented at the 16th Docomomo International Conference, Tokyo, Japan, 2021).

10 Tom Hardy, ed., *Art Education in a Postmodern World: Collected Essays* (Bristol: Intellect, 2006).

11 Hans Biedermann, *Dictionary of Symbolism: Cultural Icons and the Meanings Behind Them* (New York: Meridian Books, 1994). The iconography of the eye in works by Braem has been discussed in Elke Couchez, 'The Antwerp (Stair) Case: How a Modernist Architect Staged His Educational and Ideological Programme', *Paedagogica Historica* 53, no. 6 (2017): 799–826.

12 He delivered many lectures for this loge between 1945 and 1984. See: https://archief.onroerenderfgoed.be/vrijmetselarij;term/browseTerm.

13 Jack Tresidder, *The Watkins Dictionary of Symbols* (London: Watkins Media, 2012).

14 Free translation into English: Strauven, *Renaat Braem Architect*, 86. Original quote: *'Zoals de natuur bloemen schept, maken wij stenen bloemen. Zij ook zijn rustpunten op de weg van de eeuwige evolutie'.*

15 Jo Braeken, 'De Erfenis Van Een Sociaal Bewogen Architect - Renaat Braem En De Menselijke Stad', *VMSW Woonwoord* (2010): 6-9.; the original citation in Dutch reads '*Architectuur is de kunst van het organiseren van het levensmilieu met als doel de stoffelijke en de geestelijke bevrijding van de mens*'.

16 Francis Strauven and Renaat Braem, *Renaat Braem: De Dialectische Avonturen Van Een Vlaams Functionalist* (Archief voor Moderne Architectuur, 1983).

17 Renaat Braem, *Het Schoonste Land Ter Wereld* (Kritak, 1987), 112.

18 Strauven, *Renaat Braem Architect*. See also Couchez, 'The Antwerp (Stair) Case'. Braem used the word 'plastische kunsten' in Dutch to refer to the visual arts, which we translated as 'plastic' in this text.

a 'community art'. He translated this vision regularly via visual or so-called 'plastic' additions to his buildings.[18]

An illustrative example is his 1950s revolutionary Kiel housing estate, where murals, colour contrasts, sculptures, and carefully orchestrated outdoor landscaping were all aligned in the design and combined with public facilities. Braem presented the Kiel project at the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM) in 1953.[19] Among other topics, the role of aesthetics and art was extensively considered during this conference.[20] Siegfried Giedion (1888–1968), Aldo Van Eyck (1918–1999), Alison Smithson (1928–1993), and Peter Smithson (1923–1903) believed that a synthesis of the arts could undo the feeling of alienation, which arose as a flip side to the rapid proliferation of highly technocratic building processes characterising post-war urban redevelopment.[21] Art thus had to contribute to a more humane environment.

At Kiel, Braem paid specific attention to the entrance halls of the different apartment blocks, where he placed sculptures to reference 'the social purpose' of his intentions or to remind the residents to strive for a 'happier' family, the fundament of a 'clean' community, according to Braem. A monumental canopy in reinforced concrete supported by caryatids of a man and a woman holding a child [Fig. 8], and a group of sculptures entitled 'Higher Up' – three circus performers standing on top of each other, expressing the 'joy of life' – illustrate this perception [Fig. 9]. Whereas the conception of the artworks was defined by Braem, the execution of the sculptures was completed by different artists. Additionally, Braem devised a pattern of contrasting colours and motifs for the walls and ceilings in the entrance halls, which were only partially executed. Following the Kiel project, Braem was commissioned for other collective housing developments like the Modelwijk in Brussels, Sint-Maartensdal in Leuven, Kruiskenslei in Antwerp, and the case study in this paper: the Arenawijk in Deurne.[22]

To conclude this iconographic reading, we can say that the Arenawijk is a representative example of a *gesamtkunstwerk*, in which Braem (partly) realised his socialist vision of architecture through the assimilation of architecture and art. Tracing some symbolic layers, comparing Braem's images to other projects, and adding a biographical reading, we can thus conclude that he represented his socialist vision for a more 'humane' architecture via these 'secular icons'. However, in 2021, the historical conditions, the ideological underpinnings, and the vision of the role of art and architecture in society have changed. How, then, do residents perceive these icons today?

[8] Male and female caryatids carrying a child and supporting an entrance hall canopy. Kiel housing estate, Renaat Braem, Antwerp, 2019.

[9] Kiel housing estate, Renaat Braem, Antwerp.

### Multi-interpretability of icons

As the photographs of Elizabeth Broeckaert have shown, the Arenawijk is marked by the inevitable ravages of time. The poor condition of the buildings and their urgent need for renovation can be read as a metaphor for the current debate on possible futures for modernist housing ensembles. The constructions are literally 'giving up', which results in unfavourable and uncomfortable living conditions. Simultaneously, this 'blanket of time' – especially the patina on the iconographical sculptures – can be interpreted as weakening the initially proclaimed socialist utopia. To what extent are these sculptures still perceived as 'socialist accents of love and luck'?[23] Of course, we can ask ourselves if these sculptures should not rather be appreciated as historical relics and evidence. However, we are convinced that a contemporary reading of these icons heralds refreshing insights, developed as a new lens to look at modernist ensembles undergoing a process of regeneration.

The question 'what do contemporary layers of meaning attribute to the site?' becomes all the more pressing when we look at the intense social and cultural transformation that the site has undergone in the 1990s due to different migration policies. According to the official numbers of the city of Antwerp, the southwest of Deurne – which includes the Arenawijk – is home to 54% foreign-born inhabitants (including the origin of their parents).[24] From previous site visits, we know that many first-generation residents do not feel any hesitation in voicing their worries and fears about the shifts in residency patterns; they even categorise this issue as the main reason for the site's material degradation.[25] As a result, we researched the role that the iconography of the Arenawijk plays for its current diverse group of inhabitants, represented by 60 nationalities. Via informal talks with residents on-site, new readings of the place and interpretations and connotations of the sculptures emerged. 'The star reminds me of our Moroccan flag'. Two younger boys standing confident on their electric scooters answered our question about their personal associations with the sculptures in the district without any hesitation. These boys knew the sculptures. However, that was not always the case. A mother with two young children, who have been living in the neighbourhood for a couple of years now, had not noticed the sculptures before. When we asked her what the star meant for her on the spot, she also referred to the Moroccan star [Figs. 10-11]. Her young son stated that the icon of the head reminds him of an evil eye that watches over and controls people. They also associated it with the Jewish Star of David and the Nazi regime. Other passers-by – most of them with Moroccan origins – referred to the lack of colour in their district, especially these 'grey' icons. They pointed out the contrast with their quaint, blue-and-orange-tinted Moroccan neighbourhoods. Initially, Braem had planned to paint the icons all in bright tints. Can this be the first step in the site's re-appropriation?

[19] He was no stranger to the CIAM entourage as he was introduced to the CIAM community through the intersession of his mentor Le Corbusier in 1937.

[20] 'An appeal for a synthesis of the Major Arts had already been made by Le Corbusier at the Liberation in 1944 in the journal *Volonté*. Then the theme was taken up by CIAM in 1947, at the Congress of Bridgwater which led to the creation of a section of CIAM devoted to a synthesis of the Plastic Arts. Finally at the end of 1948 a meeting was held in Paris to put in practice this introduction of the plastic arts into architecture'. See: http://www.fondationlecorbusier.fr/corbuweb/morpheus.aspx?sysId=13&IrisObjectId=5712&sysLanguage=en-en&itemPos=44&itemSort=en-en_sort_string1%20&itemCount=216&sysParentName=&sysParentId=65.

[21] Nicola Pezolet, 'Spectacles Plastiques: Reconstruction and the Debates on the "Synthesis of the Arts" in France, 1944–1962' (Ph.D. Diss., Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2012).

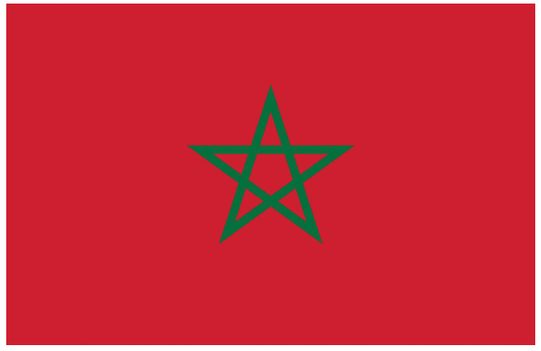
[22] Karina Van Herck, 'Wooneenheid Kiel', Agentschap Onroerend Erfgoed, https://inventaris.onroerenderfgoed.be/erfgoedobjecten/126553.

[23] Braem, quoted in Strauven, Renaat Braem Architect, 86.

[24] Stad in Cijfers: Databank, 'Inwoners naar nationaliteit, leeftijd (8 klassen) en geslacht 2021 – Buurten', Stad Antwerpn in Cijfers, https://stadincijfers.antwerpen.be/?-var=natcube.

[25] Marie Moors and Koenraad Van Cleempoel, 'The Living Heritage of Renaat Braem's Arena District', (Nordisk Arkitekturforskning (The Nordic Association of Architectural Research), forthcoming).

[10] Sculpture in the Arenawijk representing love and luck: flowers blossoming from a star by Renaat Braem, Arenawijk, Antwerp, Belgium, 1964.



[11] Flag of Morocco.

More than half of those interviewed had never noticed the sculptures – surprisingly, most of them were first-generation inhabitants who had lived there for a long time: 'I have never thought about it. People are not interested in it at all, are they?' asked an older man enjoying his beer in the community centre. Also, five rubbish collectors, an elderly couple, and another male inhabitant shared this vision.

Melancholy is another aspect that frequently emerged during our talks. 'It reminds me of the past', explained a young boy who is growing up in the Arenawijk. Along the same lines, a young girl pointed out the following: 'I appreciate those old things. It is just like in Albania, but then more pretty'. A young mother, who was getting some fresh air with her newborn baby, linked the iconography in the Arenawijk with images in her Romanian hometown. These personal memories and connections made by the residents were mainly positive. It is interesting to observe how these abstract sculptures, by the hand of Braem, leave open a certain identification, regardless of the author's intentions and the observer's cultural background.

Generally, people were fascinated by the meaning of the icons. Each of them shyly admitted that they had never paid attention to the sculptures before, yet after a short historical contextualisation, all of them found it a pity that they did not know the intentions of the architect. 'I think the architect had the urge to leave something behind', one said intuitively and accurately. Three others linked the icons to the uniqueness of the site, or to say it in their words: 'they are super cool' and make the neighbourhood 'at least not mundane and boring', 'I am sure people will start to miss the icons if they would dissapear'.

The moment we asked the recent residents for their opinions, visions, and interpretations of the iconography in the Arenawijk, they were pleasantly surprised. Their faces literally glowed.

### Conclusion: Towards a living heritage

In this paper, we developed a double reading of Braem's on-site sculptures. First, we used the lens of the inventor or art historian, which enabled us to get closer to the initial symbolic layers. Second, we used the approach of the field worker via in-person interviews. Whereas the iconographical reading could be further developed by looking more closely at similar artworks of the 1940s and 1950s, the fieldwork imposed its own challenges. As researchers having expertise in architecture history, theory and adaptive reuse, we struggled with how to develop open-ended methodologies to question people about their interpretations of their surroundings.[26]

Therefore, we used this paper to engage in 'small talk' on the topic of public spaces, embracing this approach for writing 'living histories'. Though this approach is far from a solid scientific method, it allowed us to question the notion of iconography and think about its transient meanings. Braem's 'stone flowers' in the Arenawijk have undergone a considerable shift in appearance, meaning, and interpretation. His socialist message of love and luck might never have reached its recipients; instead, it opened a new world of suggestive interpretations. His formalist and abstract language allowed for multiple (multicultural) readings, leading to our conclusion that an iconographic reading is a way of putting the potential of the multi-interpretability of architecture on the table in adaptive reuse projects.

Our Arenawijk case reveals that meanings and associations shift over time and that the intention of the architect is only one thread in a polyphonic narrative. An iconographical reading, however crucial in an adaptive reuse process, does not sufficiently consider the layers of time and the personal associations of the residents. When reusing such sculptures, we have to go further than retrieving the initial artistic intentions (insofar as we can assure them) and release the idea that an image should trigger an 'appropriate' interpretation.

Architects should be concerned with the social implications and the shifting meanings of both artworks and buildings and embrace the non-neutrality of images or signs. As Nicholas Addison wrote: 'Iconographic analysis, or even its Panofskian extension into iconology, contains the danger of assuming that the vehicle, or in semiotic terms the signifier, is neutral. Here the artwork's content (the signified) is delivered by its formal means (signifiers) in a seamless process of transmission where only the symbolic nature of its represented objects stands in the way of literal interpretation'.[27] Willem A. DeVries links interpretation and meaning in the article 'Meaning and Interpretation in History' (1983), arguing 'that interpretations have to do with meanings, it is through interpretation that we come to know meanings'. Furthermore, 'interpretation involves something like re-enacting or re-living in one's imagination the historical moment to be interpreted'. When we draw a parallel with architecture, we can say that through the interpretation of the sculptures, we may have found a key to keeping heritage alive. What if we see the inhabitants – rather than the architect(s) – as the 'experts' of the site? What if their creative translations of personal associations with the sculptures ensure their involvement with the site in an honest, memorable way? What if they can now write their own story over the existing layers?

[26] As researchers affiliated with Hasselt University, we are subject to a bureaucratic system where GDPR administration for conducting interviews led to extremely complicated and excessive procedures. This complication alienated residents and, in many cases, they turned away. Despite trying to openly 'connect' with people, spontaneous, in-depth conversations were not possible due to these administrative, dissuasive obligations.

[27] Nicholas Addison, 'Who's Afraid of Signs and Significations? Defending Semiotics in the Secondary Art and Design Curriculum', in *Art Education in a Postmodern World: Collected Essays*, ed. T. Hardy (2006), 120.

[28] Willem A. DeVries, 'Meaning and Interpretation in History', *History and Theory* 22, no. 3 (1983): 253–63.

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# Subtle acts of resistance
## Contentious national heritage and adaptive reuse

*N. Vande Keere* . . . . . .


[1] View of the Rotunda from the Parc du Cinquantenaire, Art and History Museum, 2019.

**‘In a very few hours I arrived in a city that always makes me think of a whited sepulchre. Prejudice no doubt. I had no difficulty in finding the Company’s offices. It was the biggest thing in the town, and everybody I met was full of it. They were going to run an over-sea empire, and make no end of coin by trade’.**

Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 1899[1]

In the context of the international debate about the removal of contentious historical statues and monuments in public spaces, renewed interest has emerged in the figure of King Leopold II and Belgium’s colonial past. Following the 2018 reopening of the AfricaMuseum in Tervuren, the United Nations reported that the reorganisation of the museum did not go far enough with its decolonisation process. In addition, the UN demanded an apology for colonial atrocities in the Congo and questioned the symbolism of historical statues and monuments in the public sphere, linking them explicitly to recent forms of racism in Belgium.

Surely, the heroic representation of prominent figures from the period of King Leopold II is a far cry from the role they played in reality. As symptoms of the construction of national identity, however, these statues are merely the tip of the iceberg. The king was a prolific master builder and laid the basis for expansive public works that can also be regarded as contentious national heritage.

This article will reflect on some of the iconographic properties of the building projects developed under ‘builder king’ Leopold II. We will focus on the royal Art and History Museum [Fig. 1], located in the monumental Parc du Cinquantenaire, as one of the five national museums in and around Brussels initiated by the king. In addition, we will present a selection of research-by-design projects[2] that restaged the museum from within, all of which were designed between 2019 and 2020 by students in the International Master on Adaptive Reuse programme.[3] Beyond adapting the museum to current standards, the students addressed institutional representation and national symbolism in a subversive way, demonstrating the potential of adaptive reuse to transform the meaning[4] of contentious heritage. The examples serve as subtle acts of resistance to the archaic and controversial character of the site, aiming to revive the Art and History Museum as a cultural landmark with a positive identity.

### Contemporary iconoclasm

The current attention to contentious statues and monuments is not an isolated phenomenon. In many countries, national sites linked to colonialism, slavery, and totalitarianism pose critical challenges to heritage policy and management. The artistic or historical value of these sites is often eclipsed by the perception of their negative iconographic role in present-day society. Belgium had its fair share of historical developments due to colonial rule between 1885 and 1960, with consequences that have reverberated until the present day. The central figure – or ‘villain’[5] – in this episode is the second king of Belgium, Leopold II [Fig. 2], who reigned between 1865 and 1909, ruling what was called the Congo Free State between 1885 and 1908 (today the Democratic Republic of Congo). Although historical research is not conclusive, forced labour, including the ‘red rubber system’ of his regime, caused a significant number of deaths.[6] The profits went primarily into his pockets, enabling the king to acquire large properties in Belgium and initiate nation-building projects.

Despite the early revelations of the atrocities in Congo – for example, the Casement Report[7], which dates back to 1904 – colonial monuments have resonated less with social and political realities in Belgium. Compared to other countries, their symbolic role seems to be felt less acutely here,

1 Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (London: Penguin Books, 2012 [1899]), 9. The main character in the book describes late 19th-century Brussels as a ‘whited sepulchre’, a Biblical reference to the traits of a hypocrite, hiding its malignant intentions behind a façade of dignity.

2 For the methodology of research-by-design, see the ‘EAAE Charter on Architectural Research’, European Association for Architectural Education, accessed 9 August 2020, http://www.eaae.be/about/statutes-and-policy/eaae-charter-architectural-research/.

3 During the 2020–2021 academic year, the International Master on Adaptive Reuse programme also addressed the subject of contentious heritage in parallel with the Continuity in Architecture Atelier at the Manchester School of Architecture. More information on the design projects and texts summarising various lectures are available at www.uhasselt.be/trace.

4 Rodolfo Machado, ‘Old Buildings as Palimpsest: Toward a Theory of Remodeling’, *Progressive Architecture* 11 (1976): 46–49, 49.

5 Architectural historian Johan Lagae used this term in his lecture ‘Rethinking (Architectural) Heritage from Below?’, given at Hasselt University on 20 February 2019, hinting at a lack of nuance in the description of the role of the king in Adam Hochschild’s *King Leopold’s Ghost – A Story of Greed, Terror and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (Boston: Mariner Books, 1998).

6 Recent estimates range between 1 and 5 million. See Jean-Paul Sanderson, ‘Van bevolkingsafname naar bevolkingsgroei: welke invloed had de kolonisatie op de Congolese demografie?’, in *Koloniaal Congo – Een geschiedenis in vragen*, eds. Idesbald Goddeeris, Amandine Lauro, and Guy Vanthemsche (Kalmthout: Polis, 2020), 116.

7 This report was commissioned by the British government and written by Roger Casement, the British Consul in the Congo at the time. It confirmed the allegations of systematic abuse in the Congo Free State.

8 Matthew G. Stanard, *The Leopard, the Lion and the Cock: Colonial Memories and Monuments in Belgium* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2019).

9 Due to the scandal in the Congo Free State, Belgium ‘inherited’ the colony in 1908. However, this shift did not lead to a major overhaul in governance. The state maintained most of the colonial structures and heralded the deceased Leopold II for his ‘humanitarian’ actions in the territory.

10 E.g., Auguste Rodin, James Ensor, Charles Baudelaire, Arthur Rimbaud, Paul Verlaine, Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels. See also: Eric Min, *De eeuw van Brussel – Biografie van een wereldstad (1850–1914)* (Antwerp: De Bezige Bij, 2013).

[2] Equestrian statue of Leopold II by Thomas Vinçotte (1926), Art and History Museum. Currently located in the Large Narthex of the museum, it is a less well-known copy of the statue in the Place du Trône, near the royal palace in Brussels, perhaps the most susceptible to vandalism in the context of iconoclasm.

with the exception of protests by the small Congolese diaspora or the clandestine actions of mostly ‘fringe’ organisations. Iconoclasm in Belgium has thus far remained limited, and most monuments in public spaces have stayed intact. Consequently, the government received the negative UN report with some surprise.

However, in spite of the limited vigour in the public sphere, the debate on the colonial era in Belgium is increasingly present, both in the academic and public domains. In June 2020, King Philippe of Belgium issued an apology. A month later, the Belgian parliament appointed a commission to investigate Belgium’s relationship with the colonial past and make recommendations in this regard. In addition, several local authorities and organisations have taken the initiative to discuss the future of colonial monuments through working groups.
In an academic context, the 2019 book *The Leopard, the Lion and the Cock: Colonial Memories and Monuments in Belgium* is worth mentioning. The author, Matthew Stanard, investigates the impact of the colonial era on Belgium after the independence of Congo in 1960. The book focuses on the colonial iconography of public monuments in Belgium as a testimony to the ‘enduring presence of empire’.[8]



### Architectural iconography at the turn of the 20th century

Stanard is reticent to select architectural sites in his book, apart from including the Arcade du Cinquantenaire and the obvious references to the AfricaMuseum. In addition, he partly disproves the often-used argument that most of the grand projects were financed by Leopold II with privately-obtained profits from the colony, dating the beginning of this practice to 1896 and noting the widespread spirit of large-scale building projects throughout Europe at the time.

Rather than reviewing the origins of these financial resources, we argue here for a continuous development based on the comparison of the iconological properties and the underlying significance of both campaigns. The statues can be assessed as tokens of the afterlife of colonialism and its deliberate contamination of nationalism in Belgium. The personal ambition of Leopold II regarding nation-building projects was no different. The megalomaniac character of the national projects in which he was involved, including plans that were not realised, prove this point *a fortiori*. As such, one could speak of an ‘iconographic continuity’ surpassing the reign of the king and becoming embedded in Belgian culture and politics for decades. As much as the contentious heritage of monuments or buildings is met with an attitude of (un-)conscious indifference by the Belgian population today, we believe their presence proves the hidden but lingering existence of deep and persistent ties to colonialism.

While the statues were built between the two world wars, with Congo continuing to be administered under Belgian rule,[9] the building projects were initiated earlier, during the second half of the 19th century. At the time, Brussels, the capital of the young nation of Belgium, was perceived as a thriving centre of European culture and politics, and its cosmopolitan character attracted famous avant-garde artists, writers, and alternative thinkers.[10] The author Joseph Conrad refers to the city as a significant in-between-stop for Marlow, the main character in *Heart of Darkness* (1899), before embarking on his ‘colonial adventure’. The Second Industrial Revolution transformed the city substantially and was largely responsible for its growth,

urban structure, and image as we know it today. As his reign very much coincided with this period (1865–1909), King Leopold II played an instrumental role in the urban development.

Referring to the same period, architectural historian Richard Krautheimer observes a tendency of (Western) architectural iconography to evolve towards formal reproduction or imitation at the turn of the 20th century:

> A gradual process of draining the edifice of its 'content' seems to begin. It is by no means a continuous development and is constantly interrupted by counter movements, but it grows stronger and reaches its peak in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Architectural patterns are then used regardless of their original significance, a Greek Temple for a Customs House …, a Gothic cathedral for an office building …, a thermal room for a railway station …. The modern copy with all its exactness in reproducing the whole building and with its striving towards absolute faithfulness, definitely omits the elements which were important to the Middle Ages: the content and the significance of the building.[11]

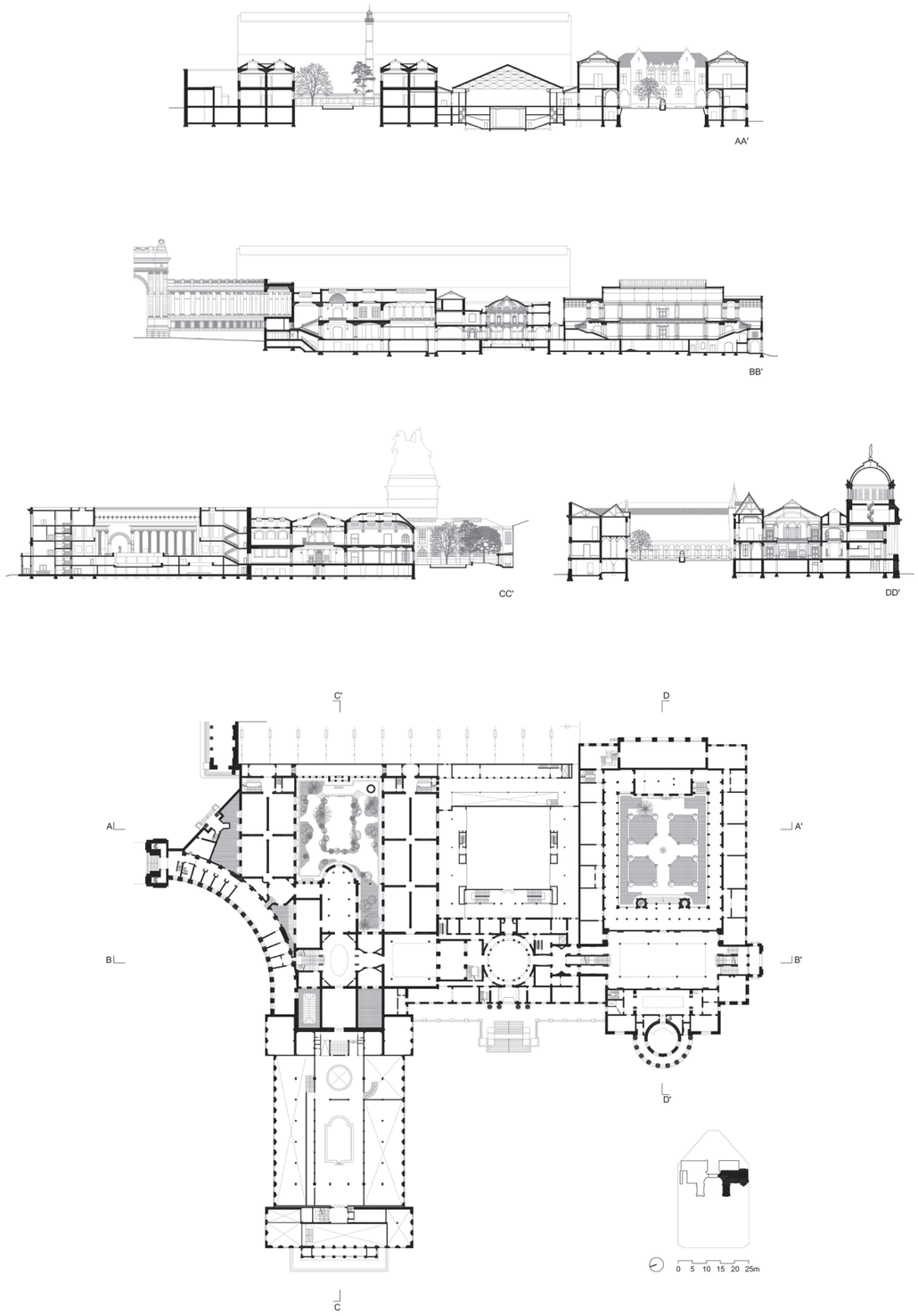
The architectural legacy of Leopold II is no exception. While his infrastructural and urban ambitions for Brussels could be characterised as innovative (sometimes even labelled visionary[12]), his architectural taste was rather traditional or, at best, eclectic. Inspired by foreign, often French, architecture, the monarch favoured Neo-Classicism for national and royal institutions.[13] As was common among the ruling class in Europe and further abroad, this monumental style was considered the most likely to impress and instil the population with a sense of national identity (and is still popular among autocratic rulers today). Due to the emergence of large-scale industrial reproduction, it can be considered the first globalist architectural style [Fig. 3].

[3] The Pavilion of Human Passions in the Parc du Cinquantenaire. Designed by the young Victor Horta, a pupil of Alphonse Balat, in a Neo-Classicist style of the early 1890s, with some details that signify his shift to Art Nouveau in the following years. As such, it forms a notable exception that proves the rule. The little temple is part of the Art and History Museum and serves as a shelter for an impressive and controversial bas-relief by sculptor Jef Lambeaux depicting human passions (1890).[14]

### Re-staging the national museum from within

The most obvious example of Leopold II's ambitions and the corresponding architectural translation can be found in the development of the Parc du Cinquantenaire in Brussels. Developed for various exhibitive functions on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Belgium (1880), the site houses a monumental ensemble of buildings joined together in a symmetric structure. Due to a lack of funding, large parts of the complex were built later, such as the central, triumphal arch, symbolising the eastern gate to the capital (finalised in 1905 with profits from the Congo). The buildings are adorned with elements glorifying the nation (e.g., the allegorical mosaics in the colonnade by a group of artists led by the symbolist painter Jean Delville, which were completed in the 1920s under the reign of king Albert I). There have been many changes to the buildings during the lifetime of the site, but the various functions remain subordinate to the urban composition. Today, it forms a singular but pompous, monumental *gesamtkunstwerk*, referring to an artificially constructed heroic past, seemingly ignored by a significant percentage of local inhabitants, migrants and the ex-pat community, who simply enjoy the park.

After studying the Cinquantenaire and other sites linked to Leopold II in the research seminar *Genius Loci*, the students of the International Master on




[4] Art and History Museum, current ground floor plan and sections.

11 Richard Krautheimer, 'Introduction to an 'Iconography of Mediaeval Architecture', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 5 (1942), 20. Krautheimer wrote this seminal text in response to the modern principles on iconography proposed by Erwin Panofsky in the field of visual arts. His planned study of Western architectural iconography through the ages unfortunately remained unfinished.

12 Liane Ranieri, *Léopold II Urbaniste* (Brussel: Hayez, 1973).

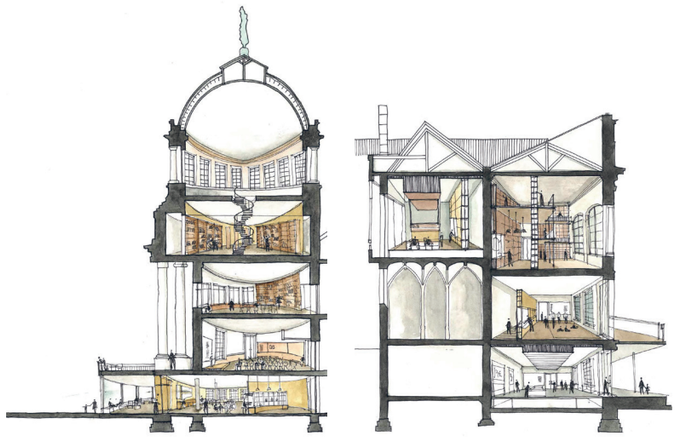
13 The list of architects and planners who worked for the king is long. Some examples include Gédéon Bordiau (BE), municipal architect of Brussels and main designer of the buildings in the Parc du Cinquantenaire; Charles Girault (FR), responsible for the Royal Galleries in Ostend, the AfricaMuseum and the final Arcade du Cinquantenaire; Alphonse Balat (BE), who is known for the steel construction of the Royal Greenhouses, part of the Royal Palace in Laeken; and Alexandre Marcel (FR), responsible for the Royal Race Track in Ostend and the orientalist Japanese Tower and Chinese Pavilion in Laeken.

14 For a detailed analysis of the pavilion and its content, see Werner Adriaenssens, André Demesmaeker, and Claudine

Adaptive Reuse focused in the Design Studio on the Art and History Museum, situated in the south wing of the complex since 1889 [Fig.]. A comparison with national museums in surrounding countries reveals a structural backlog, and the yearly number of visitors is only a fraction of equivalent museums abroad. Partly due to the lack of national sentiment, it is relatively unknown among the Belgian population. Its collection comprises objects from Prehistoric times to today, including Antiquity, European decorative arts and non-European civilisations, of which only a small part is currently on display. The 19th-century museum is characterised by a multitude of exhibition rooms. It has a variety of potentially qualitative spaces (both indoor and outdoor) but lacks clarity – the organisation of the interior has grown organically, with offices and libraries scattered throughout the complex. Most (exhibition) spaces have a stuffy and old-fashioned character, while large parts are either underused or leftover space.

Below, we investigate the potential role of architectural and museological iconography in transforming the meaning of the national museum. Inspired by the students' work, we synthesise the different approaches into three spatial layers, which is typical for a 19th-century national museum: 'architectural space', 'scenographic space', and 'object space'. For the purposes of illustration, we present some strategies as a result of the research-by-design done by students in the Design Studio.[15]

The assignment was 1) to counter the possible decline of the museum and reanimate it through its transformation into a contemporary and sustainable exhibition site, generating broader use and more public relevance, and 2) to look critically at the future role of the royal museum and its contentious position as a national institute. Instead of emulating the monumental or Neo-Classicist style or resorting to large-scale transformations, the students were to develop ideas and concepts through surgical interventions in the existing situation. Rather than react to the contentious properties directly, the proposals attempt to tackle what one could call 'iconographic voids', spaces that are empty in a literal or metaphorical sense, an analogy to Krautheimer's description of the lack of content or significance in 19th-century architecture. The examples range from the transformation of the exterior appearance to the development of a personal and topical perspective on the meaning and role of the historical collection.



[5] Shailja Patel and Mathilde Winkin. De-monumentalising the museum.

The project focuses on the architectural appearance and use of the southern wing of the museum. It counters the institutional, overly monumental character of the façades (see also Fig. 1) by creating a relationship between the interior and exterior. The proposal offers two equal faces at the front and back of the building, with new ground floor entrances and (re)introduces public functions in the adjacent, underused spaces. The hand-drawn impressions illustrate the various new activities in the design. In front, facing the park, the Rotunda is extended with a new ambulatory space that includes an easily accessible café and restaurant. The higher floors are used as a library and conference spaces. Behind the building, staff parking is transformed into a public square. The spaces facing the square are reactivated as a new arts and crafts academy, interacting with the adjacent plaster cast workshop. An added terrace on the first floor serves as a shelter for the back entrance. The new entrances make independent use of the wing possible and offer an inviting and human scale on the outside.

Houbart, '60. De Menselijke Driften', in *Brussel, Stad van Kunst en Geschiedenis* (Brussels: urban.brussels/Bety Waknine, 2021).

15 The assignment in the Design Studio started with a division of the museum into four zones (corresponding to the main wings of the building), allowing the students to focus on specific interventions rather than creating a master plan. Similarly, we chose to illustrate the iconographic approach with a selection of student interventions.This is comparable to the 1748 Nolli map of Rome, using the same technique on an urban scale.

16 This split between an architecture to look through and an architecture to hide in cut an unbridgeable gap dividing commodity from delight, utility from beauty, and function from form'. Robin Evans, 'Figures, Doors and Passages 1978', in *Translations from Drawing to Building and Other Essays* (London: Janet Evens and Architectural Association Publications, 1997), 74. This inspiring essay addressed similar themes in domestic architecture (e.g., the emergence of servant circulation in the late 16th century).



*Architectural space*

The Neo-Classicist museum is expressed through an architectural hierarchy within the organisational scheme of the Parc du Cinquantenaire, characterised by an imposing symmetry, clear axis, and fixed perspectives. The various entrances, public circulation, and different functions of the museum are arranged in accordance with the urban layout. Outside, the architectural hierarchy is translated into the front and back façades, the division of the façade into a base, main, and top part, with public and service entrances.

Inside, one could characterise the architectural concept of the museum as an iconographical division into positive and negative spaces. The positive spaces have a public character and can be perceived as a chain of chambers or rooms (like the typical *enfilade* in a domestic context), iconographically charged and programmed as exhibition spaces, an entrance lobby, a restaurant and similar public functions. The museological sequence of public interiors choreographs the visit, moving from one set piece to another. The negative space can be considered the sum of service rooms, thickened scenographic wall constructions, basement and attic, storage and alternative circulation for staff, without iconographic meaning of itself and in support of the positive spaces. As non-public interiors, they can be drawn in black in architectural drawings[16] to indicate that they are 'outside' of the legible architectural realm and connected to the positive spaces in elaborate and often hidden ways (for interventions in the architectural space, see Fig. 5 and 6).[17]





[6] Elien Vandesande and Vincent Bergiers. Undermining the museum.

The project proposes to break the Neo-Classicist order by reorganising the access points and internal circulation – moving the original architectural entrance on the *piano nobile* to the ground floor, currently used as negative storage space – and extending the positive exhibition space. The rendered images show some design impressions of the refurbished ground floor. The new entrance provides easy access from the park and leads to a covered atrium courtyard with a central position in the museum complex. The top-lit atrium offers an uncluttered overview and a direct connection to the different activities and exhibition spaces. Echoing the rough and unfinished quality of the base level, the project maintains this character as a deconstruction of the Neo-Classicist interior and in contrast to the existing museum levels. The proposal succeeds in creating a new and contemporary experience for the visitor while enhancing the surface, organisation, and readability of exhibition spaces.

*Scenographic space*

The museum can also be read as a scenographic device. The architectural emphasis and sequence of positive spaces are elaborated in the development of various settings, each representing a component of the building or a specific part of the collection. The monumental exterior of the building complex defines the urban scenography, befitting the institutional character of the museum and aiming to impress passers-by. The interior scenography of the museum consists of an eclectic summation of set pieces or stylistic reproductions or inventions, e.g., a Gothic revival cloister, a Japanese garden, or an ancient Greek temple front.

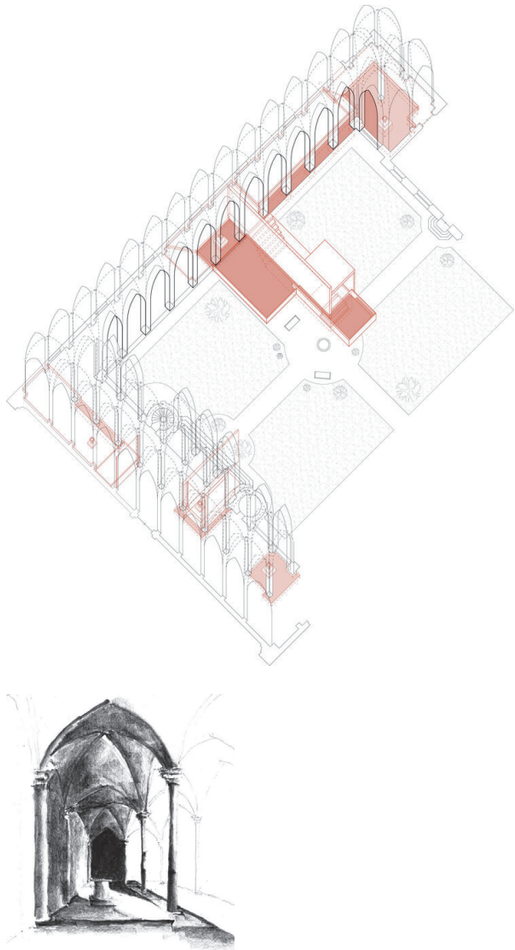
The scenographic interior is a means to re-enact the historical and geographical context of the collection and evoke its atmosphere and assemble complementary objects. Where architectural space emphasises the connection of the various exhibition rooms, scenographic space defines the difference between them. The scenographic space has an imaginary or fictitious character and is used to stimulate a sensory experience, theatrically rendering its intended effect. As such, 19th-century exterior and interior spaces were to be experienced similarly (for interventions in the scenographic space, see Fig. 7 and 8).

*Object space*

In this perspective, the museum experience is mainly defined by the collection of exhibited objects, a variety of artefacts with a historical character that represent various cultures from around the world. Each piece on display has its genesis and narrative, which we could define as object space. De-contextualised and reappearing in a museological context, the original object space is isolated, fractured, and to a certain extent, redefined. The museum thus generates a new object space with a specific significance or a (curated) interpretation of its original or intended meaning. Various pieces are thematically selected and assembled to be exhibited in one room or scenographic setting (as mentioned above). This categorical approach, often supported by research on the collection itself, is typical for the 19th-century national museum. Classified as a place of scientific expertise, the museum can also be defined as an institute of knowledge, claiming objectivity despite the manipulation of its collection.[18] Beyond de-contextualisation, this also potentially suppresses an artistic quality or deviating interpretation of the content or the object space in favour of an artificially (re-) constructed context (for interventions in the object space, see Fig. 8 and 9).[19]

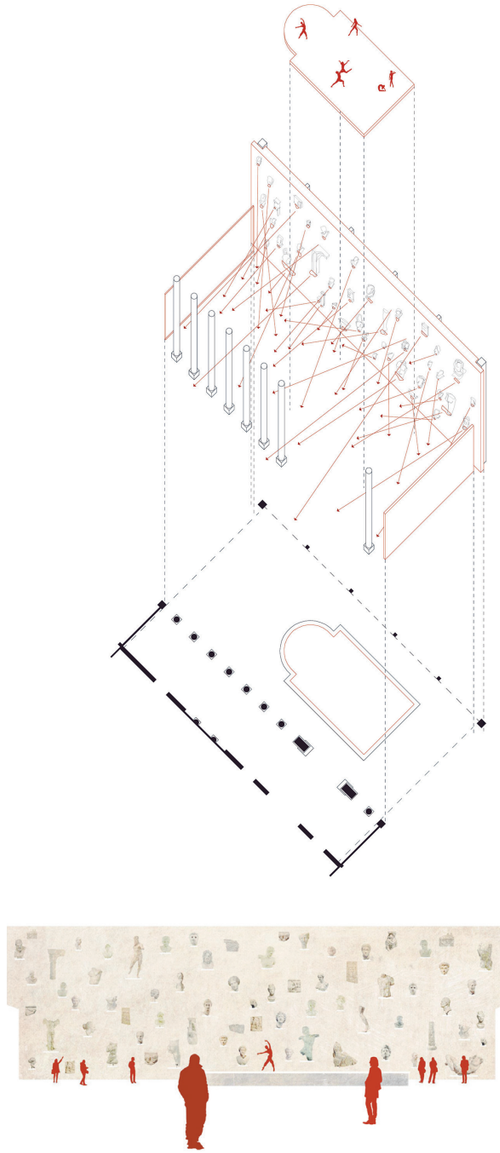
[7] Lisa Battaline and Alexia Di Carlantonio. Uncovering the scenography.

The project evaluates and reveals the various, often contradictory, transformation phases of the building over time and the oddly shaped leftover spaces that result, see scheme on the top. In addition to deliberately countering the monumental structure with a specific programme, e.g., a creative workshop for children in the curved part of the building with an outdoor playground on the gallery above, it opens up adjacent spaces to confront the different atmospheric settings and exhibitive intentions. By transforming indoor into outdoor spaces and introducing green, it brings in natural light and reactivates some of the enclosed spaces as gardens, now closed to the public. Small deconstructions or the removal of ornamented parts lay bare the artificial scenographic layers and unexpected see-throughs; see the montage on the bottom. Together with surprising connections, they betray the original and often absurd representational intentions and offer the visitor a warranted and fresh glimpse behind the scenes.



[8] Matthew Moskal. Transforming the scenography.

This project focuses on the scenographic set-up of the cloister and the idealised Gothic revival part of the southern wing. The intervention is based on a detailed study of the artificially constructed monastic space through various sketches and analytical drawings, see sketch on the bottom. Inspired by the attempt to create a spiritual context or mystical atmosphere, the design nevertheless 'modernises' this 19th-century fiction by redefining the object space for the baptisteries, exhibited before as theatrical props, dysfunctional and alienated from their original religious environment. As shown in the isometric drawing, the project proposes carving out parts of the cloister floor to introduce a silent water surface, mirroring fragments of the staged environment. By delicately contradicting the surrounding corridor, intruding on the cloister garden and repositioning the old baptisteries, the interventions create an innovative new scenography that breaks with the static movement in the cloister, urging visitors to engage with the original reconstruction of this traditional space and reflect on its purpose in the museum.



[9] Matthew Moskal. Engaging with the collection.

This project draws inspiration from the overwhelming and provocative bas-relief of Human Passions by Jef Lambeaux (see Fig. 3). It manipulates the obligatory collection of ancient and foreign civilisations as a typical feature in a national museum to create the setting for a more compelling exhibition. The conceptual isometry of the proposal demonstrates the reuse of the atrium space of the renewed western wing of 1966 to set the stage for more direct and physical interactions. By elevating the old Syrian central floor mosaic, depicting various hunting rituals, it constructs a podium for experimental live dance performances. The montage gives an impression of the huge sidewall defining a new object space or background canvas for a multitude of strategically relocated ancient sculptures. The choreography of the dancers is to enter into a dialogue with the immobile, broken, but sensually sculpted body parts of Greek and Roman antiquity. The design replaces the classic museological point of view with an intensely personal gaze, unsettling the common and distant perception and encouraging visitors to immerse themselves and become part of the 'spectacle'.

18 The ambiguity of representation and control is captured well by Thordis Arrhenius, who traced it back to the concept of the museum after the French Revolution: 'The chronological order unfolding within the didactic space of the museum restored the 'vandalised' monuments to their proper place in history – at the very same instant that this chronology was the efficient device that destroyed the symbolic power of the monument'. See Thordis Arrhenius, 'The Space of Conservation', in *The Fragile Monument: On Conservation and Modernity* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2011), 31.

19 An important example of a counter-interpretation of object space is 'Mining the Museum' (1992) by artist Fred Wilson. The project, which challenges the classic narrative of the museum, is an intervention at the Maryland Historical Society in Baltimore, Maryland (US) based on the unsettling juxtaposition of objects in the museum. See also Fred Wilson and Howard Halle, 'Mining the Museum', *Grand Street*, no. 44 (1993).

20 For an interesting reflection on the broader meaning of decolonisation in the cultural field, see Amzat Boukari-Yabara, António Pinto Ribeiro, António Sousa Ribeiro, Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, Cécile Bourne-Farrell, Christine Bluard, Bruno Verbergt, et al., *Europa Oxalá – Essays*, eds. Ana Rebelo

### Decolonising Belgium

The debate regarding decolonisation in Belgium is embedded in an international context with various perspectives on this term, which has become central in a discourse going beyond the mere historical aftermath of colonisation, identifying a wider process of emancipation as a reaction to colonialism.[20] In the context of this paper, it signals the need for a profound reflection on the contemporary meaning and (re-)use of contentious national heritage. While most of the academic discussions regarding the topic are being held in the fields of history, museology, and cultural theory, our contribution develops a designerly approach. We reference the art historical discipline of iconography to investigate some aspects of the architectural legacy of Leopold II, in this case, the Art and History Museum in the Parc du Cinquantenaire. We have tried to define the first steps of a methodology to analyse the typical national museum in this respect. Rather than attempt to transform the museum top-down by creating an overarching or ideological perspective, we suggest a more measured and tailored approach, contributing with separate pieces of the sophisticated puzzle to decolonise. First, we acknowledge the relative position of the design project as such; second, we allow the students to experiment on a more tangible level.

Considering adaptive reuse more than simply reprogramming or defining a new function, we investigate how to generate new meanings for existing places by adapting the spatial iconography. By using the informal environment of the Design Studio, we were able to balance the appropriation of the existing architecture with conceptual interventions and to develop and compare various design strategies. The results shown here are deliberate fragments, trying to reveal, break up or disturb the contentious 19th-century narrative of the Neo-Classicist museum as a symbol for national identity (or Stanard's 'empire'). The interventions have an implicit rather than explicit character, aiming for a rhetorical instead of a literal 'deconstruction of monumental insincerity'.[21] Rather than creating an anti-monument or an overly moralistic reaction to the outdated memorial value of the museum, they remain contextual and sufficiently indeterminate, avoiding a false sense of closure and trying to take into account the actual time needed for more comprehensive change.

Correia and Margarida Calafate Ribeiro (Porto: Edições Afrontamento, 2021) and the accompanying exhibition. For example, António Pinto Ribeiro used the expression 'the decolonisation of the arts and the "mind"', (borrowed in part from Kenyan author Ngugu wa Thiong'o's literary work); Christine Bluard and Bruno Verbergt of the AfricaMuseum acknowledged the complex process of decolonisation taking place over time by referring to the need for doubt to avoid repeating mistakes (referring to the 'work-in-progress' of artist Aimé Mpane in the large rotunda of the museum).

[21] We borrow this phrase from Anne Lacaton and Jean-Philippe Vassal, architects of the remodelled Palais de Tokyo, originally built for the World Exhibition in Paris in 1937 as a Neo-Classicist museum for modern art. The designers used this description to suggest a contentious stylistic alliance with the pavilions of Nazi Germany and communist Russia, feeding their argument for a complete 'ruination' of the interior. Steven Wassenaar, 'The Beauty of Transience: The Palais de Tokyo in Paris', *Archis* Archis is Africa, no. 1 (2002): 93–99, 96.

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[List of figures]

# Telling Tales
## Design Thinking through Storytelling

*S. Stone*

[1] L. S. Lowry, Going to Work, 1943.

**Abstract**

Stories are indispensable to human experience; they are instinctual, and we intuitively understand how they work.[1] A well-told story can encourage people to look at a specific situation from a different angle - to place themselves in a different position. Storytelling is an effective strategy to encourage students to understand the nature of the design problem that they are undertaking; it allows them to engage imagination with research. It is an instrument not so much for solving problems as for finding them[2], and the essence of design thinking is creative problem-solving[3], so the relationship of narrative thinking to design thinking can be made through analogy.[4]

This paper documents a project completed by final year Master of Architecture students at the Manchester School of Architecture who used the practice of storytelling to generate a design proposal for the new use for a remodelled building. This approach provided a means for the students to engage with the building in both the formal sense - that is with the typology, morphology, materials and construction etc., and also with the more hidden meanings, such as the contentious heritage inherent within the building.

> *'Buildings are engrained with the stories and histories of the people who use them, the people who made them and those who have edited them along the way.'*[5]

**Storytelling**

Contained within all buildings are individual narratives. Whether these are benign tales of domestication or orderly work, fanciful fables of strange and wonderful occupation, or despairing stories of oppression, exploitation and woe, these chronicles are embedded within the very being of the structures. As with all narratives, there are many tales to tell, and some are more hidden than others.

However, a story and a narrative are different. A narrative depicts a series of individual yet connected events, while a story is distinguished from this routine series of events by some sort of resolution; that is, it is complete. Thus, a narrative is open-ended and infinite, while a story has a definite beginning, middle and end. Ostensibly, narratives are objective (if that is indeed possible) but stories are always unreliable, they are told from a specific point of view and are definitely subjective. Stories can illuminate the accepted world by revealing alternative realities.[6] As such they can serve as dynamic forces for change as they have the ability to reveal truths that otherwise would be difficult to comprehend, and thus can *'be the gateways to truths that are hidden behind the veil of facts that we primarily concern ourselves with.'*[7]

Stories engage the imagination, and they also aid understanding. A well-told story can make palatable what may be difficult to comprehend. A fine example of how storytelling helped to transform attitudes towards the casual neglect of precious buildings and gave impetus to the conservation movement is Victor Hugo's tale of Quasimodo, the bell ringer of Notre-Dame de Paris.[8] After the book's publication in 1831 and riding high on the general fascination with all things mediaeval that was engulfing Europe[9], visitors flocked to see for themselves the setting of the great manuscript. They were horrified by the casual neglect of the building and the lack of protection from the weather and the users, which was combined with deliberate destruction in the cause of modernisation.[10] Victor Hugo was an active campaigner for the preservation of French historic structures, he had already written a number of earnest tracts upon the need to act, but it was this story that connected with the general public - it had a much greater appeal and therefore impact. The story by Victor Hugo entertained the imaginations of the 19th-century readers, who were encouraged to value the great cathedral, to comprehend its worth, and thus to appreciate the urgency of the need to conserve it. The story revealed not the solution, but the problem.

*Research Through Storytelling*

All design research is grounded within problem solving. Research-through-storytelling is no different: it is an activity that is based upon the gathering of insights about an object of research; the aim of this process is the collection of knowledge. This knowledge is then analysed and interpreted through the actual design process. Thus, knowledge is gained through the analytical process of storytelling rather than the pure collection of facts.[11]

Storytelling encourages students to analyse and understand the object of their research in a productive manner. Through the creative process of translation that occurs when the students engage with the narrative of the building, the underlying meaning of it is exposed. Thus, the reading and rereading of the narrative contained within the description and classification of the building, combined with an interpretation of the meaning that is inherent within this acquired knowledge has the power to reveal the hidden plot within the building, and so transform it into something beyond the physical structure. This process of collecting the diverse in character strands together into a coherent narrative provides a plural reading of the past, and '*is no less a question of de-familiarising the familiar than of familiarising the unfamiliar.*'[12]

This narrative is translated into a story, a tale with a beginning, middle and end that engages the sympathy of the reader, '*… it requires that we demonstrate in what unique way the narrative imagination is interpolated into the "intended having-been"* of history'.[13] Thus the idea of an inhabited place becomes a driver in the design process, and it allows several narratives to co-exist within the project. '*Places are points where something happens, where something comes to be, where temporal changes follow actual paths along intervals that separate and reconnect the places.*'[14]

*Dialogue with the Past*

The student project was conducted in the Contentious Heritage stream of the atelier: Continuity in Architecture. The atelier pursues a reading and understanding of the patterns of the city and uses this information as the basis for proposals to regenerate the built environment. This approach includes an understanding of why a place has evolved into the entity of today and also what the future needs are. Contentious Heritage is not a category of building or site, but rather the set of negative historical relationships and connotations that have informed the character, meaning and virtual properties of the building or site.

The chosen building for this remodelling project was the Medlock Mill, which, despite its prominent position in the centre of Manchester has been long empty and forgotten. The significance of the building made it a perfect vehicle for a project by a pair of students, Celia and Alex. The students began the project with straightforward fact-finding research. The initial purpose of analytical investigation was to eliminate any preconceptions and alleviate any assumptions, so that the qualities of any built environment are not immediately coloured by supposition or prejudice. This allowed comparisons, juxtapositions and correlations to be made. They studied the urban grain of the site, the structure of the buildings, the shape and size of the interior spaces, the spatial evolution and development, and the growth and decline of the collection of structures. The history, the occupations, activities, topography, geology, geography, climate, key figures, and population were mapped.



From this, the students developed a strong understanding of the character of the building, what had happened to it and within it, but somehow they could not comprehend its significance. They were certainly aware of why the building could be considered contentious; the appalling working and living conditions of those who once toiled within its walls, the exploitation of children as cheap labour, and the connections between cotton and the slave trade, all of which underpinned the prosperity of Manchester and the financial success of the mill. But the question was how this information could fuel not just the strategy for the adaptive reuse of the building, but more importantly the function of that new use: What should happen in the remodelled building?

**Medlock Mill**

The Medlock Mill is ostensibly a neutral thing. It is an 'actual' structure that encloses space, and yet it contains a host of 'virtual' stories that chronicle its occupation. Engrained within the building are the stories and the histories of the people who once occupied it. The great building is a typical example of a 19th century mill. It is just one of over a hundred that were once scattered across the city of Manchester, when at the height of the industrial revolution 'Cottonopolis' was an intense and filthy collection of mills and warehouses surrounded by sordid housing, where '*slums of almost indescribable squalor mushroomed*'.[15] The building is contained by the banks of the once polluted river Medlock, which wraps around two of the façades, a third side is bounded by the railway and so just the fourth contains a street presence. The five-storey brick mill was constructed in 1801, in a particularly unpleasant and low-lying area of the city called Little Ireland.[16] Air movement in Manchester has always been difficult, it is geographically a huge bowl that the clouds struggle to cross, and this particular area is almost the lowest in the city – and so even today feels permanently damp.

The building contains layers of history, many of which are easily read within the materials of the facades. Cotton was originally processed in the mill. When the demand for this began to dwindle, the building was converted into the Percy and Co. Hotspur Press Printworks, and to accommodate this expansion, the building was twice extended. In 1880 a huge block was added that effectively doubled the size of the building, and just a decade later, a wide single storey glazed shed filled all of the remaining space on the enclosed site.

1 Jerome Bruner, *Making Stories: Law, Literature, Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 15.
2 Jerome Bruner, *Making Stories*, 17.
3 Frank Rose, *The Sea We Swim In* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2021), 14.
4 Frank Rose, *The Sea We Swim In*, 15.
5 Sally Stone and Laura Sanderson, *UnDoing* (MSA Press, 2020), 21.
6 Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), xvi.
7 Sunil Rao, *Law Library Journal* 95 (2003), 462.
8 Victor Hugo, *Notre-Dame de Paris* (1831).
9 Miles Glendinning, *The Conservation Movement: A History of Architectural Preservation* (Routledge, 2013), 88.
10 Jukka Jokilehto, *A History of Architectural Conservation* (Routledge, 1999), 159.
11 Sally Stone and Laura Sanderson, 'Pedagogy and Policy: Rochdale Reimagined', in *Emerging Practices in Architectural Pedagogy*, eds. Laura Sanderson and Sally Stone (Routledge, 2020), 95.
12 Paul Ricœur, 'Architecture and Narrativity', *Études Ricœuriennes / Ricœur Studies* 7, no. 2 (2016), 40.
13 Richard Kearney, 'Narrative Imagination: Between Ethics and Poetics', in *Paul Ricœur: The Hermeneutics of Action*, ed. Richard Kearney (Sage Publications, 1996), 175.
14 Paul Ricœur, 'Architecture and Narrativity', 34.
15 Clare Hartwell, Matthew Hyde and Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Lancashire: Manchester and the South-East* (Yale University Press, 2004), 259.
16 'Long Lost Histories: "Little Ireland", Manchester', If Those Walls Could Talk, https://ifthosewallscouldtalk.wordpress.com/2016/09/12/long-lost-histories-little-ireland-manchester/.


[2] Celia Brearley and Alex Williams. Marking the transition of power from building to inhabitant: Medlock Mill.

So the building has a physical history, but it also contains a number of other stories: those of the people who worked within it, the goods that passed through it, the society that constructed the need for the manufactured goods, the technology that developed to contain the sheer size of the machines to manufacture the goods, the movement of people from the country to the city to work in the factories, the people who occupied the building when it was no longer needed to make things, and so on - there are many stories hidden within the Hotspur Press building.

Immediately it is possible to view the 'actual' building, to study the manner in which it was constructed, the materials of that assembly, the order and arrangement of the interior spaces, and the position of the front door, all of which are physically real and definitely 'actual'. The building is also a collection of other 'virtual' parts that may not be visible, but their existence has informed the impression of the building. These include the general psychological impression of a brick mill, the nostalgia for the long-lost industrial period, the generations of people who worked there, and those who profited from that work. So, the physical or actual reality of the appearance of the building may begin the story, but buried within the character or virtuality of the structure is the information that completes the tale. *'Purely actual objects do not exist. Every actual surrounds itself with a cloud of virtual images.'*[17] The 'virtual' cloud of ideas and the physical 'actual' are partners in the construction of the idea of the whole (or what is referred to as the 'real'). Thus, the individual narrative of the building is a collection of different factors, some physically apparent, others virtually real.

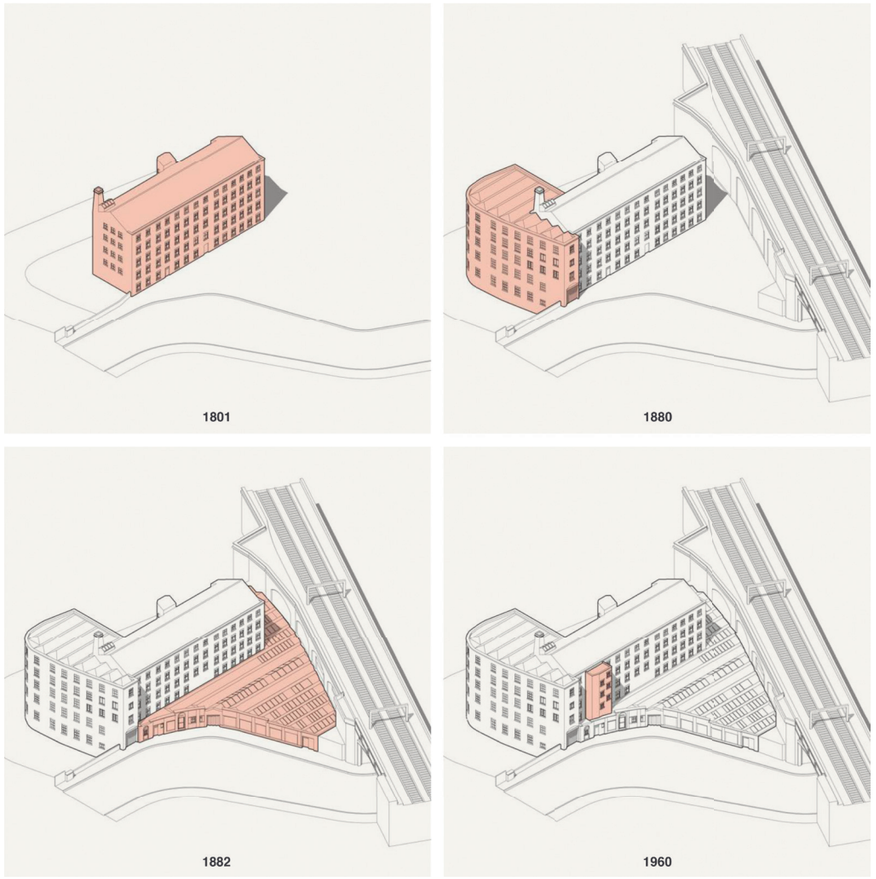
*One Day in the Life*

Over the last 200 years, the Medlock Mill has changed its purpose several times, and therefore the manner in which it was occupied emulated that pattern of evolution. The people who have worked or lived in the building had individual lives, some had a degree of power over their own future, while others were completely embedded in a system over which they had little or no control. The student's fact-finding research identified four real people who had actually inhabited the mill. The students chose to tell the story of each of their lives through a description of just one typical day in their life, outlining the events that occurred, and mapping their journeys around the building.

The stories begin in 1862 with the tale of little Martha Bennett, a child of just nine years old who started working at the mill as a 'Scavenger' ten months before the description of her day. Scavengers were always the smallest children who were expected to crawl underneath the loud and heaving weaving machines to collect fallen debris – a horrible, dirty and dangerous task. However, Martha was quick and clever, so after less than a year she was promoted to the role of 'Piecer'. Her day's work started before 6am, and by the time that Martha arrived at manditary afternoon-school, she had already walked over 15 miles on that hot, dusty and airless factory floor. She occupied little of the building, just the space immediately next to her loom, plus the route to get there

The second story is set almost a century later, in 1951. It was the final glory years of the industrial period, a time of full employment, when children

[17] Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues II* (Columbia University Press, 2002), 148.
[18] Phrase popularised in the UK by the Conservative Prime-Minister Harold Macmillan, who used it in a speech in 1957.




[3] Celia Brearley and Alex Williams. Evolution of the building.

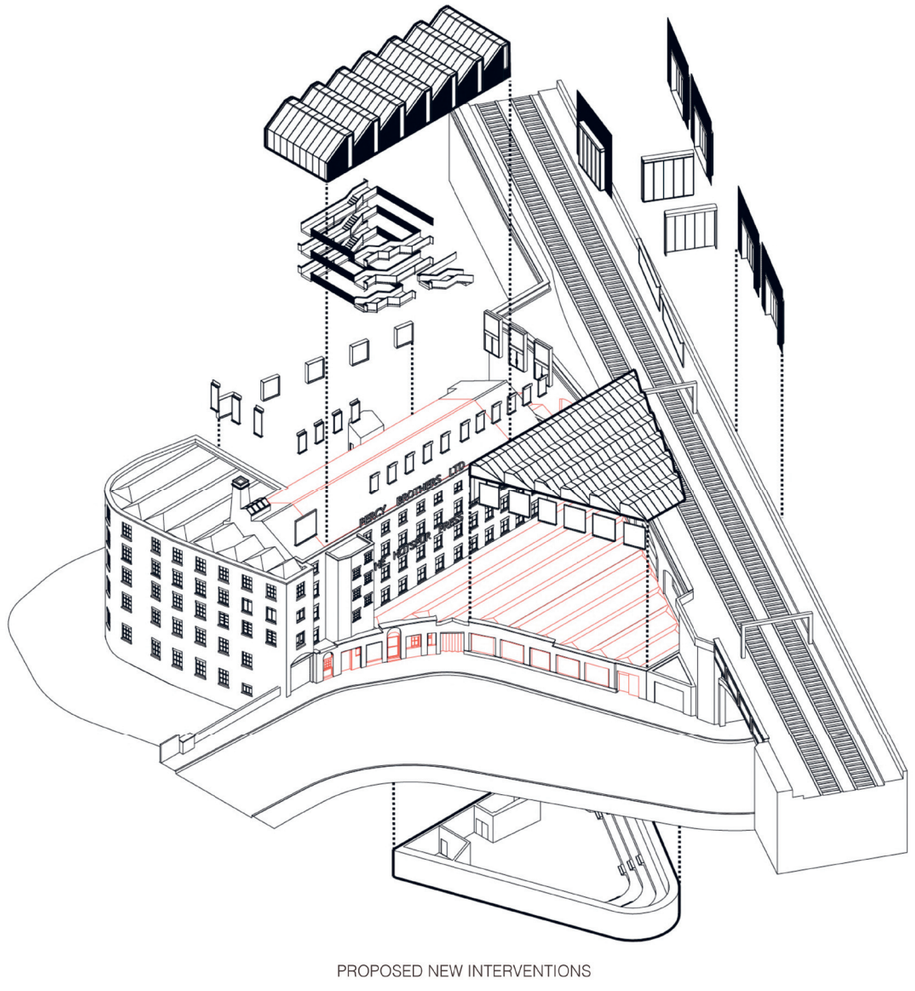
were expected to stay at school until they were 14, and the UK National Health Service supported the improved welfare of the country. This was a benevolent and prosperous country that 'had never had it so good'.[18] Despite this, Manchester was a grim and dirty pace to live, scarred by the Second World War damage and was still badly polluted. Tony Whitehead was an 18-year-old apprentice at the Hotspur Press, which now occupied the mill. He arrived at work just before 8am, in time to grab a cup of tea and piece of toast in the staff canteen before joining the other 50 or so apprentices in the print rooms. The working day was relatively long, but was broken by regular tea breaks, an hour for lunch and plenty of time for socialising. Tony was a strong well-fed lad, and definitely not exhausted at the end of the day, so he may have chosen to go to the pub, to a football game or the cinema after work. He travelled freely around the building, and as an apprentice he was expected to run errands and join in wherever needed, and therefore understood the layout and knew all of the hidden available short-cuts.

Thirdly, James Mooreland epitomised the optimism of the de-regulated post-industrial Western society of the late 20th century. He was a self-employed entrepreneur who purchased part of the ground floor of the mill to establish a digital Printworks that offered commercial prints faster and cheaper than the defunct Hotspur Press. James's working life was exciting and busy, he enjoyed his working day, and

had connections across the city, he controlled his own time and knew how to generate money. Although his business only occupied a limited area of the building, he owned other parts as well, these were somewhat more run-down spaces that let these to artists.

The final story set in 2017 is the sad tale of the final resident of the building, which again maps directly onto the global condition, this time the recession and austerity programmes that fed directly into a rise in homelessness and drug addiction. Sarah Thompson was down-on-her-luck; she occupied the redundant mill with a collection of equally jobless friends. However, they were a buoyant and friendly bunch of comrades, with a shared sense of solidarity and compassion. During the day she wandered around the city, sometimes begging, sometimes 'hanging-out'. Unlike the previous 'users' of the building, Sarah was there during the night-time; for it was her home. She constructed her own private area but spent much of her time with the other residents around a large warming open fire. Sarah occupied all of the building, she could wander wherever she wanted to, she had the freedom to do as she liked within the structure.

As each of the protagonists had a different relationship with the building, this enabled the students to sum-up each story with a single word. Little Martha Bennett lived a very exact and RESTRICTED working life. Tony Whitehead was still controlled by the organisation of the mill, but he had a much more optimistic outlook, his relative freedom endowed him the condition of OBSERVATION. James Mooreland governed his own life, and as such he was in




[4] Celia Brearley and Alex Williams. Liberation of the building through design interventions.



control over the manner in which he interacted with the building, and therefore his allocated term was term REVEAL. Sarah Thompson had an EPHEMERAL relationship with the building, and although she was constantly worried about eviction and had no squatting rights, she had the freedom to occupy any part of the building that she wished to.

*The Story Reveals the Problem*

The student's identified a transition of power – from the building to the people. The mill completely dominated Martha Bennett; she was afraid of its power and the damage that could be caused if she did not pay close attention and obey every instruction. Tony Whitehead had more command over his interaction with the mill, he felt sufficiently comfortable to explore the structure and sometimes even take advantage of it. James Mooreland was the first character with real power over the building; the now compartmentalised structure no longer dominated the occupier. While the redundant mill has become a benevolent shelter for Sarah Thompson, she controlled how she used the structure, and where she went.

The students recognised that this transition of power also reflected wider societal issues. The first users lived and worked in appalling conditions; they were mercilessly exploited, abused and taken advantage of - as were huge numbers of the working class. This situation was eventually acknowledged and addressed with a series of UK 'Factory Acts'[19] that gave workers certain rights, which eventually led to the outlawing of child labour, pensions for older workers, and holidays with pay. While the users of the late 20th century and early 21st were part of the deindustrialisation of the Western world, and the rise of the individual.

[5] Celia Brearley and Alex Williams. A new future.

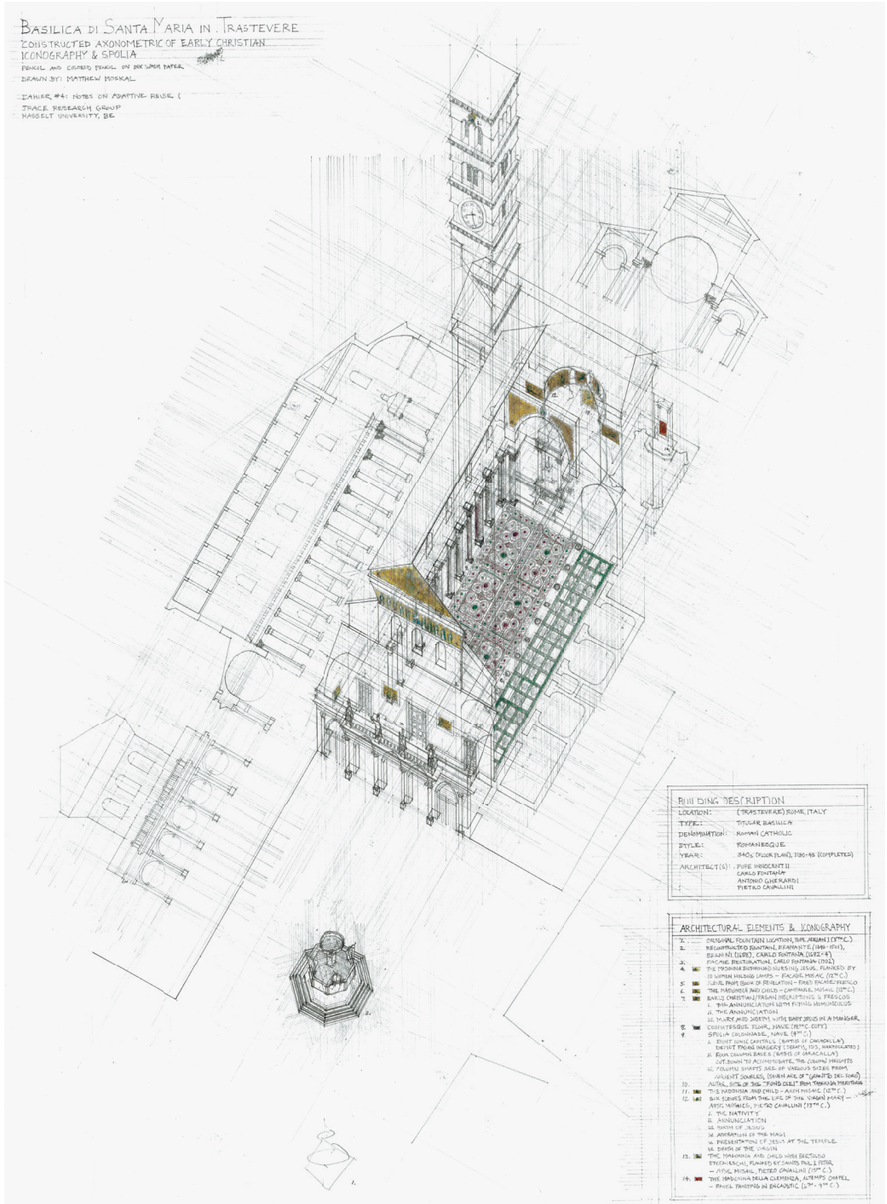
[6] Celia Brearley and Alex Williams. Mother and her children watching a debate from the public viewing gallery.

19 'The 1833 Factory Act', UK Parliament, accessed 22 October 2021, https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/livinglearning/19thcentury/overview/factoryact/.

The stories illustrated the changing power dynamic between the building and the user over time as well as the fact that the building is a physical representation of wider societal issues. The students, therefore, wanted the building to continue its compassionate and benevolent journey; they felt that the next natural use for the building would be Manchester People's Parliament. They regarded the building as a metaphor for UK northern politics and therefore an architectural representation of the transparent neglect of the north by a southern-based parliament. Celia and Alex were confident that the building could theoretically satisfy the demands for devolution of the north, autonomy, openness, and a more participatory style of government.

Storytelling was used as a research tool that revealed the complex relationships between places and those who occupy them. The project used analogy to uncover not only the inherent meaning embedded within the physical structure and situation but also the virtual narrative that supported it. Often these stories need to be sought out and uncovered, they are not easy to find, and equally they are not straightforward to read. *The story does not solve the design problem, but it identifies it.*

# Explanatory Note
## Drawing Basilica di Santa Maria in Trastevere
*Matthew Moskal* . . . . . .




Poster [1] Matthew Moskal. Constructed Axonometric of Early Christian Iconography and Spolia, pencil and coloured pencil on ink wash paper, 42 x 59 cm. The two-dimensional plan and sections form the foundation for a central image that reveals the interior from above, highlighting the location of important mosaics and architectural elements of the Basilica di Santa Maria in Trastevere.

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Stone, Sally and Laura Sanderson. "UnDoing: An Essay by Sally Stone and Laura Sanderson." Sally Stone, Laura Sanderson, Matthew Pendergast, Tom Every. *UnDoing.* Manchester: Manchester School of Architecture (MSA) Press, 2020. 15-25.

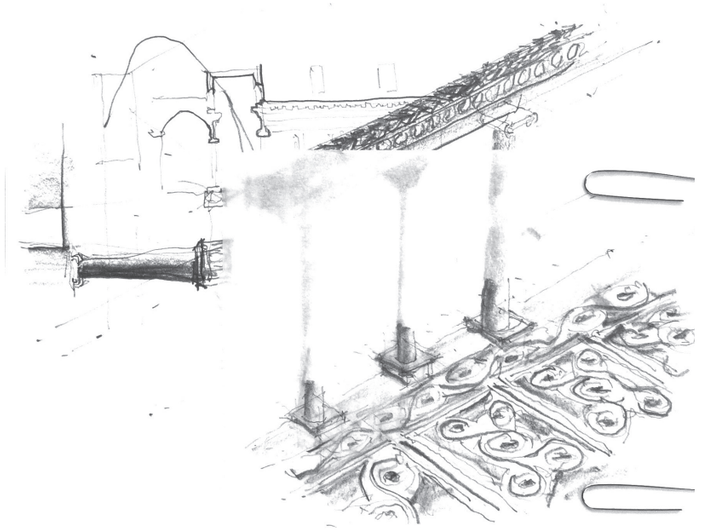

[List of figures]

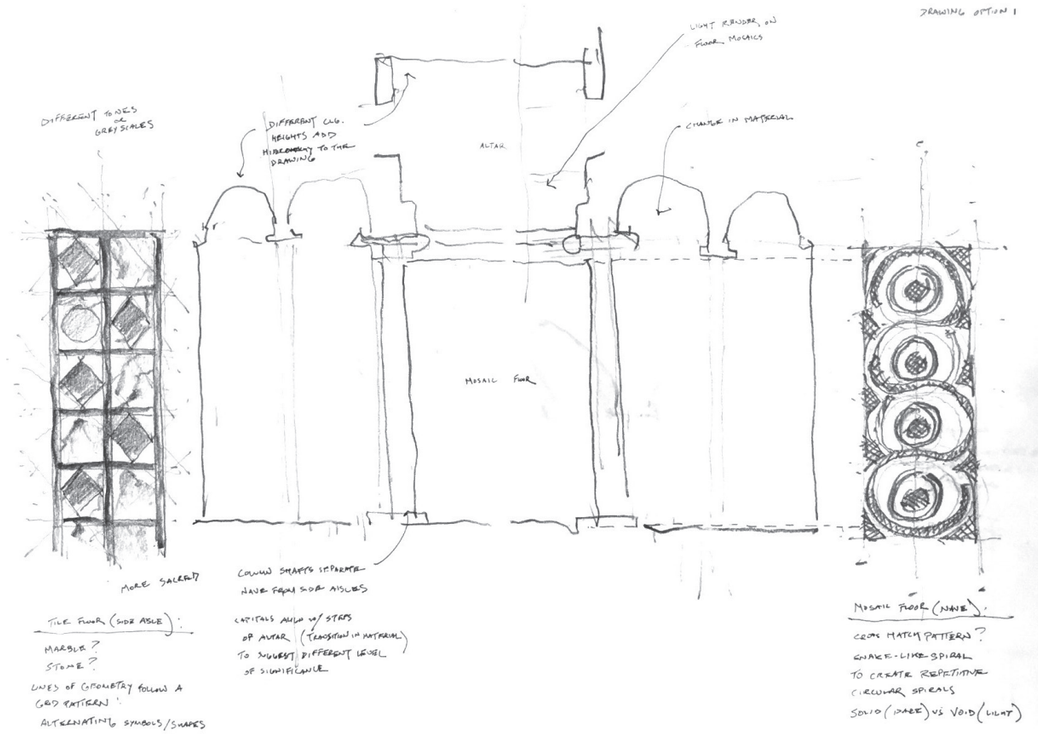
## Statement of Intent

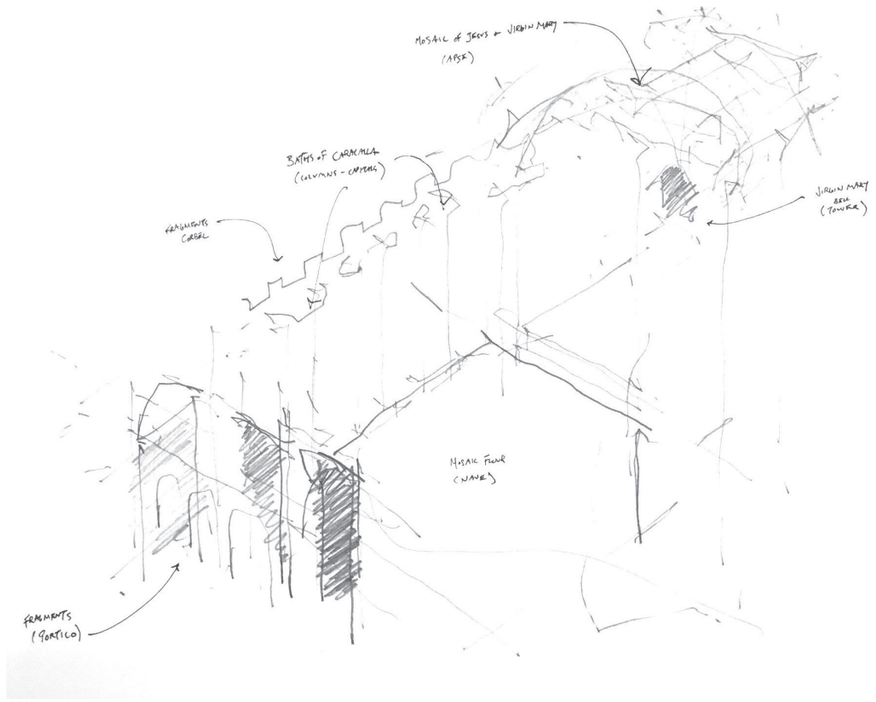
The drawing is unfolded as an axonometric, viewed from above and built up by its 4th century foundation and 12th century elevations that are left in situ as a reminder of the constructive process [1]. In addition, the different drawing types are distinguished by their level of detail, with more development on the central axonometric. The North facade is peeled away to expose the elements of the interior and reveal the relationship between the horizontal (cosmatesque floor) and vertical plane (spolia columns). The granite colonnade divides the three naves and is extruded in various shaft sizes (taken from many ancient sources with eight Ionic capitals and four bases originating from the Baths of Caracalla), where it transitions into the geometric pattern of the floor plan. The pathway to the altar is halted by a sign reading, “Fons Olei” or (“source of oil”), the spot of the famous myth where a stream of oil travelled from the original Taberna Meritoria to the Tiber River. Finally, at the climax is a cluster of 13th century mosaics by Pietro Cavallini portraying the Life of the Virgin with a panel painting at its side, left for private worship in a small chapel. The overall goal of this drawing was to depict different layers of architecture and iconic imagery prominent in the Basilica di Santa Maria in Trastevere. The manner in which the architecture and mosaics of the Virgin Mary are tied together begin with an exterior perspective to the most sacred interior spaces. One might conclude a particular approach from this description: From the alluring campanile in the distance, to meeting at the Fontana di Piazza Santa Maria, to being confronted by the restored facade, to entering the inscripted portico, to transitioning onto the interior cosmati floor, to acknowledging the spolia columns, to noticing the pagan figures on the capitals, to passing under the apsidal arch, to interacting with mosaics in the apse, to gazing at the Madonna della Clemenza in the Altemps chapel.

## Research by Redrawing

Drawing by hand has been a useful tool in the research of the Basilica di Santa Maria in Trastevere, not only as a physical activity (layering marks on paper), but as a way to comprehend information by reformulating the absorbed literature into compartmental vignettes [2-4]. The juxtaposition of text and imagery merges the research and the information is laid out visually; therefore, enabling the researcher to realize concepts that are then mapped onto memory. As humans, we tend to retain information through narratives and images. You could argue that one of the reasons Christianity has survived for centuries is perhaps because of its ability to articulate mythological archetypes through religious iconography (e.g. the representation of the Virgin Mary, a common theme in the typology of ecclesiastical architecture, and particularly, the Basilica di Santa Maria in Trastevere). The preliminary sketches of this project leading into the final composition were inspired by, “Rome: Continuity and Change,” a five-week summer course in Rome via the Yale University School of Architecture (Bahadursingh, n.d.). The result of the students’ work was a helpful source in determining a strategy for the construction of the final drawing.






[2-4] Matthew Moskal. Drawing studies, graphite on paper. Drawing studies of the Basilica di Santa Maria in Trastevere exposing the thought process of the researcher through text and imagery.

## Drawing by Construction

Transition to the final stages of the project, the practice of using traditional drafting tools clearly adds a tactful edge to the overall presence of the drawing. Something that is very difficult to accomplish with modern design software because of its two-dimensionality. On the one hand, in his essay from “Frank Lloyd Wright: Unpacking the Archive,” Ken Tadashi Oshima (2017, 60-77) showcases the American architect’s elegant drawing style of the Imperial Hotel in Japan, where hand renderings and technical details are interlocked with the rawness of handwritten project titles and notes. However, the counterargument seen in the collages of Mexican architect, Tatiana Bilbao, reveals how combining hand sketches with digital media can bring dialogue to the creative process (Frearson 2019). Hence, there’s something worth mentioning about the depth revealed in both the final result and production of working with tangible methods. For example, the force of the mayline moving across the drawing board, the constant shifting of the triangle in rhythm with the sliding mayline, the layering of trace paper to test spontaneous ideas, the masking and removal of tape to fill areas with colour, the crossing of pencil lines to turn two-dimensional views into a comprehensive form, the unintended smudges of the medium and erase marks caused by manoeuvring in multiple positions around the paper. These are all what make the drawing a product of immense value. The start of one motion escalates into a repetitive activity, which eventually manifests into a stimulus for the creative process or as others describe it, “being in the zone.” As a result, the interaction with these tools empower the architect to demonstrate their imagination and meaning into the drawing.

## Reflection on Early Christian Iconography

As one might notice when visiting the site, there is great emphasis on the iconography of the Virgin Mary, which is no surprise to the title given to the Basilica. The religious icon takes many forms, depending on where you are on the site, from The Madonna and Child to the Coronation of the Virgin [5-8]. Apart from this specific case study, I began to wonder why there was such a vast presence of religious imagery within early Christian Churches in the late Medieval period? And when did the shift of devotion to these images occur, given the lack of representation in modern churches and the decline of the Catholic religion in the West? To conclude, there is something to be said about the profound level of detail within the Basilica di Santa Maria in Trastevere. The depth of architectural history in combination with early Christian art dating to the 6th-9th centuries has a place for discussion in the theme of adaptive reuse. This case study is a significant example of how the reuse of architectural elements and conserving the past could enable modern societies to travel into the perspective of our ancestors, providing a base of knowledge to reference and guide our future encounters.

[5-8] Photographs of the Basilica di Santa Maria in Trastevere.

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[1] Constructed Axonometric of Early Christian Iconography and Spolia, pencil and coloured pencil on ink wash paper, 42 x 59 cm, Matthew Moskal. The two-dimensional plan and sections form the foundation for a central image that reveals the interior from above, highlighting the location of important mosaics and architectural elements of the Basilica di Santa Maria in Trastevere. Source: Drawing by Matthew Moskal

[2-4] Drawing studies, graphite on paper. Drawing studies of the Basilica di Santa Maria in Trastevere exposing the thought process of the researcher through text and imagery. Source: Drawing by Matthew Moskal

[5] Source: Photograph by Bie Plevoets

[6] Source: Photograph by Bie Plevoets

[7] Source: Wikimedia commons, Carlos Teixidor Cadenas, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bas%C3%ADlica_de_Santa_Mar%C3%ADa_en_Trast%C3%A9vere._Columnas_de_%C3%A9poca_romana._Roma,_Italia.jpg

[8] Source: Wikimedia commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rome_-_Trastevere_-_Basilica_di_Santa_Maria_-_Interior_View_-_20181021-01_PvE_(Q1137391).jpg

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# Colofon

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**Notes on adaptive reuse**

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