Buildings Used

Human Interactions with Architecture

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Introduction

"We shape our buildings, and afterwards our buildings shape us". With these words, Sir Winston Churchill wrapped up his arguments in the debate of the 28th of October, 1943, on the reconstruction of the House of Parliament, following its partial destruction during a German air raid two years earlier.

By using them, he implied.

We usually assume that a building is essentially what we see, and, moreover, what we feel while walking in it and around it, the texture of its materials, the sequence of light and shade, the echoes of our steps, the smell of timber or fresh paint. We ultimately consider that it is its form – in the widest sense of the term, that is, the arrangement of the physical elements it consists of – that determines what this building is. Whether it is the Villa Rotonda or the Villa Savoye.

Our conviction that the building is what we see and what we touch stems from the fact that we, as humans, are made to trust our senses. Without this information, and particularly our sight, we would not be able to survive.

However, by asserting that this is Villa Rotonda and that is Villa Savoye, and by attempting to break down their differences and identify their similarities as physical objects, we grossly underestimate how important the way they are used is in order for them to become what they are.

This book argues that the use of an edifice is as important as its form in determining its identity. Actually, in a great many cases, it is much more important. If the construction of an edifice is the bringing in order of a heap of bricks and stones by the creation of a more or less clearly structured form, then it is its use by people that transforms this ordered heap of bricks and stones into a house, a school, a town hall, a church; use, which is favoured or served to a lesser or greater degree – but not dictated – by this or the other building form.

And, much more than form, it is its use by people that allows the creation of one or another narrative related to the edifice itself and the people around it – a narrative that makes the edifice part of our cultural environment.

However, the history of architecture as a literary and scientific genre has been rather indifferent towards the use of buildings, focusing primarily on

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issues of form, symbolism and construction; works focusing on the "afterlife" of buildings are rather rare.

On the other hand, theory of architecture has dealt with the use of buildings, at times quite extensively. Generally speaking, though, architectural theory mostly focuses on the intended use, which, in most cases, is seen as a quite significant factor to be taken into account during the design process, and may even thoroughly determine the form of the building.

This said, only a handful of theorists have placed the use of buildings subsequent to their erection at the centre of their research, most notably Jonathan Hill, author and editor of books such as *Occupying Architecture: Between The Architect And The User*, published in 1996; *Actions of Architecture: Architects and Creative Users*, published in 2003; and *Immaterial Architecture*, published in 2006. Hill understood use as a notion encompassing the full range of ways in which buildings and cities are experienced, and offered a penetrating view into the power games between users and authors of edifices, signified and regenerated by these very edifices.

This book further elaborates on the user's interaction with buildings, by introducing new perspectives. It only marginally examines who is practicing (or should we say: delivering? Or creating?) architecture: whether they are the future users, as is the case with the participatory architecture of the 1960s, or the laypersons, people who make their own homes, as is the case with the so-called vernacular architecture, extensively documented in the twentieth century worldwide.

The starting point of our considerations is that only by using a building do we let it function in a certain way: as home, as school, as town hall, as shrine – function is inconceivable in the absence of use. However, it is essential that we broaden the notion of the use of an edifice – the purpose we use it for – so that it encompasses our attitude towards it – how we use it, how we treat it. In this sense, the concept of use exhibits a remarkable variety.

Modern humans live their lives creating new edifices, but also disregarding, destroying or appropriating existing, older and newer, ones; in other words, using them as objects with which, or on which, they can serve their most divergent needs and satisfy a wide scope of desires, ranging from the most practical to the darkest and well hidden. Indeed, we may use buildings as shelters to keep us safe from rain and people with nefarious intentions; we may use them as symbols of authority and power; we may use them as inspiration for daydreaming; we may also use them as objects on which, or through which, we can express our drive for aggression, domination, supremacy and destruction.

It might well be the case that the latter use is the most frequent.

These two aspects of use – the use as function of an edifice, and the use as stance or attitude towards an edifice – are quite discernible from each other but intertwined.

Use as function makes buildings what they are.

Use as attitude towards buildings characterises our culture collectively, and impacts our personality individually.

Part I

Use as function

pyramid, and crowned with twin shrines; one was dedicated to Tlaloc, the god of rain and fertility, and the other to Huitzilopochtli, god of sun and war. The temple in its final form measured approximately 80 by 100 metres at its base, and its height possibly reached 60 metres. Two steep, parallel stairways led to the twin shrines on the top (Serrato-Combe 2001).

The temple dominated the religious and cultural center of the city, which, by the late fifteenth century had a population of more than 200,000 people. It was built on the exact spot where the gods supposedly revealed the signs that this was the Aztec Promised Land. It represented Mount Coatepec, the birthplace of Huitzilopochtli. The god killed his sister Coyolxauhqui there because she conspired against their mother; he dismembered and decapitated her body – a tale reenacted repeatedly by actual people and with actual people.

Typically for Mesoamerican cultures, Aztecs were especially skillful in astronomical observations. The elite appeared to be capable of reading the supposed "signs" of the sky. Drawing on such readings, extremely complex and imaginative myths were constructed to justify the strict social and political hierarchy, as well as the value systems that supported it. The worldview of the Aztecs was deeply influenced, as was their art and architecture, by that of people who had flourished in the region in earlier periods. They believed that death was essential for the perpetuation of life and that people had to offer their blood constantly as a payment to the gods to maintain the world order. These beliefs may have helped keep population growth at bay so that the natural environment's capacity was not exceeded, a dubious way to achieve sustainability even at times of limited family planning methods. Neither the nobility nor the priests were excluded from the blood toll, participating regularly in self-wounding and self-mutilating rituals. However, the toll was clearly heavier for ordinary citizens and much heavier for the subjects of enemy cities.

Aztecs conducted highly ritualised warfare. The purpose was not to exterminate the enemy but to capture as many prisoners as possible for sacrifice. And this they did apparently remarkably well.

During the festivals, prisoners were led one by one to the shrines at the top of the pyramid-like temple to be sacrificed. Executions followed a strict ritual. Four priests restrained the prisoner, while a fifth – or the king himself – made an incision from the abdomen to the diaphragm with a blade and cut out his heart, while it was still beating. He placed the trophy in a basin at the statue of the god, while the body was left to slide down the pyramid's stairs to its bottom, where it was then decapitated. During the days of mass human sacrifices, as in the dedication of the temple in 1487, the blood of thousands of victims per day seems to have flown unceasingly (Keegan 1993; Clandinnen 1991).

John Keegan elaborates on one of the rituals: "One in about 400 prisoners suffered a somewhat different, but even more terrifying ordeal. In the period

and crossbeams. It was 60 metres long, 30 metres wide, and 30 metres high (i.e., as tall as an eight-floor building). Attached to the crossbeams were specially processed human skulls – about 136,000 of them. Those worn out by the time were replaced by others; rarely, though, was the renewal as profound as on the eve of the ceremonies for the 1487 dedication of the temple, when the order was given to remove tens of thousands of skulls in order to replace them with the severed heads of the new victims.

Hernán Cortés, the Spanish conquistador who brought down the Aztec empire, was impressed by the monumental centre of Tenochtitlan, and especially the large twin temple, with its grandeur and artistic quality (Cortés 1520, II); undoubtedly, it would have equally impressed the captives who climbed the staircases to be sacrificed, and the crowd watching the bloodshed.

But there is a good reason to suspect that the procedure unfolding on top of the pyramid was, for all participants, infinitely more important than whether it was built of stone or bricks or timber. The use of the pyramid determined its character and its identity, not its form. So did the use of the great tzompantli – the skull rack – of Tenochtitlan. Tellingly, the details of its form in the drawing Cortés himself prepared are minimal. The severed heads exhibited on it are shown clearly, albeit abstractly. By drawing a dozen, instead of 136,000, skulls, Cortés represented the use of the tzompantli, not its geometry. Evidently, for the diehard warrior what was important was not its precise configuration, but its use.

Form and use in the passage of time

If the use of an edifice determines to a great extent its identity at the time it is built, that is, when it is still used in the way its authors have conceived of it being used, as we saw in the case of Tenochtitlan's Templo Mayor, this is even truer in diachrony, several years after its completion.

The classical Parthenon was built as a temple to honour Goddess Athena and – probably – to commemorate the three daughters of Athens' semi-mythical king Erechteus, who were voluntarily sacrificed for the good of their city (Connelly 2014). It was used as such for 800 years, despite having briefly served, as Plutarch conveyed, as headquarters cum domicile of Demetrius, the so-called Poliorcetes, son of Antigonus I, one of Alexander the Great's generals. It was converted to a Christian church, which became known as Panagia Athiniotissa, Our Lady of Athens, and functioned as such for a further 900 years (as an Orthodox church subsequent to the Great Church Schism in 1054, and as a Catholic church after the conquest of Athens by the Franks in 1204). In the mid-fifteenth century it was converted to a mosque dedicated to Mehmed the Conqueror and functioned as such for the next 400 years.

For many people, probably excluding most architects, a temple dedicated to the twelve gods and a Christian church, and a Christian church and a

mosque, respectively, are totally different things. In the eyes of the faithful, the transition from one to the other radically transformed the building's character.

In the case of the Parthenon, the transition from temple to church left some visible traces on the form of the building. The temple was already seriously damaged by the blaze that consumed most of its wooden parts, including the roof, sometime in late antiquity, probably during a raid by Heroules in 267 CE, and was hastily repaired (Travlos 1971; Bouras 2012). Its conversion to a church was accomplished after the destruction of part of its sculptural decoration, probably to eliminate depictions perceived as indecent or provocatively incompatible with the rituals performed in it (Pollini 2007), and the construction at its east side of a semi-hexagonal apsis; the latter required the demolition of a good part of the frieze and of the eastern pediment (Korres 1996). While at some point – there is no consensus on exactly when – the metopes were chopped off, the sculptures on the conspicuous western pediment were left almost intact.

Apparently, the conversion of the Parthenon to a Christian church took place in the mid-sixth century, almost 200 years after pagan rituals were banned by successive decrees issued during the reign of Theodosius I in the late fourth century. This timespan was evidently enough for the faithful to be persuaded that evil spirits inhabiting the abandoned temple were ousted; an ousting probably assisted by an "exorcism" such as those performed in similar cases, with a cross carried through the building (Deichmann 1939).

The subsequent conversion of the Christian church to a mosque left visible traces too: most prominently, the minaret signified the building's new use. However, the form of the building proper was left more or less unchanged until a huge explosion rocked it in 1687 when a Venetian army under the command of the later doge Francesco Morosini besieged and bombed the Acropolis. Several columns were blown out of place, and the roof was destroyed. After the withdrawal of Morosini's forces, a small, conventional vaulted mosque, with its mihrab wall oriented towards Mecca, was erected where the temple's cella once stood (Travlos 1971); the ruined marble building has remained to the present day more or less unchanged apart from the removal of the best part of its sculptures in the early nineteenth century.

We must acknowledge that the housing of the church of Our Lady of Athens and Mehmed the Conqueror's mosque in an older building was of minor importance. The Mother of Christ was not present in the Athena temple, while she was, at least in the eyes of the faithful, in the church named after her. For devout Christians of the ninth and tenth centuries the presence of the Mother of Christ in a building undoubtedly determined its identity in a decisive manner; no matter if this happened in an edifice whose roof was supported by columns which some unknown artisans who hadn't seen the light shed on earth by the birth of Christ had once upon a time sculpted from Pentelian marble.

In 1182 CE, in his inaugural address as Bishop of Athens, Michael Choniates, a man of great learning and educated in classics, described the former Parthenon, by his time Our Lady of Athens church, as a "very beautiful shrine" (τέμενος περικαλλές), whose true beauty, nevertheless, stemmed from an invisible source of light shining eternally without being refuelled; this light made the church the "elegant palace of the light-dispensing Virgin" (Choniates, *Inaug.* 26). Choniates called the divine light "not from burning wood", "non-material", "brightest", "ever-shining", "inexhaustible", using words in Greek all beginning with the letter "a" (ἀξυλον, ἀυλον, ακραιφνέστατον, ασιλομπές, ἀσβεστον), in an exhibition of rhetoric potency in the tradition once flourished in the city he admired and now shepherded.

Choniates reflected on the greatness of the city that used to be "the mother of wisdom". But he reckoned that Acropolis found its true identity when it "got rid" of the "tyranny" of "pseudo-virgin" Athena and the cult of the true ever-Virgin Mary was established: In Greek "Parthenon" means "(Temple) of the virgin(s)", as said, in commemoration either of Goddess Athena or the three sacrificed daughters of Erechteus, or both. Christ's mother ostensibly made her presence felt through the ever-shining light illuminating her church (Choniates *Inaug.* 33).

Our Lady of Athens and the Parthenon are not the same building.

The Conqueror's Mosque is neither Our Lady of Athens nor the Parthenon.

The supposed persistence of edifices is all but ideology, a certain, narrow interpretation of reality, not a fact; an interpretation focusing almost entirely on form.

Our Lady of Athens was born out of the ashes fanatic early Christians had reduced – luckily symbolically, not literally – the Parthenon to. And, the Conqueror's mosque was born out of the ashes to which the conquest of Athens by the Ottomans in 1458 had reduced – once more conceptually, not physically – Our Lady of Athens.

In a similar way, in the eighteenth century classicists converted the Conqueror's mosque into a ruin.

Interestingly, the conversion of the large marble building on top of the Athenian Acropolis from something like "heavily damaged old building" into "ruin" began in the 1760s with the publication, in 1762, by James Stuart and Nicholas Revett, of the first accurate survey of classical Greek architecture: that is, full seven decades before the demolition of the small mosque built where once Parthenon's cella stood.

The signification and the identity of this particular edifice had changed in the eyes of the European public seven decades before its form was altered (with the demolition of the mosque and of several other smaller constructs), so that it could better serve its new use: that of the object of admiration, of the model building, of the symbol of a bygone civilization the legacy of which several European countries vowed to assimilate.

Perceived use

It should not escape our attention that the "change of use" of the large marble building on the Acropolis from mosque to "glorious ruin of the classical era", and to "great architectural accomplishment", and to "most representative masterpiece of the Athenian democracy", or whatever else, in the second half of the eighteenth century was a change of attitude of the European elite towards this building; an elite whose members were well-educated white males. It was not a tangible, "real" change; the Conqueror's mosque kept on functioning as such. Its new use was a perceived use.

Every use is first and foremost a perceived use. We tend to lump together conceptually a whole set of actions we carry out, and of actions others carry out, and to perceive them as having a direction, a goal; this set of actions or activities we call "use" of something. We hold the grip handle of the screwdriver, we drive its sharp end into the head of the screw, we turn our hand: these separate activities we call "use of screwdriver". The separate actions become meaningful when the screwdriver is used to drive a screw down.

Hill argues that "function is the intended use of a space. Use, of which function is a particular understanding, is a richer and more flexible term" (Hill 2003, 17), although it would probably be more accurate to say that function is the *declared* use of a space or a building. A building may shelter some function, but its real use (and, ultimately, its function) can be something else, as was the case with the large marble building on the Acropolis in the second half of the eighteenth century. On top of that, each user can use the building in their own way, which might not conform to the officially sanctioned function of the building, something that may speak in favour of discerning between use and function.

The Louvre functions today as a museum but is used by the French state to assert its leading role in cultural matters worldwide, to determine what should be perceived as art, and what are its prime accomplishments. Its visitors, though, use it as a museum, that is, as a venue where beautiful, rare, or historically significant important artefacts are gathered and exhibited.

Discerning between use and function could be important in pinpointing that use on some occasions is primarily a personal matter, even if it is performed by many individuals simultaneously. One can see that in every major church in Europe – in Notre Dame in Paris, and in San Petronio in Bologna. The congregation, restricted in a small area, uses the church to pray, while the tourists are kept at arm's length; tourists who might not share the view of the faithful that this is the place to communicate with God, if they believe there is such thing at all, and who stroll around admiring the stained glass windows of the former, or the longest indoor meridian line inscribed in 1656 into the latter's floor by Gian Domenico Cassini.

Whether – and to what extent – an edifice can assume a new identity resulting from its new use or not, only partly depends on its physical features. It depends primarily on the plasticity of the symbolic systems of the host society.

Humans have used a multitude of symbolic systems – language, art, garments – to communicate with one another, in the present, in the future, and, so some believe, in the past.

These symbolic systems are the collective accomplishments of groups, communities, societies. In case these systems are all too rigid, in the sense that the collectives who created and use them accept that a certain symbol, and only this, conveys a certain meaning, and only this, the buildings can acquire just one identity, and no other.

In twenty-first-century Greece, for instance, it is out of people's horizon of expectations that a Greek Orthodox church, having the form usually employed to this genre of buildings, can be anything else than a Greek Orthodox church. The concept and the tradition of secularisation are non-existent; there are no examples of Greek Orthodox churches converted to apartment blocks or shopping malls, or to warehouses as was common in communist China during the Cultural Revolution.

In Tenochtitlan, the Spanish conquerors failed to disengage the form of the great temple (by this we mean the great temple as a physical object) from the rituals it hosted, and they tore it down.

In contrast, several ancient statues survived because they were perceived by Christians as depicting persons mentioned in the Scriptures – the so-called *interpretatio christiana* (Deichmann 1939). The metope, which today carries the number "32" at the western end on the northern side of the building initially built to honour Goddess Athena on the Acropolis, the Parthenon, owes its survival probably to such a misconception. While the metopes next to it were defaced, possibly by fanatics, metope no. 32 remains in fairly good condition: the most widely accepted theory goes that Christians believed it depicted the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary, not Hebe and Hera (Rodenwaldt 1933).

Here, let us make a small deviation to point out that if the dominant view on the history of metope no. 32 holds, the wording used in the previous paragraph cannot conceal a major theoretical issue. Is the phrase "metope 32 depicted Hebe and Hera" accurate? The answer is probably that it did depict them at some specific point of time. Far more accurate is the claim that the intention of the sculptor apparently was to depict Hebe and Hera. The fact check shows that he partly succeeded and partly failed to do so: for 1,400 years (from fourth- to eighteenth-century CE) the audience didn't recognise Hebe and Hera on his artwork.

It is far less doubtful that the Marcus Aurelius equestrian statue, now on the Capitoline Hill in Rome, owes its survival to a misconception regarding its iconography. Christians thought it depicted Constantine the Great, the Roman emperor who legitimised their religion and was canonised in return

This did not always happen with the pagan shrines and temples.

Actions against the pagan practice and cult locations had begun under Constantine and intensified in the 340s and 350s under Constantius (Bradbury 1994). Julian reversed these policies, but Valentinian and Valens reinstated them, albeit not as radically as in the times of Constantius. In the 380s, however, hostilities against pagan practices reached new heights (Watts 2015; Fowden 1979). Cynegius, the praetorian prefect of the East from 384 until his death in 388 engaged in a mission to eliminate the pagan cult in his territory (Hahn 2004). Therefore, he embarked on the destruction of temples in Mesopotamia, Syria and Egypt. But his campaign was only a part of a larger set of events in which imperial administrators either "encouraged or simply turned a blind eye towards Christian violence" against non-Christian sacred sites (Watts 2013).

In 382 CE a decree by Theodosius I – the very emperor who encouraged acts against pagan shrines – for the city of Edessa ruled that while sacrifices would not be tolerated and had to stop immediately, temples should remain open for common use, with their sculptures "judged on their art, rather, than the deities [they represented] (*artis pretio quam divinitate*)" (Codex Theodosianus 16.10.8).

What is of interest here is not whether this decree had managed to halt the wave of destruction inflicted on pagan temples and sculptures: Libanius, a pagan philosopher, wrote *pro templis*, a desperate appeal to spare ancient temples, probably in 386 CE, that is four years after Theodosius I issued the Edessa decree, and two years after Cynegius embarked on his mission (Libanius, *Pro templis*, 8, 22 and 45, Wiemer 1995).

What we should note is that, albeit momentarily, the ruling elite of the Christianised Roman empire perceived the form of an object, and its art, in the narrow sense of the word, as being more important than its iconography and its use; in other words, its shape was perceived as determining what the building was more than the content depicted on its stones, and the activities it called for. This evaluation could save the temples from the raging Christian crowds and ensure their survival – survival of their physical features, that is, deprived of their initial meaning; meaning bestowed to them intentionally by their authors and confirmed through their subsequent use by the public.

In Athens, as well as in Rome, the choice was to convert ancient temples to churches. This preference could be traced back to the Athenians' unwillingness to destroy the monumental centre of their city and rebuild it from scratch. Therefore, the conversion of the Parthenon, as well as that of the Erechteion and the temple of Hephaistos at the Agora, into Christian churches may have been a stratagem aimed at their preservation, probably conceived by people who highly appreciated these buildings as works of art (Kaldellis 2009). If their conversion was not carried out (which, needless to say, preserved their bodies, bereaved of their "souls"), their demolition would have been more or less unavoidable.

Form versus use

We tend to believe that the physical objects "buildings" always serve – more or less successfully – the uses they shelter.

Often, buildings undermine the uses they supposedly serve. A conflict unfolds between form and use, with the form sidelining use as often as use defies form.

Such conflict is evident in the Athenian Agora. In the sixth century BCE, this public space of crucial importance for ancient Athens was an unbuilt area about 300 metres northwest of the Acropolis at the city fringes. It was established there by Solon, around 600 BCE, at a time when the amalgamation of the villages scattered in the region into the newly formed city-state had been completed. The boundaries of the Agora were marked by small columns since its edges were not sufficiently defined by building fronts. Just a handful of non-descript edifices existed, none of them more than 20 metres long: among them the Royal Stoa, which served as the headquarters of the *Archon basileus* (king Archon), the official responsible for religious matters and the laws, inscribed copies of which were on display; the *Bouleuterion*, or council house; the *Prytaneion*, or the seat of the executive committee; the *Heliaia* court; and the *Enneakrounos* fountain (ASCSA 2018). All public life was enacted in the Agora, from commerce to civic functions and party rallies to sports events to theatrical performances to the administration of justice. All activities that render a space as genuinely public were gathered in the Agora.

Subsequent to the victory over the invading Persians in 479 BCE the Athenians engaged themselves in the reconstruction of their heavily damaged city. In the Agora they built a stoa 40 metres long, dedicated to Zeus; a new, larger *Bouleuterion*, the *Tholos*, all important civic buildings. Towards the end of the fifth century BC the South Stoa was built; 80 metres long, with sixteen rooms behind, each equipped with seven dining couches, perhaps used by magistrates and veterans dining at public expense, it took up much of the southern side of the Agora.

While the buildings in the Agora kept proliferating, the activities taking place there attenuated. The sessions of the *ecclesia*, the assembly of Athens' citizens, were moved to Pnyx, just keeping eye contact with the Agora downhill. Sports events were held at the stadium, built on the foot of Arditos hill, 1,500 metres east of the Agora, by Lycurgus, Athens' strongman of the mid-fourth century BCE (Travlos 1960, 1971).

Meanwhile, from the early fifth-century BCE, theatre was taught in Dionysus theatre, at the southern slope of the Acropolis. At a spot where the slope was not steep, the first cavea of the theatre in rectangular shape was formed with minimal earthworks just before 490 BCE. There was wooden seating, but most spectators probably sat on the ground or lay down to watch the performances. These were the times of the great poets; Aeschylus won his first victory at the Great Dionysia Festival in 484 BCE.

At the end of the fifth or the beginning of the fourth century BCE, the cavea was shaped like an arc, with wooden seating. A few decades later, the wooden seats were replaced with marble ones and expanded upward – part of these tiers survives today. The body posture of the spectators was now defined unequivocally; the sitting position may have been comfortable, but it was their only option: everyone had to look straight ahead, towards the stage.

Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides never saw in its prime the magnificent theatre we can still admire today, albeit ruined (Melchinger 1974). As if great architecture was called upon to compensate for the lack of great plays.

Back to the Agora, during the course of the second century BCE, new impressive buildings were built at the perimeter of the open-air space that struggled to remain the focal point of the glorious city's public life: in the mid-second century BCE, the Middle Stoa was built and along with the then existing South Stoa formed the commercial heart of Athens, cutting off the central area of the Agora that kept its primarily civic character; and Attalus Stoa, a gift to Athens by the mighty king of Pergamos. In the second century CE, the open-air square, or Agora, was partly occupied by a covered concert hall (Camp 2001, 2010): spectacular buildings in an Agora that had lost almost all its vital functions, in a city that paled in comparison to what used to be.

The very complex and multi-faceted use of the area north-east of the Acropolis, the use as "Agora" was dealt a blow with each stone put atop the other, with each new building constructed either within its boundaries or hundreds of metres away; the new buildings, all distinguished by their architectural merits, served impoverished, less important, in civic and cultural terms, specific uses.

The Athenian Agora case sheds light on the paradox of buildings restricting and hampering the specific uses they are designated for, instead of helping them flourish. This may be the result of bad design obstructing practically, or undermining them aesthetically or symbolically; or of the simple fact that sheltering some activity in some building means the absence of this activity from another building, another place where it might have interacted with other activities, broadening the horizons of people undertaking them.

The persistence of use

In his manifest *Vers une Architecture*, Le Corbusier claimed that "architecture can be found in the telephone and in the Parthenon" (Le Corbusier 1923, 15).

Indeed, the telephone is the product of conscious, well-thought out, and predetermined actions, as the Parthenon is.

However, the telephone probably would not have had the form that could stand up to the expectations of Pericles and the Athenian democracy who vowed to construct a monument visualising in the ages the superiority of their city and its political system.

We cannot be sure that if the Parthenon had the form of a telephone – primarily, the size, since size is an essential aspect of form – we would be able to admire on the Acropolis what has become of it: a "ruin" as Robert Ousterhout points out, who has studied the afterlife of the Parthenon extensively and recognises this as a distinct phase in the monument's life (Ousterhout 2005); a ruin taken care of, today, and the product of a recent reconstruction "which is not faithful to any past historical condition", as Richard McNeal commented (McNeal 1991).

The survival of form isn't equivalent to survival of the building in its integrity. That Joseph Stalin's body is mummified and still intact, sixty years after his death, doesn't mean that the man whom his mother loved, his children respected and his foes feared still exists.

In this instance we should adopt the first-person perspective as probably did the prisoners who climbed Huey Teocalli's stairways in Tenochtitlan: what is important may not lie with whether the building's geometry and appearance are relatively stable over time, but whether the building is still the same, or it has changed radically in the minds and hearts of people who experienced it in the full sense of the word.

French philosopher and sociologist Maurice Halbwachs has observed that cities are persisting human artefacts, normally outliving by far the people they shelter (Halbwachs 1925). Halbwachs, who helped popularise the concept of collective memory and gave it pivotal role in his theory, held that the man-made environment is essential to its creation and preservation. Communities recognise common values in the human-made environment and relate to it their narratives holding them together.

Moreover, he pointed out that people are very sensitive to the "material aspect" of the city: that is why great upheavals may severely shake society without altering the appearance of the city (Halbwachs 1925, ch.4).

Aldo Rossi built his approach partly on Halbachs' views; he pointed out that urban space is defined by monuments. Monuments are buildings which, for some reason – either because they stand witnesses to major historical events, or because they are considered essential to the city, or for any other reason, including pure coincidence – stand the test of time; being inscribed in the minds of successive generations of its inhabitants, they become signs of its past (Rossi 1966). According to Rossi, monuments condense collective memory and become the physical entities in which the identity of the city is entrenched. In the long run, monuments in their tangible and visible materiality, even in ruins, lend "flesh and bones" to memories and narratives, offer "embodied experience, forge ties with the terrain, with the soil, with the land" (Hamilakis 2017). Monuments as physical bodies guide the city's development, even if their use changes over time.

Contrary to buildings such as the Parthenon, edifices of minor importance, Le Corbusier's "telephones", are replaced time and again by newer ones, on a rather stable layout and an often unchanged grid of streets.

and continue to do what they would be doing under any circumstances; their actions do not have a specific purpose, or direction, such as those related to the change of use of the large marble edifice on the Acropolis. In such instances their actions do not mean necessarily much in terms of the use of building: they correspond to what Walter Benjamin had pointed out about architecture, that it has always "represented the prototype of a work of art the reception of which is consummated by a collectivity in a state of distraction" (Benjamin 1963, 239).

2 Aspects of use

Traces of use

The conclusion drawn by systematic observation of human activities as performed in a time-space specific frame is that edifices have, generally speaking, a remarkable plasticity and are being often used in ways outsiders cannot even think of. Sanjoy and Shampa Mazumdar report:

> For practicing Muslims ... the sharing of space with na-mahram [mahram denotes persons whom it is absolutely forbidden to have sexual contact with, such as close relatives] is problematic. Places, both at home and in the neighborhood, where one is likely to encounter, meet and interact with na-mahram people become defined as restricted spaces for both women and men. Thus, spaces per se are not seen as inherently 'public' or 'private,' but rather it is who one interacts with them that makes them so. ...
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> In the home, when na-mahram male guests arrive, part of the home is re-defined as public. ... A front room or the front verandah (in India) is used as the more accessible 'public' space where men can interact, conduct business, and socialize with men who are na-mahram to the women of the household. In the traditional homes of wealthy Muslim families in both India and Iran, several rooms (known as the birun in Iran and mardana quarters in India) are set aside for the 'public,' while the inside of the home remains 'private.' In the homes of the poor, the public-private definition is less physical and more symbolic, emphasizing the improvisational nature of space. Screens and curtains are used to differentiate and partition the public from private.
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> In the village, even if one room is all there is in the house, it can be quickly transformed from an internal family room to an external guest room, by having the household head stand in greeting guests (and put on his trousers if he wasn't already wearing them/ bringing something special for the visitor to sit on, and having the women leave the room. ...
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> Similarly, neighborhood streets, particularly in less urbanized settings, become less 'public' and more 'private' when men are at work during the day or at Friday prayers in mosques. ... Friday, during the prayers, when all the men were in the mosque, women could go out to socialize and visit each other freely. ...
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> At nightfall and at hours when men are using the space, they are defined as 'public.' ... Towards dusk, the women's gathering dispersed, and each returned to her yard-space to receive the older children when they came home from school, and to prepare the evening meal. After the interaction of the women in the morning and their gatherings in the afternoon, their public arena faded with the light. At the same time, the men who had been working in isolation through the day, returned from the mountains to their houses to finish the last of the day's work and eat, before their visits and meetings later on. There is then the added component of time and the diurnal and nocturnal patterns of public space usage.
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> (Mazumdar & Mazumdar 2001)

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Often the boundaries between an identity created by daily use on one hand, and an identity created by the form of a building on the other, are blurred. This happens because everyday practices, such as personal hygiene or the welcoming of visiting relatives, which are heavily regulated by rituals reflecting widely held views on appropriateness, morality, privacy or respect, are accompanied by the corresponding configuration of the building in question.

This is how things have always been. In Mesopotamia, the birthplace of urban civilisation, a tradition was formed regulating everyday life issues and facilitating the coexistence of people learning to coexist in densely populated areas, close to one another. This tradition was codified by so-called house omens. These were a group of oracles (of the type if/then), some of which referred to houses and cities. According to one rather colourful omen, "If a house's doorways open towards its front, the man's wife will cause her spouse trouble" (Freedman 1998, *5*, 22), something surely to be avoided! What choice did they have other than to make the door of their houses open inwards? Passers-by could be certain that a door opening suddenly would not hit them in the face.

A code of conduct (respect to passers-by) dictated a repeated use (careful exit from the house without causing injury to the passers-by), and was supported by the respective configuration of the building (the door made to open inwards).

Simple, everyday activities such as teaching, cooking, trading etc., have taken place since time immemorial, around the globe. However, each time, and in each place, they are performed in a distinctly unique manner, typical of each culture (Giddens 1982; de Certeau 1994).

These activities, that is, the use of domestic space in everyday routine, determines its identity often far more than deeply rooted worldviews (Pader 1993, 114).

On the other hand, there is little doubt that religious and social rituals do their part in regulating the rhythm of daily life and endowing home with meaning (Saile 1985, 94), which eventually encourages and supports a specific use thereof.

Since the 1980s, Swiss architect Bernard Tschumi insisted that "there is no architecture without events, without actions or activity", and that it is defined by "its combinations of spaces, movements, and events" rather than the form of the container housing them; he supposedly applied this idea on his Paris Parc de la Villette project, where he transformed a former brownfield into a new "cultural" park "based on activity rather than nature, one whose many buildings, gardens, bridges, and fields would serve as sites for concerts, exhibitions, sporting events, and more" (Tschumi 2015).

The question is whether the identity bestowed through use evaporates as soon as use ceases, without leaving any trace; or whether identity lingers as memory in the mind of the beholder, or it leaves some trace, such as the worn marble steps of a nineteenth-century school still in use, or the finger marks on the wall of a government building in Calcutta; and what this means.

Walter Benjamin once said that "dwelling means leaving traces behind" (Benjamin 1983, I, 53); as a Jew in pre-war Germany, he knew how valuable it was to be able to make one's presence felt. The traces everyday life leaves on buildings are outside the scope of architecture in the narrow sense of the word, but they are essential to it in the broad sense, through the bestowal of identity to its products.

The body of users

We should not assume that users are a body of persons acting in a uniform way.

Actually, Jonathan Hill distinguished between three groups: the "passive", the "reacting", and the "creative" users:

> The passive user is consistent, predictable and transforms neither use, space nor meaning, whether performing useful tasks according to functionalist principles, following a sequence of spaces directed by the architect or contemplating a building as an artwork. The reactive user modifies the physical characteristics of a space as needs change, but must choose from a narrow and predictable range of configurations largely defined by the architect. The passive and reactive users are dependent upon existing conditions, which they are unable to fundamentally transform. With a role as important in the formulation of architecture as that of the architect, the creative user either creates a new space or gives an existing one meanings and uses contrary to established behavior.
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> (Hill 2003, 86)