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### The force of everyday life

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#### Abstract

Italo Calvino in his searching recollection of cities discussed the many-layered relationship between the generation of a place and the manner in which it is occupied. A city, he said, consists of «... the relationships between the measurements of its space and the events of its past». He qualifies this «... the line strung from the lamppost to the railing opposite and the festoons that decorate the course of the queen's nuptial procession; the height of that railing and the leap of the adulterer who climbed over it at dawn; the tilt of a guttering and a cat's progress along it as he slips into the same window.» (Calvino 1979: 13).

This constant use and adjustment to that use and abuse creates an ever-evolving environment, somewhere that is never finished, not complete nor content. Yet as the city develops it leaves traces and marks of that evolution. It is ordered and reordered, and in doing so displays these uncertainties and patina of time within the very grain of the streets and buildings themselves. Calvino continues: «As this wave from memories flows in, the city soaks up like a sponge and expands. ... The city does not tell its past, but contains it like the lines of a hand, written in the corners of the street, the gratings of the windows, the banisters of the steps, the antennae of the lightning rods, the poles of the flags, every segment marked in turn with scratches, indentations, scrolls.» (Calvino 1979: 13).

#### **Connections**

It is possible to draw a direct connection between a building and the society that constructed it - this includes the subsequent modifications of the structure. The evolving attitudes of a culture are present within the organisation and programmatic use of a building, thus each change and adaptation reflects the concerns of the residents of that environment. Buildings and places hold histories. They depict patterns of life, the preoccupations of the people that inhabit them, the obsessions and anxieties of the residents. Buildings store these passions, enthusiasms and neurosis seemingly within their very structure.

This sense of ownership is underlined by the outraged reaction of the public to the artwork; House, by Rachel Whiteread. House (1993) was a most extraordinary and highly controversial exposure of the insides of a somewhat unremarkable terraced house in London. The building was already due to be demolished; in fact, the whole street was to make way for an urban parkland, a ribbon of green corridor to connect the Isle of Dogs with Victoria Park. This was a non-controversial and visionary policy that allowed residents access to connected green space without banishment to busy roads. However, within this enlightened scheme, House was condemned as an affront to the previous residents and an insult to the generations of Londoners who had once occupied the street. Simon Watney documented the reaction to the piece: «House is deemed obscene because it exposes an interior, because it shows us something that we are not supposed to see, because it fails to operate as a proper decent public sculpture in the interests of the moral and political claims of an administrative system ... » (Watney 1995: 108).

The interior of the building was filled with concrete, and then the exterior walls simply demolished. This exposed the interior not as uncontained space, but exactly the opposite, as a definite and tangible solid. The memory of its occupation was revealed in negative within the shape of the space, and the marks, inscriptions, scratches and impressions of daily life exposed in the casting process. The spaces appeared naked, exposed and vulnerable, and the loneliness of existence revealed in the disconnection with the loss of the rest of the houses in the street. It is somewhat ironic that in the end the council did bow to pressure from the local population, the press and other self-styled vigilantes, and house was demolished just 11 short weeks after it was constructed.

Worn floors, damaged surfaces, graffitied walls, these serve as records of the people who were there, for whom a particular building was a fundamental part of the infrastructure of daily life. In any given building exciting things have happened, terrible things have happened, but mostly, things have just happened, everyday life continued and for the most part, it wasn't notable, except to the person who lived it. Yet these buildings do contain a direct connection with the past, with the culture of those who constructed them and the culture of those who occupied them.

This link, which is characterised by a strong connection to place, to building capacity and contains resilience to external forces can be described as social sustainability (Smith et al. 2014: 1). This connection between context and sustainability focuses on the needs, aspirations and quality of human relationships; «Social sustainability is the ability of a society or an individual's lifestyle to continue in a way that suits their needs and those of subsequent generations. The values and spiritual aspirations of the people should be complimented in their interior environment, and in the processes and activities involved should respect their history, current needs and future potentials beliefs and rituals.» (Smith et al. 2014: 1). Thus strategies that do not raze the existing, that do not conduct indiscriminate demolition, that do not replace inadequate yet salvageable places and structures with new unrepresentative developments can have a direct and beneficial impact upon the quality of life.

But how would the residents feel this disconnection between the physical nature of the existing urban landscape and the memory of the past place? The sense of belonging to a place, to be part of the evolution, to feel connected to somewhere is highly important. Collective and cultural memories are tied up with community sustainability. Wholesale demolition of complete environments can create complete dislocation of the individual from the community. Wellbeing that is created when an individual is part of a community is something that evolves from the collective memory of the place, the community that that memory creates and the maintenance of this through constant interaction.

#### **Demolition and partial demolition**

So, what are the consequences for an existing building or place when it is renovated or redeveloped? Sometimes this is simply the necessary work to make a building useable. But redevelopment can also be a threat. It can herald gentrification, or the loss of the history attached to a specific building or area. Any significant redevelopment inevitably attracts criticism from people who are worried that they will lose something, whether that is the affordability to continue living in their home, or the historical value attached to a certain site. How then, do architects manage the conflict between the needs of the present with the value of the past? What is lost once a building is gone for good? What is the relationship to with the specific history, and how does future inhabitation respond to the present environment?

The EAAE Conservation / Demolition focus group, The Force of Everyday Life reached certain conclusions with regards to demolition. These mutual and informed statements expressed the concern that the group had for the destructive quality within the process of demolition, not just the loss of physical fabric, but also, and just as importantly, the accompanying loss of cultural memory.

Demolition was defined as "the removal in whole or in part of a place's fabric and can lead to the loss of cultural significance. Conversely the opposite is also true, for the loss of cultural significance can be the trigger for the loss of fabric leading to the destruction of the place though deterioration or demolition". The group also regarded demolition as a force of everyday life: "It is part of the actions that must be taken in the shaping of the environment and as such can be a creative act as much as a destructive one", and, although there are many degrees of demolition, "... almost all requirements for changes to a place that will require some degree of loss of historic fabric and by extension, loss of meaning" (The Force of Everyday Life). Thus the conclusions reached supposed that demolition affects both the material and immaterial qualities of place. It is a process of dematerialisation that can equally impact on the place's fabric and meaning, or each independently of the other. The loss of meaning of a place can be as destructive as the loss of its fabric and could be regarded as a non-material form of demolition.

Louis Aragon's 1926 Surrealist document of a threatened Parisian arcade, Paris Peasant, is an endless and meandering story of a man who constantly rediscovers his city. This allows him to appreciate the place, the lives of those within it and the relationship between the two (Aragon 1971). This description of the places and spaces of the soon to be demolished Passage de l'Opéra, could be described as a quotidian adventure, a celebration of the commonplace, sometimes banal lives of seemingly ordinary people. But it is also a heartrending description of a way of life soon to be lost, as the Haussmann Plan for Paris slowly and relentlessly drives its way through the neighbourhood. The great American passion for city planning, imported into Paris by a prefect of police during the Second Empire and now being applied to the task of redrawing the map of our capital in straight lines, will soon spell the doom of these human aquariums. Although the life that originally quickened them has drained away, they deserve, nevertheless, to be regarded as the

secret repositories of several modern myths: it is only today, when the pickaxe menaces them, that they have at last become the true sanctuaries of a cult of the ephemeral, the ghostly landscape of damnable pleasures and profession. Places that were incomprehensible yesterday, and that tomorrow will never know.» (Aragon 1971: 14). He mourns this damage as though forces beyond the control of the everyday comprehension were overcoming the city: «Today the Boulevard Haussmann has reached the Rue Lafitte, remarked *L'Intransigeant* the other day. A few more paces forward by this giant rodent and, after it has devoured the block of houses separating it from the Rue Le Peletier, it will inexorably gash open the thicket whose twin arcades run through the Passage de l'Opéra before finally emerging diagonally on to the Boulevard des Italiens». The catalogue of destruction carries on, until it ends with a lament for the loss of the established way of life: «It seems possible, though, that a good part of the human river which carries incredible floods of dreamers and dawdlers from the Bastille to the Madeleine may divert itself through this new channel, and thus modify the ways of thought of a whole district, perhaps of a whole world.» (Aragon 1971: 14).

#### The future of the already built

As individuals and communities, deep significance is attached to familiar places, and complex relationships can develop between the residents and the place that they inhabit. Thus, places are defined by the people who live within them. This quality that is present in the nature of the buildings and the streets, is often generated by the ordinary actions of local people, many of who believe that their identity is essentially tied to the place that they inhabit. This local distinctiveness is characterised by the activities that occur within the specific environment. And so, significant markers are formed, in both the present and in the past, which will allow a society to relate to a particular environment.

«In the ex-industrial meatpacking district of Holešovice, Prague, a new wave of offbeat art galleries and cocktails in jam jars are stealing the show.» (Corinthia).

Holešovice is a diverse district to the north of Prague city-centre tucked into the bend of the river and stretching along the left bank of the VItava to Letná Hill. It was once a great iron-making area, and its relationship with the city, the river and thus connections beyond the confines of the city made the perfect conditions for industrial development. This post-industrial area was, at the beginning of the twentieth century, a great centre of manufacturing and trade. The city slaughterhouses and associated market were based here, as were steam mills, a brewery, various factories, and a busy cargo port. The majority of these industrial buildings no longer serve their original purpose; many have been remodelled as apartment buildings, cultural centres, office complexes, studios, or even market buildings. (Figg. 1, 2, 3)

The Art Nouveau and Neo-Renaissance style slaughterhouse served the residents of the city for more than a hundred years. Until the advent of refrigeration including cold-transportation, abattoirs were generally positioned close to the centre of population; meat needed to be eaten as soon as possible after slaughter to avoid putrefaction. This great meat-packing building is in the process of conversion into 'MINT', an arts and crafts market. Next to this is a venue for contemporary performing arts – Jatka 78,

a self-proclaimed "Temple of Creativity". Close by, the reuse of an industrial warehouse to house Vnitroblock is a thoroughly 21st century concept: part coffee shop, part concept store, part multifunction gallery space. While in the same neighbourhood is DOX, the Centre for Contemporary Art. This is a mixture of old factory buildings and new structures created between 2003 and 2008 by Ivan Kroupa Architects (Van Uffelen and Golser 2013: 168). The original industrial buildings were extended and reused, while the new elements emulate the objectivity of the original factory buildings, and a cohesive unity created through the use of light grey render. A recent and extraordinary addition is the zeppelin-like structure that has seemingly just landed on the roof of the buildings. This 42-metre-long timber, steel and glass structure was designed by Martin Rajniš, Leoš Válka, David Kubík and opened in 2016. It is not just a visual delight, but also a venue for readings and public discussion. (Figg. 4, 5)

But still Holešovice has no shortage of vacant industrial buildings. It also has plenty of brownfield space. Construction within the dense urban environment, upon brownfield or the once-occupied sites is one of the most important issues within architecture at the moment and represents a considerable investment within the industry. These tarnished areas which would once have been overlooked, have become cradles of architectural enquiry. This undoubtedly leads to the creation of social sustainability within the area, and the liberation of a new future for the area. However Jan Richter of Radio Prague International is concerned about the loss of a distinct character. He writes that «much of the area around the old port is planned to turn into an area of modern high-rise office buildings and shopping malls. Some locals, including the writer Ludvík Vaculík, fear that this will be the end of old Holešovice and it will become just another indistinct part of the new Prague.» (Richter 2007)

#### **Collective memory**

The absence of cultural memories, that is the loss of the collective knowledge that is passed from one generation to the next to enable the construction of a collective identity, can lead to an unreliable interpretation of the past. The sense of the preceding era is based upon certain social and mental conditions, so for key elements of that past to be destroyed, demolished or forgotten, is to forgo key elements of community and social evolution. Such, of course was the impact of much that was constructed during that period of collective amnesia after the Second World War.

In the fourth and final section of W G Sebald's Vertigo, the protagonist visits his childhood home in the Tyrol. It was thirty years since he had last been there, and the place had «... continually returned in my dreams and daydreams and had become more real to me than they had been then, yet upon arrival in the village he was shocked to discover that it «... was more remote from me than any other place I could conceive of» (Sebald 1999: 185-186). Sebald reflects upon the nature of the loss of association with this place from the past, with the sense of belonging that it would and could imbue. The book continues: «The house of the head forester, a small shingled villa with a pair of antlers and the inscription "1913" above the front door, together with its small orchard had made way for a holiday home; the fire station and its handsome slatted tower, where the fire brigade's hoses hung in silent anticipation of the next conflagration, were no longer there; the farmhouses had without exception been rebuilt, with added storeys; the vicarage, the curate's lodge, the school, the town hall where Fürgut the one-armed clerk went in and out with a regularity that my grandfather could set his watch by, the cheese dairy, the poorhouse, Michael Meyer's grocery and haberdashery - all had been thoroughly modernised or had disappeared altogether.» (Sebald 1999: 185-186).

Strangely the narrator felt a certain amount of relief at the total transformation of the village of W. The fact that everything had completely changed was somewhat reassuring. The authenticity of his recollection of the past would not be sullied by the reality of the present. The stories existed within their own reality, somewhere beyond the certainty of the everyday, outside the inevitability of the present and therefore acquired the qualities of myth or fable. This transformation enabled the past to become more real, more tangible and thus more physically present. But this placed the narrator outside the current events of the small town of W. It allowed him to become disconnected from the present incarnation of the village, and the memories of the place to take precedence over the present-day manifestation. This disconnection enabled the storyteller to leave the small town without the necessity to create a connection with the place. He did not feel the compulsion to stay, to become part of the present-day incarnation. He could leave without guilt or connection.

#### **Memory and anticipation**

«A city is made of buildings and streets. It is constructed from concrete and glass, steel and masonry. But a city is more than an itinerary of bricks and mortar, it is greater than the streets and alleyways, it is bigger than the rooms, squares and parks, and the funding needed to construct them. It is formed by the people who occupy it, by what they do, how they feel and the way that they interact with each other and with the environment around them.» (Stone, Sanderson 2019: 18). Buildings and spaces are engrained with the narrative of use over time. Walter Benjamin clarified this relationship between places and the people who occupy them: «To live is to leave traces.» (Benjamin 1986: 155).

Issues of collective memory and identity combined with ideas of tradition, history and culture mean that it is possible to retain a sense of continuity with the past as a way of creating the future. Questions related to heritage, smartness and sustainability are leading today's architectural debate. Adaptation and reuse do contain elements of destruction, inevitably for a place not to become scarified, for it to develop and evolve these things must happen, but they can happen with grace and care. Meticulous readings of place combined with sensitive interpretation means that the health-giving sense of community is not necessarily lost, but retained and develops as those within the community evolve.



Fig. 1) Hall 22, former slaughterhouse, with the minimum of translation the buildings, now house a vibrant traditional fruit and flower market. Holešovice, Prague, Czech Republic. (photo Sally Stone 2019)



Fig. 3) The Vnitroblock café – a miscellaneous assortment of furniture animates this postindustrial interior. Holešovice, Prague, Czech Republic. (photo Sally Stone 2019)



Fig. 2) Raw, robust and clean – the great exhibition and performance area of the Vnitroblock building is enlivened by the visiting group. Holešovice, Prague, Czech Republic. (photo Sally Stone 2019)



Fig. 4) The original industrial buildings have been extended and reused to accommodate the DOX Centre for Contemporary Art. Holešovice, Prague, Czech Republic. (photo Sally Stone 2019)

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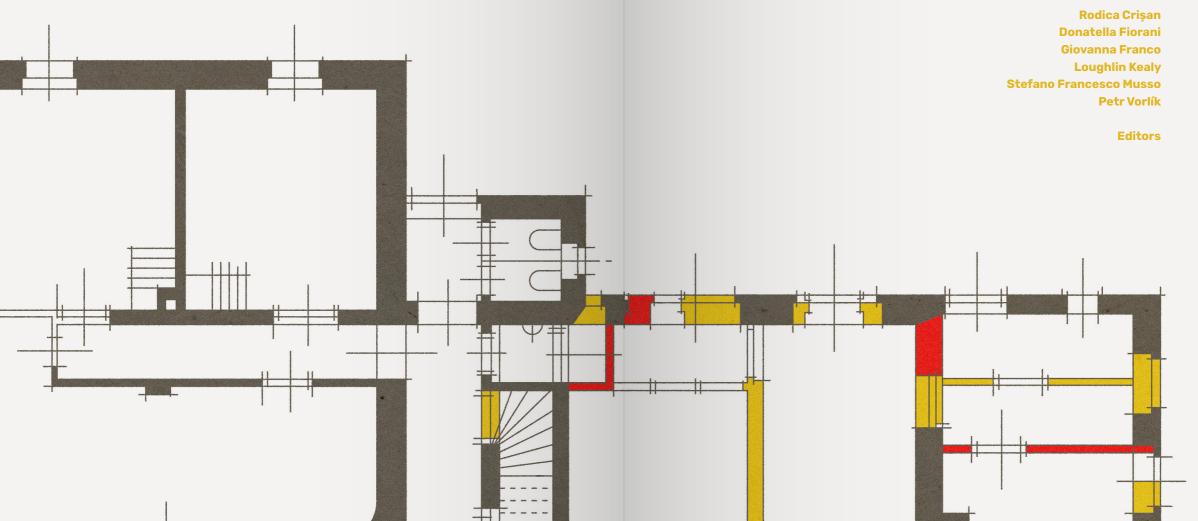
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Fig. 5) A most extraordinary floating lecture theatre appears to hover over the DOX Centre for Contemporary Arts. Holešovice, Prague, Czech Republic. (photo Sally Stone 2019)

## **CONSERVATION**

### **DEMOLITION**





#### **EAAE**

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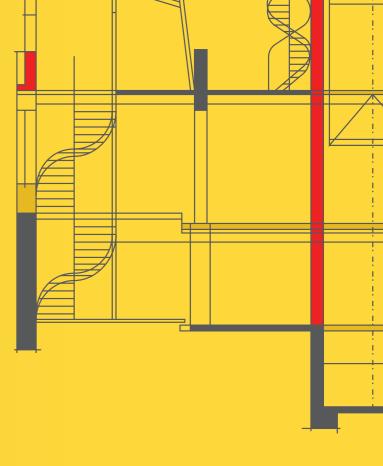
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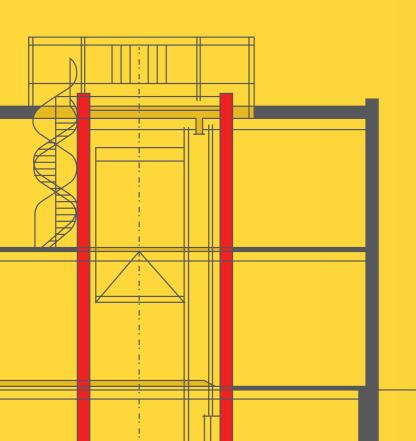












#### **Conservation - Demolition**

#### EAAE

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The workshop brings together a broad range of people, from art conservators to architects, engineers, and officials, to discuss the issues that have come to be of crucial importance in the management of European cultural heritage. Considering the roles that critical reflection and academic scholarship have played in developing conservation as a cultural practice, it will explore how the EAAE Conservation Network can enhance the contribution of these two basic pillars of architecture for the future of architectural heritage.

The workshop takes place in the heart of Europe: the City of Prague in the Czech Republic. It comprises academic presentations on the issues identified below as topic areas, small, intensive group discussions, and study trips to selected sites.

# 1. Towards the contemporary hybrid city and cultural complexity

Do contemporary cities need a blended mix of history and modernity? How does gentrification impact public or private spaces, their diversity, and the intricate web of relations in the city?

### 2. The force of everyday life

How can we strengthen the sustainability of the cultural value, ecology, economy, and prolonged life cycle of the built environment through necessary, responsible maintenance? Can we control or manage amateur alterations (adaptations) driven by consumption and commercial forces?

# 3. Contemporary versus traditional technologies and approaches

Are traditional and modern technologies sufficiently accessible or culturally acceptable in a contemporary city? And what is the role of architects, conservators, municipalities, institutions, legislation, participation, and professional ethics?

# 4. The scale of new intervention versus memory

Is it possible to accept and make meaningful use of small-scale historic heritage in a contemporary city? Or to benefit contemporary lifestyles? Using current development approaches and building processes? Can demolition be accepted as a legitimate option or strategy? Can we accept demolition in the process of conservation? Or conservation and restitution after demolition?

