

Reuse, Transformation and Restoration

BY HUBERT-JAN HENKET

In the period I was teaching at the Eindhoven University of Technology, the Netherlands, from 1984–1998, I often had the privilege to welcome our first year students entering the faculty of architecture. After I had paid my compliments to the students for having chosen a fascinating study and future profession I told them that for environmental and climate reasons, it would be best not to build at all any longer. And since this was unrealistic, the next best thing was that we should learn how to renew the world with things that exist already. Laughter was always their response. Didn't the nutty professor notice that outside an enormous boom of new building was going on as a result of the neo-liberal wave that was hitting Europe and North America? Besides, the ambition of most of them was to become the future Rem Koolhaas or Norman Foster. So please don't spoil the party. Directly after my talk they were embraced by the faculty staff to fulfill their dreams.

In 1998 I transferred to Delft University because they offered me a much more favorable deal for the further development of **docomomo** and our international secretariat. In Delft I encountered a similar mood among staff and students as in Eindhoven. Everything was geared to the design of new buildings and cities with ever more spectacular shapes and dimensions. The architect, not in the role of a craftsman, but as a free and creative artist.

For those who are dedicated to the ideas of the Modern Movement this attitude shouldn't come as a surprise. Isn't one of the driving forces of Modernity, ever since the Enlightenment, the dedication to dynamism and the constant new? And isn't the concept of the constant new the driving force behind scientific innovation and the market economy which together have delivered the spectacular individual and social progress of the last 50 years? And isn't the concept of the constant new still a dominating phenomenon in the arts, architecture and fashion?

At the end of the 18th century another revolution took place in the mind of the Western Man which is relevant to mention. Up until then, there was hardly any distinction between a craftsman and an artist. Quite suddenly this situation changes. Art becomes an autonomous domain, as was already the case with science and religion. For the romantic artist of the time, beauty and utility are perpendicular to each other. Art becomes expression. The famous romantic painting "The walker above the sea of mist", which Caspar David Friedrich painted in 1818, informs us that art is not so much about what you see around you but what you see inside yourself. It tells us that

art comes from within to the outside. The artist inspires the world around him by his expression of his innermost self, the unique.

The conflict between utility (as a result of the rational ideas promoted by the Enlightenment) and art (as a result of the spiritual ideas of Romanticism) have occupied the debate in architecture and architectural education, ever since. And it also plays a role in the discussions about restoration and authenticity.

In the Netherlands, as in most European countries and in North America, the boom of new buildings came to an abrupt end due to the financial crisis of 2008. A vast over-supply of office space, shopping centers, apartments, warehouses etc stared us in the face, the result of greedy developers and public authorities. At the same time, climate change was increasingly demonstrating its ugly face.

Add these two together and one understands why today the curricula at the schools of architecture, in the countries mentioned above, have finally accepted restoration, reuse and the transformation of existing buildings and cities as a reality. Roughly 50% of the commissions in architectural studios and offices in the Netherlands today is related to reuse of the existing stock. It is to be expected that a similar situation will occur in the countries that are still witnessing a building boom. For tempering climate change this would be a blessing.

This issue of the **docomomo** Journal on reuse, with contributions from Japan, Canada, Mexico, Chile and New Zealand, shows a wide variety of original functions. Two civic buildings, a non-governmental organization, a golf-club club house, an elementary school, a church, a petrol station and a dwelling. Three buildings are designed by celebrated masters, Mies van der Rohe, Kenzo Tange and Luis Baragán. The other buildings are designed by nationally well-respected architects. Three contributions deal with transformation of the original function to a new function, in the other contributions the original function remains.

In the essays several key topics of reuse are presented. Various contributors show the importance of public awareness, because Modern Movement buildings are often not communally all that much appreciated, leave alone that they are not loved by the majority. Certainly if public money is involved a positive attitude of the citizens is key. Traditional and modern social media prove effective vehicles for information.

Another item is the position of the property developer. Auckland's Civic building is a clear example.



01 Hubert-Jan Henket giving the keynote lecture "When the Oppressive New and the Vulnerable Old Meet; a Plea for Sustainable Modernity" at the 13th International docomomo Conference, in Seoul, Korea, 25 September 2014. In the background: René Magritte, 1939. © Joonhwan Yoon, 2014.

The debate concerning demolition *versus* reuse can only be effective if the discussion is based on rational facts. A proper value assessment is essential. In such an assessment the social, cultural, economic and technical values are shown for the current state of the complex and the scenarios of demolition and redevelopment vis-a-vis options of re-use or transformation. The energy embedded in the existing building should form part of the evaluation as well. It is a pity that no author shows us these decision-making tools in any detail.

The interesting essay by Masami Kobayashi is an informative description of the forces at work and the way these were brought together in a balanced way.

The essay about the Muashi-Razan golf club house is an example of the struggle involved to keep the original building, notwithstanding external forces to demolish it.

The influence of accelerated obsolescence is demonstrated in all four Japanese contributions. This happens when — among others — the authorities are forced to change the building requirements, for example to conserve energy, to diminish carbon dioxide emissions, to improve working conditions or equitable access, or when safety is concerned. Due the disastrous results of recent earthquakes in Japan the authorities were forced to implement much stricter requirements concerning existing structures. Keizo Hamada shows the three main earthquake resistance improvement possibilities for existing buildings plus the pros and cons involved. It would be informative for many journal readers if Keizo Hamada would be invited to show us in more detail the technical consequences of the three options in a future issue.

The essay by Marie-Dina Salvione draws our attention to the serious situation of the heritage of Momo churches.

This issue is paramount in many regions in the northern hemisphere and would be very appropriate for a future **docomomo** journal issue.

Whereas most buildings in this issue fit into the category of the more ordinary buildings, Louise Noelle's essay about the house in Pedregal is a small serenade to a poetic house. It is a welcomed ode to the restoration of a small icon.

Another little icon is the petrol station in Montreal by Mies van der Rohe. In her essay France Vanlaethem discusses the issue of authenticity, an important topic that is hardly touched on in the other contributions. She argues that authenticity is a construct, a judgment, a process involving citizens, experts and authorities. Sure, but is it not a fact that the experts are asked to establish the original and existing values? Is it not for the authorities to secure these values and for the citizens to express their minds and feelings as well as to give the authorities their mandate?

The distinction between authenticity of the materials and the authenticity of the original architect's ideas (ie his artistic contribution), makes sense, because they have different influences on the decision-making process.

I agree with France Vanlaethem where she questions the validity of the changes made to Mies' original design by the restoration architect concerned, simply because these changes go against the original intention of Mies van der Rohe. As the author concludes: "Mies proved to be sensitive to context, an aspect neglected" by the architect of the reuse project.

This conclusion hints to the essence of any culturally valuable reuse project. Any transformation should respect the intentions of the original architect, interventions should be in balance with the cultural value of these intentions and these should add to the architectural quality of the new whole.

Enjoy reading **docomomo** Journal number 52. ■