

The background is a detailed architectural line drawing of a building's interior. It shows a room with a brick wall, a window, and a table. There are several potted plants on a ledge. The drawing uses various line styles, including solid, dashed, and dotted lines, to create a sense of depth and structure. The overall style is minimalist and technical.

# On the Unfinished in Architecture

A Reflection on Temporality, Superposition  
and the Indetermined Life of a Building

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*A Reflection on Temporality, Superposition and the Indetermined Life of a Building.*

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## Preface

We never stop drawing a building. First we look for the preliminary ideas, the first sketches of spaces formed in our imagination. Then we start drafting the project. We draw in smaller and smaller scale to know exactly what each little detail looks like. Later we move on to the execution phase. We keep on drawing the building continuously, it changes continuously and improves and adapts continuously. Then, we build it. And then we draw it again, because that which is built is rarely exactly what was drawn initially. Then, one would say the building is finished, but actually it just starts to live. First, it adapts to the people using it. Maybe they put in an extra door or remove a wall. The building gets old, needs care, grows bigger, lose weight. And every time a change is made we partly or entirely draw the building again.

This work is a reflection on the unfinished in architecture. It evolves around the idea that an architectural project can be seen as always—and at the same time never finished. The architecture that we as architects make, only represents a moment in the life of a building, and the project is yours personally only for the time you are working on it. When looking at a building over time, one understands that a project is a story to be continued by others. Or maybe it is you that have the opportunity to continue a story started by someone else?

What is the unfinished and how is it expressed in architecture? Is it an attitude, a statement, a phenomenon, a style, a given or a result? Through a series of individual essays, I am trying to find possible answers to these questions. The essays can either be read in the order they present themselves, or simply individually, in the order preferred by the reader. The first part investigates several concepts of the unfinished that has fascinated and troubled man through time—referring to perceptions and ideas known from fine arts, literature, anthropology, philosophy and architecture—to be able to depict an abstract image of the unfinished. The second part takes the form of five visits to specific places. Every building has its distinctive history, and by looking at each case individually, the visitor is able to understand how the aspect of ‘unfinished’ can be expressed in several different ways, producing intriguing and enriching architectural experiences.

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## A moment in the life of a building

When is a building finished? Or rather, when does a building begin and cease to be finished? Perhaps one could imagine that architecture achieves a 'finishing' point at several moments in its lifetime, and in between these moments, the architecture withdraws from its completed form and moves towards a new kind of completion. One can imagine that the building phases in and out of completion and incompleteness continuously. My statement is, that architecture does not have an ideal complete form that is valid at any time. Despite a supposedly achieved 'completion' at a certain point in time, the building will still continue to change, and the context that constitutes the basis for any architectural solution, will change too.

Why be interested in the aspect of change? The state of 'completion' is a satisfying moment, but the interest can only last for so long, as it does not produce any intellectual tension. We quickly get bored with answers that are given to us.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps this is why the unfinished state is often more intriguing than the finished? It allows us to leave the task of completion to the imaginary world of our minds. The reading of the architecture does not become entirely self-evident in this case, but requires reflection to be understood. At the same time, we have a constant desire to complete what is not finished, to reanimate that which is lifeless. This way, we are still continuously striving towards completion. The architecture is constantly driven forward by this tension between completion and incompleteness.

### Chance

At first, architecture is only an idea in somebody's mind, and does not even exist as physical form. After a process of drawing and construction, the building might enter its first moment of fulfilment. But in the same moment, the phase of degradation and fragmentation begins. The building adapts and is marked by its inhabitants, the weather or the movements of the ground. Architecture is always a response to a particular situation, and at any time a foreseen or unforeseen event can put the entire base for the architectural definition back into question. If the events are

1 «In the validly complex building or cityscape, the eye does not want to be too easily or too quickly satisfied in its search for unity within a whole.» Venturi, Robert. *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1966, p. 104.

of smaller character, one can perhaps delay the degeneration by performing small reparations or alterations, which can hold back the process of decay for a while. These alterations might not change the definition of the architecture entirely, but will still remain small evidence of time and its impact on the building. However, certain events are more severe, the architectural question will need to be redefined, and a new answer must be found. Such events could for example be the simple change of owners with different wishes or needs than the previous, an accident like a fire or a flooding, or a significant change in a political or economical situation.

### Superposition

When arriving at such a turning point, one could argue that it is time to declare the existing architecture obsolete, tear it down and recommence a new story. If there are no ecological, energetic or economical arguments to keep the building, why do so? Although ecological, energetic and economical arguments are highly important as such, I find it in this case more interesting to pursue the idea of affectionate value that the building evokes; which cannot be easily explained, nor simply be replaced by something new. Our image of the building is triggered by memories and nostalgia. Memories, it appears, are triggered above all by the space that surrounds us.<sup>2</sup> The building possesses its own personality, shaped by past events. Every time a building arrives at a new point of 'completion', all the previous layers will be more or less visible, as hints or memories of certain moments in time. It is this superposition of layers in time, which I find intriguing. Certain things are still visible and readable in the building's matter. Other things are forgotten. Anne Lacaton speaks about superposition of layers and how this enriches the architectural experience:

«The project invents then a new situation, enriched by all the previous stories and of all the existing layers. In architecture and in urbanism, we believe in the importance of superposition, the more a space generates combine multiple imaginative worlds, the more stimulating to live in it seems to be, and the more new relationships are triggered.»<sup>3</sup>



De Vylder Vinck  
Tallieu, twiggy,  
Ghent, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Halbwachs, Maurice. *The Collective Memory*.

Chicago and London: The university of Chicago Press, 1992. First published in 1952.

<sup>3</sup> Anne Lacaton, *Reinvent*.

November Conferences at Politecnico di Milano, 10 December 2013.

The occurrence of events is mostly a result of chance, and can produce unexpected, ambiguous and sometimes even comical situations in the architectural experience. One cannot immediately understand why things have been done in a certain way; one starts to question why one ceiling is lower than the other, why a floor suddenly changes material at a seemingly arbitrary place, or why there is an extra door leading nowhere. A new building does not have this internal contradiction yet; every choice seems clear or justified. The active production of these kinds of absurd spacial situations in a new project without any motivation would be perceived as banal. In an architectural project where past incidents, context and history is taken into account, the 'whole' of an architectural intervention is complemented by hints of the previous, which adds complexity and tension even in a state of 'completion'. I would argue that this kind of superposition of traces through time could lead to a certain architectural quality, when treated intelligently.

#### Indefinite architecture

It is however necessary to underline, that when investigating architecture that have been transformed recently, one tends to focus on the recently added 'layer' of intervention. One sees the recently transformed building as a new definite form, perhaps because it again represents a whole. The architects behind the work take over the intellectual ownership of the project. But even if it is considered as a coherent architecture today, it will also lose its validity in the course of time, and somebody else will pick up the thread and continue the story. The role of the architect is of smaller importance when regarded in the broad spectrum of time, he or she is only intervening in a certain moment in the life of a building. The architecture is indefinite. Indefinite as a word indicates a notion of temporality, meaning that the architecture as we know it lasts for an unknown or unstated length of time.<sup>4</sup>

We have this view on the contemporary architect and produce an image of a 'completed' work, because we can hardly imagine what is still to come in the future, that can make the architectural solution invalid, and more importantly, why should we think

about it? The architecture works right now! We cannot predict the future, nor would the architecture be the same if we could. One can imagine however, that a building that today is considered a 'timeless' piece of architecture, like for example Peter Zumthor's Kolumba Museum in Köln,<sup>5</sup> or the Upper Lawn Pavilion by the Smithsons<sup>6</sup> will also sooner or later arrive at a point in its history where it will be substantially changed. Does this mean that 'timeless' architecture does not exist? Perhaps it does indeed exist, but nonetheless the toll of time cannot be avoided even for architectural icons; an old stone house cannot stand against the weather for eternity and a gothic church cannot be entirely protected from a wartime attack.

#### Potential of the existing

If it is the case that all architecture does evolve and change in various rhythms through time—that they all have a story to tell—does that mean that every building has potential, and should be kept? Perhaps it means, that any building could have an affectionate value for somebody, when willing to look carefully. My statement is, that the potential is always present. The fulfilment of this potential however, depends solely on whether we can find any kind of value in the existing or not. The architectural quality depends on the way that the layers of time are interwoven, on how the fragments of old are rearranged into a new meaning, and if we are able to reinvent the architecture and tell a new story.

4 Oxford English Dictionary, Oxford University press.  
<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/>

5 See fifth visit: St. Kolumba/Kolumba Museum, p. 100.

6 See first visit: Upper Lawn Pavilion, p. 54.

# Concepts



## Under construction

When speaking about the unfinished in architecture, one of the first images that comes to mind, is often that of an unfinished building. The unfinished building is of course the most literal interpretation of unfinished in architecture, however it is still subject to a certain abstract fascination. When a building is still under construction, although entangled in scaffolding and plastic, one begins to see the contours of its being, its essence. There is a moment between the perception of scattered elements of material—like a stack of wood lattices and sacks of cement—and the perception of a complete and finished work of architecture, perfectly clean and stark, with all its finishing and detail. This in-between phase is where the building becomes its own, it is no longer a selection of raw materials put together, but all of a sudden begins to make sense in itself.

Perhaps the fascination for the construction phase appears, because at this moment the work keeps an abstractness that is lost at the moment when the building goes into service. It stands in the landscape like a sculpture, like pure form, like a sketch where we can freely imagine how the work is to be completed, or simply let that margin of unknown play in our sub-consciousness. Many architects express a certain fascination for the building site, seeing their work become real, but at the same time it remains mysterious, there are unsolved and unknown creeks and corners, and many things can still be edited or changed completely. The architect Jan De Vylder talks about his fascination for the work on the building site. When arriving at the execution phase, the building is already drawn many times, and each time the building is drawn it is potentially finished. But as the drawings are done, and the project begin to maintain a complete form, that is the first moment when one can start changing things, because only then we can understand what we can or should change.<sup>1</sup> This means in a sense, that the project is always finished, but can also always be changed, and in the intersection between time frame and opportunities to change, we find that the one potential among many which gets realised, is a result of a chain of a continuous process of asking questions and responding, and the time of delivery is the simple determination factor.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> De Vylder, Jan. *Difficult Double: Eric Owen Moss and De Vylder Vinck Tallieu*. Lecture at FORM EPFL, 25 Mars 2014.

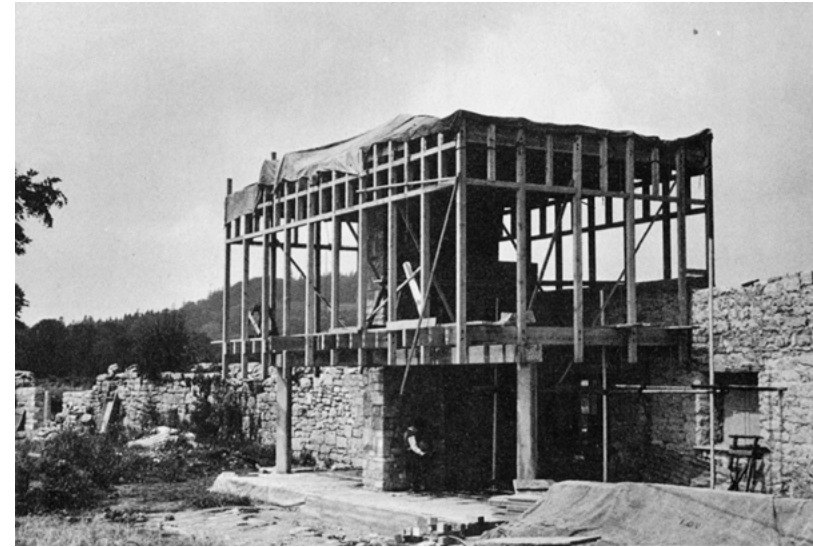
<sup>2</sup> See fourth visit: Rot-Ellen-Berg, p. 78

«Personally I always like to go to the building site; frequently, every week, because when we are making it, I believe there are huge opportunities to change it. I don't work with the idea to achieve the moment of finishing. We keep on going to the end, to the day of delivery, changing things. Not because it is a goal as such, but because each time we go to the building site, we find something different to change, we find new opportunities. [...] I don't think it is an issue of finished or not, it is only finished on the last day, but it is also always finished, even when you present a raw structure with a so-called unfinished expression.»<sup>3</sup>

This constant drawing, taking a step backwards, looking at the progressing work, seeing new opportunities and potentials as the project takes form, is a form of large-scale craftsmanship, that can only be possible if the architect is not merely focused on finishing the object. One can argue that it is a certain point of view on how to work with architecture, always regarding the project as potentially finished, yet at the same time repeatedly seeing new potential and keeping the project in constant evolution, which could be said to be a method working with the unfinished.

This particular moment before completion is parallel to that which comes after its 'complete' phase, when the building no longer serves a practical purpose, and only the form remains with the traces of its former life. Louis Kahn is using the image of the ruin as a tangible example of the conceptual idea of the incomplete, creating a link between the before- and afterlife of architecture. When perceived as an incomplete object, that is when the building reveals its own spirit and the history of how it is made.

«I note that when a building is being made, free of servitude, its spirit to be is high—no blade of grass can grow in its wake. When the building stands complete and in use, it seems to want to tell you about the adventure of its making. But all the parts locked in servitude make this story of little interest. When its use is spent and it becomes a ruin, the wonder of its beginning



Construction of the Upper Lawn Pavilion, 1961.

appears again. [...] Everyone who passes can hear the story it wants to tell about its making. It is no longer in servitude; the spirit is back.»<sup>4</sup>

According to Kahn, the architecture reveals its real identity and 'personality', when it is free from its everyday function. This happens while the building is being built, but also when it becomes a ruin, as the building is in both situations representing the unfinished. The unfinished could be a way of expressing the essence of a building, a definition of what is remains when function is detached from architecture.

<sup>3</sup> Cook, John W. and Heinrich Klotz (eds.). *Conversation with architects*. New York and Washington: Praeger, 1973, p. 183.  
<sup>4</sup> Cited in: Bergdoll, Barry (ed.). *Fragments, architecture and the unfinished: essays presented to Robert Middleton*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2006, p. 323.

## The Ruin

The ruin is the reminders and remainders of a world that used to be, but is no longer. The image of the ruin represents clearly a romantic understanding of the unfinished. The ruin is the manifestation of the ever-present struggle between the constructions of man and the power of nature. Man is seeking to construct and complete, and nature to tears the constructions back down, and bringing the remains slowly back to its own realm. But the ruin is also a token of nostalgia and memory, fragments of our common history.

The ruin is above all the image of the destructive powers that are forcing all architecture to decay, and eventually go back to the earth from which it came. It shows that architecture is also mortal, like ourselves. The German sociologist Georg Simmel saw the ruin as exactly this, the end to a struggle that is constantly carried out between human spirit and nature. The human spirit works to construct, leading upwards, and nature is the force that drives that which the spirit has erected to descend, leading downwards. At the moment a building falls into decay and becomes a ruin, the struggle between spirit and nature has ended in favour of nature.

«This unique balance—between mechanical, inert matter, which passively resists pressure, and informing spirituality which pushes upward—breaks, however, the instant a building crumbles. For this means nothing else than that merely natural forces begin to become master over the work of man: the balance between nature and human spirit, in which the building is manifested, shifts in favour of nature. This shift becomes a cosmic tragedy which, so we feel, makes every ruin an object infused with our nostalgia; for now the decay appears as nature's revenge for the spirit's having violated it, by making a form in its own image.»<sup>1</sup>

Simmel clearly follows a romantic tradition, which regards death and destruction as redemption and a return to natural innocence. Past events—joyful or tragic—offer value to the ruin, wrapping the ruin in drama and melancholy, and it becomes an object that reminds us of the transience of life. Upon regarding the ruins, it evokes memories about the past and the events that lead to its decay.

<sup>1</sup> Simmel, Georg. 'The Ruin.' *Essays on Sociology, Philosophy and Aesthetics*. New York: Harper and Row, 1965, p. 262

«New ruins have not yet acquired the weathered patina of age, the true rust of the baron's wars, not yet put on their ivy, nor equipped themselves with the appropriate bestiary of lizards, bats, screech-owls, serpents, speckled toads and little foxes [...]. New ruins are for a time stark and bare, vegetationless and creatureless; blackened and torn, they smell of fire and mortality. It will not be for long. Very soon trees will be thrusting through the empty window sockets, the rosebay and fennel blossoming within the broken walls, the brambles tangling outside them. Very soon the ruin will be enjungled, engulfed, and the appropriate creatures will revel.»

Rose Macaulay, *Pleasure of Ruins*.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, the view of an incomplete and partially destroyed object, gives us the urge to repair it, to reanimate, to complete. The sight of a ruin elicits paradoxical emotions such as fear, sadness, sentimentality and concern but also curiosity and delight. After a while, we do no longer know the course of events that has led to its decay, but that does not stop our minds from creating fantastic stories in our imagination.

Where does the fascination for ruins come from? What is it about the ruin that evokes such fearful joy in the minds of its spectators? It cannot be established when this fascination grew forth, as it seems that it has always existed as long as men have inhabited the earth. However this romantic view of ruins became a more severe preoccupation among painters, writers and architects in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. The Germans even put a word to this desire: *Ruinenlust*—Ruin Lust.<sup>3</sup> Dame Rose Macaulay, acknowledged fiction writer of the 20th century, went upon looking for the origin of this romantic, yet morbid pleasure in ruins:

«...When did it consciously begin, this delight in in decayed and wrecked buildings? Very early it seems. Since down the ages men have meditated before ruins, rhapsodized before them, mourned pleasurably over their ruination, it is interesting to speculate on the various strands in this complex enjoyment, on how much of it is admiration for the ruin as it was in its prime—*quanta Roma fuit, ipsa ruina docet* [how great Rome was, its very ruin tells.]—how much aesthetic pleasure in its present appearance—*plus belle que la beauté est la ruine de la beauté*—how much is association, historical or literary, what part is played by morbid pleasure in decay, by righteous pleasure in retribution (for so often it is the proud and righteous who have fallen), by mystical pleasure in destruction of all things mortal and the eternity of God (a common reaction in the middle ages) [...] and by a dozen other entwined threads of pleasurable and melancholy emotion, of which the main strand is, one imagines, the romantic and conscious swimming down the hurrying river

<sup>2</sup> Macaulay, Rose. *Pleasure of Ruins*. New York: Walker & Company, 1953, p. 453.

<sup>3</sup> 'Ruin Lust', TATE Britain, 4 March – 18 May 2014.

<http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/ruin-lust/>

of time, whose mysterious reaches, stretching limitlessly behind, glimmer suddenly into view with these wracks washed onto the silted shores.»<sup>4</sup>

Common to all of these interpretations of ruin pleasure, is the idea that the ruin evokes something in us. We see in the remainders of that which used to be, a potential for what it could have become, but perhaps never did. It appears as if the fascination is rooted in the fact that the ruin can tell us something. There is something inert in the material which is superior to the matter itself; the very story of its coming to be. The Italian engraver and architect Giovanni Battista Piranesi—known for his etchings of the ruins of roman architecture—evoked the notion of *the speaking ruin*, emphasising the emotive and narrative power of ruins.

«...these speaking ruins have filled my spirit with images that accurate drawings, even those of the immortal Palladio, could never have succeeded in conveying, though I always kept them before my eyes.»<sup>5</sup>

Not only does Piranesi underline the emotional experience of regarding a ruin in his work. Often, he choses a rather subjective and intimate point of view in his etchings, such as interior perspectives, which was quite unconventional compared to the tradition of representation in roman architecture. The idea of the ruin as a fragment of an invisible whole was for Piranesi more stimulating to the imagination than an accurate drawing ever would be. On the other hand one can say, that the vision of ruins seen through the eyes of a romantic like Piranesi also gave the ruins their own distinctive voice, through an idealisation of the reality.<sup>6</sup>

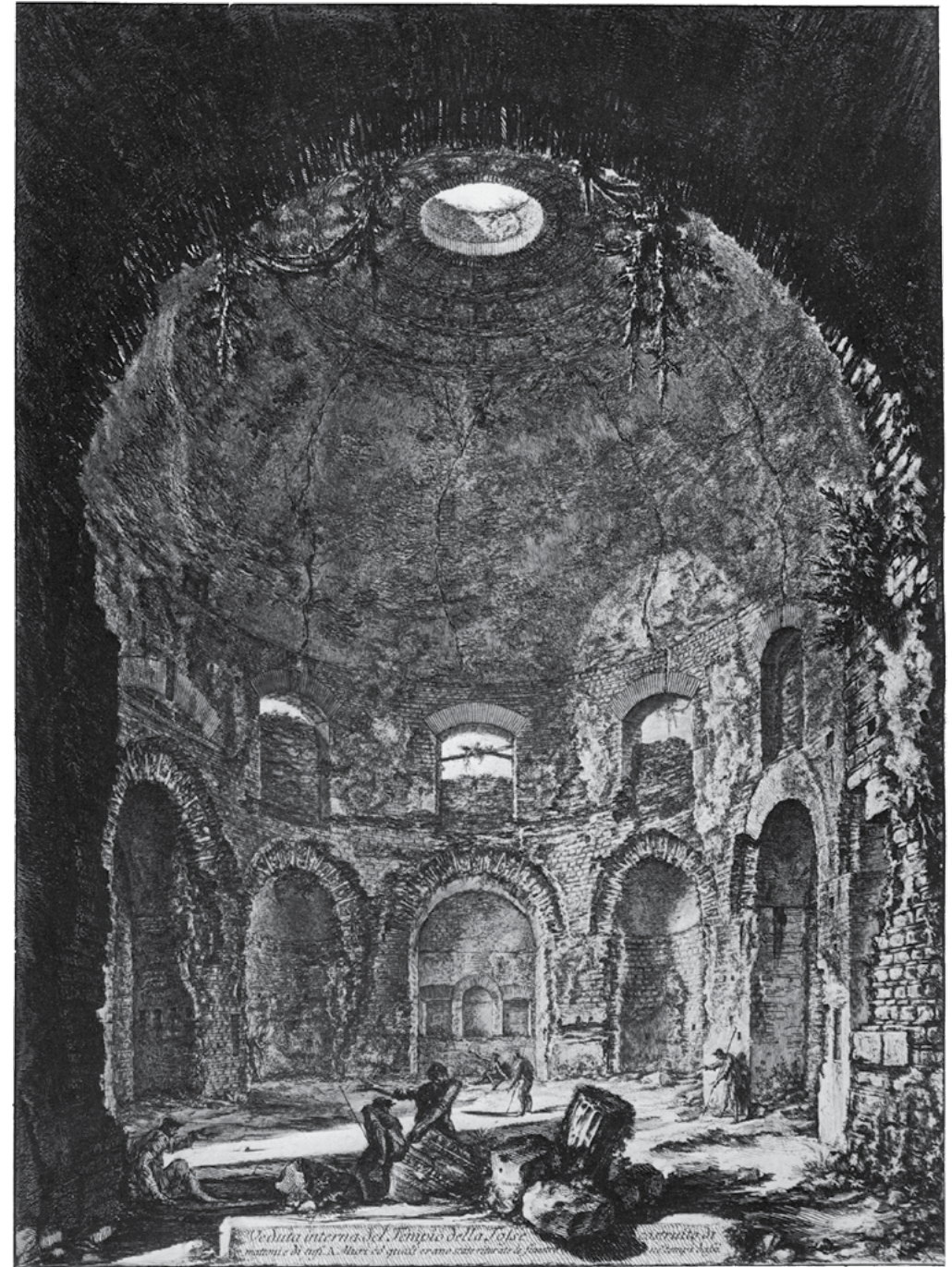
The craze for ruins culminated in the eighteenth century with the emergence of artificial ruins, the so-called *ruin follies*. Follies were small structures built for decoration, and are mainly found in English and French garden tradition. The ruin follies were, as the name suggests, artificial ruins constructed as decoration, find themselves in the ambiguity between unfinished structure and ruin. A

4 Macaulay, Rose. *Pleasure of Ruins* (see note 3), pp. 15-16.

5 «...mi hanno riempito lo spirito queste parlanti ruine, che di simili non arrivai a potermene mai formare sopra i disegni, benché accuratissimi, che di queste stresse ha fatto l'immortale Palladio, e che io pour sempre mi teneva innanzi agli occhi.»

Doratheia Nyberg, *Giovanni Battista Piranesi Drawings and etchings*. New York: The Arthur M. Sackley Collection, 1972, p 115-118. Cited in: Pinto, John A. *Speaking ruins. Piranesi, architects and antiquity in eighteenth century Rome*. Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2012, p 99.

6 Pinto, John A. *Speaking ruins. Piranesi, architects and antiquity in eighteenth century Rome* (see note 5), p. 155.



Giovanni Battista Piranesi,  
Tempio della Tosse,  
from *Vedute di Roma*, 1776.



Hubert Robert  
and René-Louis de  
Girardin, Temple of  
Modern Philosophy,  
Ermenonville, 1770.

known example of such a folly, is the Temple of Modern Philosophy near the Château d'Ermenonville, designed by Hubert Robert and René-Louis de Girardin in 1770. The temple appears to be a ruin, but was conceived as an unfinished structure deliberately imitating the aesthetic of a ruin. The six columns 'remaining' around the temple is each dedicated to a modern philosopher, among those Descartes, Voltaire and Rousseau. As a believer in the idea of Enlightenment, Girardin's intention was to add more columns—as the modern philosophy would find its spokesmen—to slowly complete the form of the building. In the mean time, the unfinished state of the building would remind the spectator of the beginning of the era of modern thought.<sup>7</sup> The temple however, has never been completed.

The obsession with ruins the way we saw it in the seventeenth and the eighteenth century does perhaps not take the same form today as it did then. But we can still identify parallels to the fascination for ruins and the aesthetic of decay. One possible explanation is that the very attraction is a natural tendency, and only takes different forms in different times. The aesthetic of the raw and

unfinished is clearly still current today. The raw and dirty has still contemporary significance, sometimes beauty is found in 'ugly' substance even, such as remnants of industry or infrastructure. These kinds of places evoke in us exactly the same, as the moss grown castle ruins did for the romantics of the seventeenth century. They are the ruins of our times. Unlike the great temples of the antique or the palaces of the romans, we can still relate to the history of industry and infrastructure of some fifty-hundred years back. This way the ruin remains ruin, but is still contemporary. We are still preoccupied with nostalgia; we are still looking for the original, for substance that has lived, for patina that can soften up the too black and impersonal finish of the new.

<sup>7</sup> Levine, Neil. 'The architecture of the unfinished and the example of Louis Kahn.' *Fragments, architecture and the unfinished: essays presented to Robert Middleton*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2006, pp. 327

## Idea and form

The unfinished can be understood as an expression for the difficult transition between the idea of a form. The idea embodies a complete, complex and perfected entity, often only figuring in an artists mind, a parallel and perfect world or in divine realms. The physical representation is our way of giving shape to this idea, an expression that can only be incomplete and unfinished, as we are not able recreate the complexity and perfectionism that the idea represents.

A known story from the perhaps first work of unfinished architecture known to western literary tradition is the story of the Tower of Babel, known from the Book of Genesis. According to the story, the people of God wanted to create a name for themselves, and with increased faith in their own capabilities and common knowledge, they were convinced they could build a tower so tall that it could reach the heavens. The Lord interrupted the construction of the tower, seeing the development as a threat to the people's faith in him. He then confused the people by giving them different languages, so that they were unable to communicate, and scattered them all over the earth, so that they were unable to continue the construction of the city.<sup>1</sup> The tower has been widely represented in arts, mostly as a perpetual form under constant construction, never close to completion. Although the story has been used to explain the vast number of languages and man's widespread settlement on earth, the underlying moral is that the Lord is the only one who has the capacity to imagine, conceive and create something complete; something perfect. The constructions of man will always be imperfect, inadequate or incomplete, because we are not able to understand fully, nor create something that is more complex than our understanding.

It is not only in religion we find the theory that our understanding of the world is an incomplete, simplified version of the something greater, something ideal. We know the *Theory of Forms* (or the *Theory of Ideas*) formulated by Plato, stating that the world as we know it, only is a 'copy' or an image of the world of ideas. The ideas are not only ideal and complete examples of things that we know from the material world; the ideas are like archetypes,

<sup>1</sup> Bible Gateway. Web. 25 Oct. 2012: The English Standard Version, Gen. 11. 3-9.



Pieter Bruegel the Elder,  
*The Tower of Babel*.  
Oil on canvas, 1563.





Michelangelo, *Atlas*,  
from the Slaves sculptures.  
Marble, ca. 1520–1523.

and the earthly forms are mere unfinished and simplified copies of the ideas. Furthermore, we cannot access or understand the ideas completely with our senses. Again, we find the notion that man, with his own measures cannot immediately fully understand the world that surrounds him, and that we are also somehow aware that the way we perceive things is only an incomplete understanding of things. According to Plato, the insight to understanding the ideal world could still be achieved—if not completely, then at least partially—through what he called *good sense*, which can again be obtained through the study and practice of philosophy.<sup>2</sup>

The idea that the creations of man only are limited representations of more complex ideas, which we are unable to fully understand, has given the unfinished as concept a place in arts, architecture and writing, but above all in the world of the virtuous artist. The image of the plagued and desperate artist striving for perfection, but incapable of producing it is well known. In the renaissance, the term *non finito* appeared to describe works of art that deliberately were not brought to completion. Michelangelo, being the figure most often attached to this term, was known to have several points in his career where he faced difficulties bringing his works to completion. Michelangelo saw the sculptor as a tool of God, destined to reveal in the stone, powerful figures that were already latent in the material. Among his works most commonly attached to the non finito, we find the series of sculptures ‘Slaves’ and ‘Captives’.<sup>3</sup> The non finito signifies deliberately creating an imperfect or incomplete image of something—like a sculpture or a painting—because one is not able to express, nor to fully understand the great and terrible conceptions of the artist in his physical work.<sup>4</sup> The unfinished becomes a sign of suggestiveness, subtlety, ambiguity and subjectivity. This understanding of the unfinished has been interpreted as an approach, a statement and a way of working as an artist. A philosophical reading of the term implies a distinction between conception and realisation, an inability to reproduce the idea into form. A more romantic understanding, relates to the image of the virtuous but troubled artist, whose intentions and individual expression that cannot be understood by others than the artist himself. The architecture historian Neil Levine understands the concept of the unfinished, or non finito to position itself in the complex intersection between abstract and concrete. «The unfinished revealed the difficult transaction that takes place between the abstraction of thought and the material demands of brute matter.»<sup>5</sup> One can understand the concept of the unfinished to be our link to the world of ideas; the unfinished work traces an impression of a form or idea, which then can be completed and interpreted only by our own intellect or imagination.

2 Tranøy, Knut Erik. 'On Plato and the Theory of Forms.' (2014, 5 June). *Platon*. In Store norske leksikon. <https://snl.no/Platon>.

3 Summers, David. *Michelangelo and the language of Art*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981. Cited in: *Fragments, architecture and the unfinished: essays presented to Robert Middleton*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2006, pp. 323-340.

4 Levine, Neil. 'The architecture of the unfinished and the example of Louis Kahn.' *Fragments, architecture and the unfinished: essays presented to Robert Middleton* (see note 3), pp. 324.

5 Ibidem.

## The unfinished form

The unfinished form in architecture, as opposed to arts and sculpture, is perhaps perceived in a more ambiguous manner. By this could be said, that works that for some reason or other have an unfinished form can very well become an entity, and be understood as a whole. We find this perception not only in architecture, but also in other realms of art. For instance do we know the Unfinished Symphony by Franz Schubert, where the only two movements written are appreciated as a musical whole, although a symphony normally consists of four movements. The unfinished form, one could argue, only relates to a subjective perception of order, hierarchy or aesthetic; it relates to our impression of how music, as well as architecture, should be composed. When the architecture is left unfinished, we still have the memory of the intention in mind, and perceive it as unfinished. When it is put into service, we can see that despite the unfinished form, that it can serve its function completely. Our understanding of its 'whole' develops over time, the unfinished character still visible, but nonetheless we accept it as an entity. The result is an ambiguous expression between unfinished and whole.

The architecture historian Neil Levine claims that literally unfinished architecture is a paradox in itself, because even though a building is visibly unfinished, it can still fulfil its purpose and therefore be understood as 'complete'.<sup>1</sup> The notion of unfinished in regards to the architectural form can therefore be argued only to relate to architectural intention. Turning the question around, the building is unfinished according to who or what? The answer could be related to the intentions of the architect or the wishes of the client, or simply the expectation of a group of people involved in a project. These are all subjective perceptions, which can change significantly during the potentially long life of a building.

There are of course many examples of unfinished buildings, among them an abundant number of churches and cathedrals constantly being renovated, modified and extended. But there are also quite a few examples of architecture that for some reason or other simply has been abandoned before completion, only to adopt

1 Levine, Neil. 'The architecture of the unfinished and the example of Louis Kahn.' *Fragments, architecture and the unfinished: essays presented to Robert Middleton*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2006, pp. 325

its use with an unfinished form. Two particular recurring examples are Alberti's church San Francesco in Rimini and the Palazzo Venier dei Leoni in Venice. Alberti's church—which began its construction around 1450 as a reconstruction of the church from the year 800—was 'finished' in 1468, but with a slightly altered design. Alberti had planned a cupola similar to the one crowning the Pantheon in Rome, a gable end at the upper part of the front façade, as well as two side chapels that were never built, due to lack of funding for the construction. Despite renovations and massive reconstruction following extensive damage during the Second World War, the church was reconstructed to its 'original' unfinished design.<sup>2</sup>

The Palazzo Venier dei Leoni was built by the architect Lorenzo Boschetti in the 1750s, and situated on the Grand Canal in Venice, right opposite the palazzo of the powerful Corner family. The building was planned to have two *piani nobili* above the triple arched entrance that we know today. It is unknown why the construction was abandoned, but rumour has it that the Corner family deliberately obstructed the construction because the palazzo would become higher than their own.<sup>3</sup> The building is today known to house the Guggenheim Foundation and is frequently visited by tourists and art lovers. There is clearly a general awareness that the building breaks with classical façade composition, which reflects the fact that it is an unfinished building. The palazzo is perhaps unfinished according to the architectural intention, but the architecture has at all times been adequate for its use, and has fulfilled its purpose for more than two centuries. What is then the meaning of unfinished in this sense? Does it speak only of form, or could we call it complete when it fulfills a purpose? Both Alberti's church and the Palazzo Venier dei Leoni's unfinished forms how now become parts of the building's identity. Contrary to cathedrals undertaking constant modification, where the continuous development almost becomes the definition of the typology 'cathedral', these two examples have maintained a rather steady image throughout history, and the idea of completing the buildings now according to Alberti's and Boschetti's intentions would now



Leon Battista Alberti,  
San Francesco (Tempio  
Malatestiano), Rimini, 1468.

<sup>2</sup> Corrado Ricci and Pier Giorgio Pasini. *Il Tempio Malatestiano*. Rimini: Gighi, 1974, p. 79

<sup>3</sup> Guggenheim Foundation: <http://www.guggenheim-venice.it/inglese/museum/palazzo.html>



Lorenzo Boschetti,  
The Palazzo Venier  
dei Leoni, Venice,  
1750.

perhaps make little sense. One could say that the buildings have acquired their own sense of 'whole', independent of initial intentions, and shaped by the course of events through time.

The two examples above show that the notion of unfinished form does not exclude the simultaneous existence of an understanding of an architectural whole. Robert Venturi writes in *Complexity and contradiction in architecture*, about his understanding of what constitutes an intriguing, intellectually challenging form of architecture. One key element that he describes is the aspect of ambiguity, that complexity and contradiction can appear through the juxtaposition of what an image is and what it seems.<sup>4</sup> An architectural project can represent a certain ambiguity between finished or unfinished; what the building is and what it can still become. Further, we find an ambiguity in the unresolved or fragmented form that can at the same time be understood as a whole.

«However, the obligation towards the whole in an architecture of complexity and contradiction does not preclude the building which is unresolved. Poets and playwrights acknowledge dilemmas without solutions. [...] A building can also be more or less incomplete in the expression of its program and its form.»<sup>5</sup> According to Venturi, the unfinished, the juxtaposition of different elements without them melting completely together to a harmonious unity, express an intriguing kind of vitality and validity, and the unfinished form does not mean that the architecture is less achieved. On the contrary, the complexity that this ambiguity represents triggers and challenges the intellect in the reading of the architecture more than a 'resolved' building does, and therefore makes the architecture more compelling.

4 Venturi, Robert. *Complexity and contradiction in architecture*.  
New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1966, p. 20

5 Venturi, Robert. *Complexity and contradiction in architecture* (see note 4), p. 102

## The aesthetic of unfinished

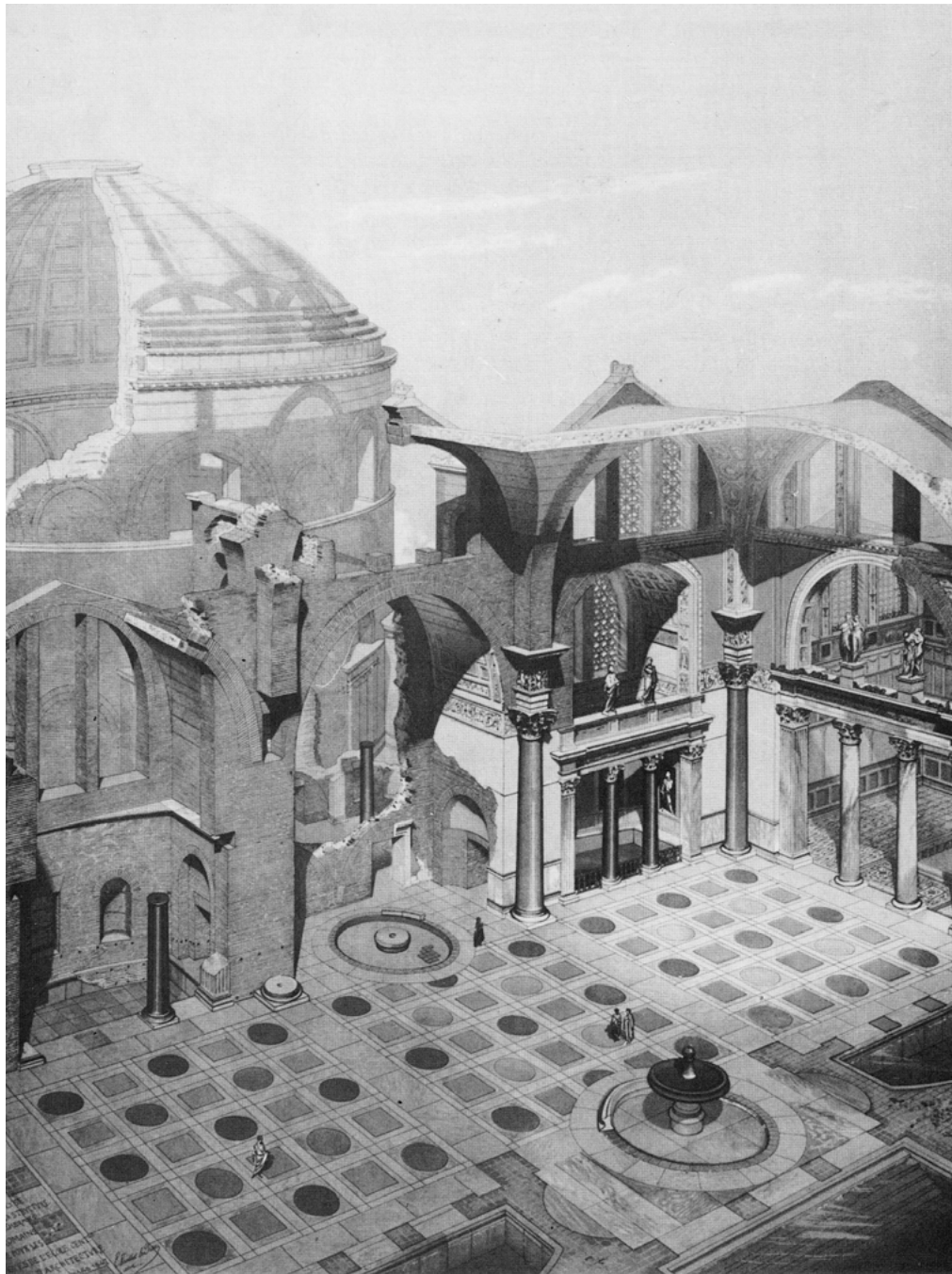
Finish does synonym with 'complete', but it also refers to the finishing of a surface, or the «Completion of the manufacture or decoration (of an article) by giving it an attractive surface appearance».<sup>1</sup> The unfinished, would imply the lack of this layer of decoration, leaving a rough structure visible. The relation between structure and decoration was until early twentieth century distinguished as two different orders in the conception of a building. A house with only structure, but no decoration was considered unfinished. In the intersection between structure, finish and ornament we find the aesthetic of unfinished to have changed its perception and status throughout the architectural history.

The attraction for an aesthetic duality between unfinished and ruin led to a compelling type of representation of architecture in the nineteenth century. One example often referred to is the artist Joseph Gandy and his watercolour of *Sir John Soane's Bank Of England*. The image shows the entire city block that John Soane began working on in 1788 in a cutaway areal perspective, presumably right after a storm has passed over the buildings. It seems to have left behind a path of destruction revealed in the light of the proceeding calm. But by closer inspection, what at first seems to be a ruin could just as well be a projection of the site under construction, at the right revealing the foundations, moving towards the structure, the finishing layers and finally the completed buildings at the left side of the image. The ambiguous representation of a ruin and an unfinished building reveals the relation between construction and decoration in architecture. According to historian Neil Levine, the narrative of the image is that architecture only gain its meaning upon receiving the final layer of finish.<sup>2</sup> I would even argue further, that the interest for uncovering the underlying layers of the building also reveal a desire to look deeper into the material and look beyond that which the perfect surface alone can express.

Some twenty years later, Eugène Viollet-le-Duc applied a similar technique to produce even more ambiguous messages. He published a vast number of drawings investigating historical architecture from the ancient roman structure to the architecture of his own time. In

<sup>1</sup> Oxford English Dictionary, Oxford University press. <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/>

<sup>2</sup> Levine, Neil. 'The architecture of the unfinished and the example of Louis Kahn.' *Fragments, architecture and the unfinished: essays presented to Robert Middleton*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2006, pp. 328



Eugène Viollet-le-Duc,  
*Thermes d'Antonin Caracalla*.  
 Lithography, 1867.

*Compositions et dessins de Viollet-le-Duc* from 1884 we find a particular areal perspective of a roman bath. The image displays an interior view that visualises the construction in greater detail. The left half of the building is stripped back to the bare bricks and concrete of the construction with just a few marble elements appearing. Towards the right the structure has received its enclosing vaults, and most of the stucco and marble decoration. Compared to the image of Gandy, this drawing represents more clearly the removal of layers in a finished building than a representation of a building in construction. But the goal is the same; to reveal the contradicting relation between how the building is actually put together, and how it gives the impression of being constructed. This was a rather common perception of the way of building at the time; the decorative layer usually contrasted markedly with the underlying structure.<sup>3</sup> In the lithography from 1867 one senses that the effect that this unveiling of the construction creates; the artificial character of the decorative layer makes us ask ourselves at which point the building really comes alive. Is it at the addition of the decorative layer, or is it not at the very contrary, when the truth of the construction—the building's proper being—becomes visible?

It appears to be the decomposition of the building from finished towards unfinished that aims to raise a question of truthfulness and sincerity in architecture. Viollet-le-Duc constructed a terminology regarding the aesthetic of what he considered good architecture, and linked the notions of beauty and quality in architecture to rational ideas of reason and logic, clarity, honesty and truth.<sup>4</sup> Through the example of the *Thermes d'Antonin Caracalla*, one observes a link between the idea of unfinished or rough, and the idea of truthfulness towards construction and material in architecture.

Perhaps these drawings were the first steps towards questioning the relation between construction, decoration and authenticity in architecture. At the time, the lack of ornament was the equivalent to an unfinished building. The development of taste and aesthetic since then has come to turn the two notions around—now we can speak of the unfinished or rough surface as becoming the ornament

<sup>3</sup> Levine, Neil. 'The architecture of the unfinished and the example of Louis Kahn.' *Fragments, architecture and the unfinished: essays presented to Robert Middleton* (see note 2), p. 329

<sup>4</sup> Junod, Philippe. *La terminologie esthétique de Viollet-le-Duc in Viollet-le-Duc: Centenaire de la mort à Lausanne*. Lausanne: Musée historique de l'Ancien-Evêché, 1979, pp. 57-58.

in itself.<sup>5</sup> A turning point in the regard of the unfinished surface, came in the early modernist era. The new 'international style' architecture emerging in the 1920's and 30's—notably by stark figures like Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe—was later given the label *brutalism* derived by the characteristic rough untreated in-situ concrete, and the unmistakable exposed steel structure. This wave was later succeeded by a more literal interpretation of the brute material's role in architecture, as the 'international style' brutalism was perceived as too abstract.<sup>6</sup> Some thirty years later, a group of young British architects lead by Alison and Peter Smithson—inspired by the more 'human' Scandinavian interpretation of brutalism—created a new 'school', formulating that a building should «be made of what it appears to be made of».<sup>7</sup> They were looking for an architectural language that was not only pleasing, but above all direct and true. The exclusive use of material in its natural form and colour became a characteristic for this kind of architecture. One of the prominent figures of the movement, Reyner Banham, formulated an architectural manifesto in the essay *The New Brutalism* from 1955. «[...] Water and electricity does not come out of unexplained holes in the wall, but are delivered to the point of use by visible pipes and manifest conduits.»<sup>8</sup> The architectural language was straight forward, revealing the 'truth' about the building's function and construction, and the rough and real became in itself the building's finish and ornament.

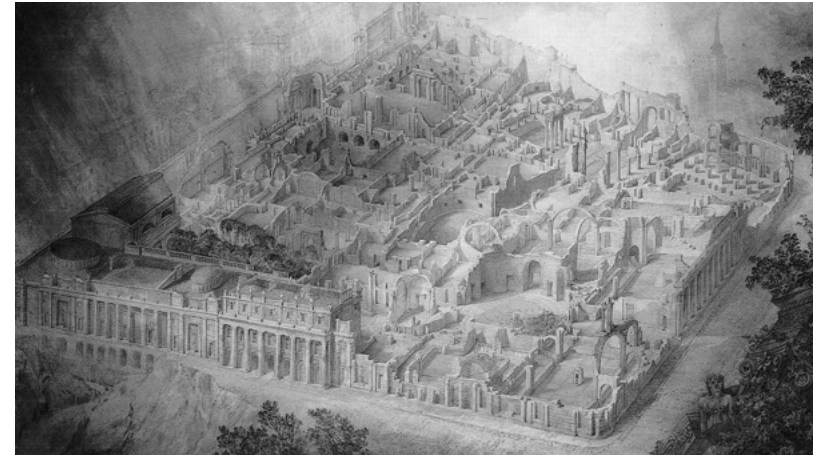
This approach was rather unconventional at the time of its appearance, but is still fortified in our contemporary approach to architecture, and has become almost a given. The notion of truth in the structural expression is still valid, although our approach is not as uncompromising as in the sixties. The rigid revelation of the structure seems not as important as the mere mixing of contrasting elements and the effect that this clash produces; rough and fine together, heavy and light, old and new. The idea that materials in their natural form give warmth and texture to otherwise blank and cold surfaces is still a common perception, but today the aesthetic of unfinished appears to be the considered a style rather than emerging out of an ideology.

5 See fourth visit: Rot-Ellen-Berg, p. 78

6 Banham, Reyner. 'The New Brutalism'. *As found: the discovery of the ordinary. British architecture and art of the 1950s*. Baden: Verlag Lars Müller, 2001, p. 125.

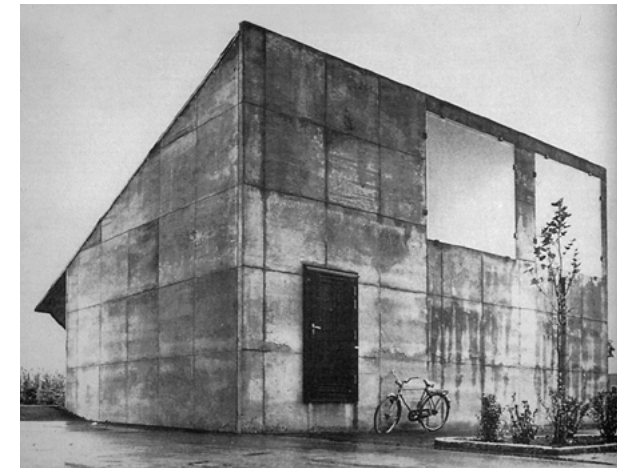
7 Ibidem.

8 Ibid.



Joseph Gandy, *Bank of England* by John Soane. Cutaway aerial perspective, 1830.

Sigurd Lewerentz, *Flower Kiosk*, Malmö East Cemetery, 1969.



## Recomposition of fragments

Several concepts of unfinished are in one way or another interpreting the aspect of unfinished fragmentary. Either fragments of matter, of memory, of stories or fragments of ideas. Furthermore, a fragment also suggests the existence of a complementary idea; that is the idea of a whole. The statement that our perception and reading of fragments triggers the creative force of our imagination to want to complete them, a theory further supported by Piranesi.<sup>1</sup> An important concept in the understanding of the fascination for the unfinished in architecture, appears to be this desire to complete the incomplete, and moreover reinvent the pieces of what find in a new way. The fragment contains a certain inert potential, they represent what they used to be, but could also be recomposed, without changing their respective forms and signification, to form an ensemble that gives a new meaning.

This recomposition of fragments is essentially what defines the act of *bricolage*. The French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss formulated the theory of a science, which is 'prior' and concrete, exemplified by the activity of bricolage. A 'bricoleur', is defined as a person who works with his hands and uses devious means compared to those of a craftsman. The particularity of bricolage, as opposed to any type of composition, is that he makes the use of a repertoire of perhaps extensive, but nonetheless limited set of 'pre-constrained' tools to create a project.<sup>2</sup> This implies that the tools—or shall we call them fragments—at hand, are remnants of previous projects, and bear their own signification and record depending on their origin, they are not invented by the bricoleur to fit the purpose of the project. They are chosen, among a repertoire of fragments, to be the most fitting piece to find its place in the new order, and the attributes of the fragment can even influence or modify the design because of its particular characteristic. Lévi-Strauss opposes the definition of the work of the bricoleur to that of the engineer.

«The *bricoleur* is adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks; but, unlike the engineer, he does not subordinate each of them to the availability of raw materials and tools conceived and procured for the purpose of the project. His universe of

<sup>1</sup> See 'The Ruin', p. 20.

<sup>2</sup> Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *The savage mind. Chapter one: The science of the concrete*. Chicago : The University of Chicago Press, 1966, p. 11.



instruments is closed and the rules of his game are always to make do with 'whatever is at hand', that is to say with a set of tools and materials which is always finite and is also heterogeneous because what it contains bears no relation to the current project, or indeed to any particular project, but is the contingent result of all the occasions there have been to renew or enrich the stock or to maintain it with the remains of previous constructions or destructions.»<sup>3</sup>

Without losing ourselves completely in the practical act of bricolage, it is important to mention that Lévi-Strauss also draws a parallel between the physical and the intellectual understanding of bricolage. He calls the intellectual composition of fragments *mythical thought*.<sup>4</sup> In architecture one can both find approaches relating to the concrete meaning of bricolage, reusing the actual fragments of old, but also the intellectual type of bricolage, which could take the form of reinterpretation of a memory or an event into a particular design idea, rather than physically using the fragments directly in the new structure.<sup>5</sup> The mythical thought builds up sets from the remnants of events, in essence, creating a 'myth' or a story from fragments of other stories. Lévi-Strauss is in his description of mythical thought touching on the relation between the abstract and concrete, the representation and the represented. He calls the idea—or the event that a fragment represents—a concept, and the physical fragment recalling this concept—a sign.<sup>6</sup> The signs are references to the events or circumstances that they represent. Further these signs can be used and reused in a new configuration to possibly create a new meaning or a new understanding.

«Mythical thought for its part is imprisoned in the events and experiences which it never tires of ordering and re-ordering in its search to find them a meaning.»<sup>7</sup>

Additionally, Lévi-Strauss introduces the notion of subjectivity, which the act of bricolage implies. With his composition as medium, the bricoleur is giving an account for «his personality and life by the choices he makes between the limited possibilities.»<sup>8</sup>

3 Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *The savage mind* (see note 1), 1966, p. 11.

4 Ibidem.

5 See fourth visit: Raven Row, p. 88.

6 Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *The savage mind* (see note 1), p. 12.

7 Ibidem, p. 14.

8 Ibid.



Marcel Duchamp,  
*Bicycle Wheel*, 1951  
(remake of the original  
installation from 1913).

Even if the work is not finished, and the work only consist of elements with their proper meaning, the bricoleur leaves something of himself in the work, because he is obliged to make a choice of what to include and not to include in his new composition.

In the realm of art, this reassembling of found ordinary objects to assign to them a new value or meaning, was explored by dadaist Marcel Duchamp in the early twentieth century. His *readymades* consisted of found, ordinary objects taken out of their context and sometimes just exposed individually, or in a composition in an exhibition space. The intention was to demonstrate that manufactured objects with a distinct function could be freed from their use, and gain the status and expression of a work of art, by the mere decision of the artist.<sup>9</sup> The regard to the object resembles that of the bricoleur, in the sense that he claims that an object designed for a certain purpose can become something other when the context of configuration is changed, or in a constellation where several objects designed for completely different means, can constitute a new set of whole. A set of unfinished bits and pieces can be put together again and again and each time produce a new meaning.

In architecture, as in fine arts, photography, theatre and cinema, an approach comparable to the process of bricolage emerged during the modernist era.<sup>10</sup> The movement, fronted by the young British architects Alison and Peter Smithson was a reaction to the modern ideology of *tabula rasa*, that of their contemporaries who aimed to reinvent every aspect of modern life. Their approach consisted in «carefully looking, picking up, turning over and putting with» as Peter Smithson formulated it.<sup>11</sup> The concept as such was given a term—*As found*—by the Smithsons through their writing in the 1990's, although already adopted in their work as architects much earlier. Thomas Schregenberger, co-curator of the 'As Found' exhibition in 2001 at Museum Für Gestaltung in Zürich, explains the phenomenon as follows:

«It is an attitude, an interest, an approach to architecture and art. *As Found* is about the here and now, about truthfulness and reality, about the common and the ordinary. It is not about visions and remote ideals. It means carefully observing everyday life, to discover its qualities, to follow the traces of what's already there and to use it as a basis for new insights and new form.»<sup>12</sup>

Within the notion of carefully looking, where one could draw a parallel to being curious and search for the previously mentioned signs, one can draw a link back to the speaking ruins of Piranesi. Essentially, the process of observing and searching through the existing, means looking for fragments that speak to us and then composing them to produce a new meaning in the new arrangement. The *As Found*-approach further underlines the value of the ordinary. The adoration of the ordinary implies that everything has potential, even the every-day object. In fact, it is about searching for value, and considering everything, not only the objects of obvious special character. It is easy to forget to investigate the things we already know very well, or the things that only seem to serve a banal, practical purpose. The value of the things we find only depends in the end on the new meaning we give to them by putting them together in a different way.

9 Bailly, Jean-Christophe. Marcel Duchamp. Paris: Fernand Hazan, 1984, pp. 44-55.

10 Lichtenstein, Claude, and Thomas Schregenberger. *As found: the discovery of the ordinary. British architecture and art of the 1950s*. Baden: Verlag Lars Müller, 2001, p. 8.

11 Johnston, Pamela (ed.), Alison Smithson and Peter Smithson. *Architecture is not made with the brain. The Labour of Alison and Peter Smithson*. London: Architectural Association Publications, 2005, p. 98.

12 Johnston, Pamela (ed.), Alison Smithson and Peter Smithson. *Architecture is not made with the brain. The Labour of Alison and Peter Smithson* (see note 10), 2005, p. 81.

# Visits

First visit:  
Upper Lawn Pavilion, Wiltshire



Farmhouse,  
Upper Lawn, 1959

Informal habitation

Having already lived a life of 52 years, the Upper Lawn Pavilion, located in the picturesque English countryside, still stands in its garden, seemingly just the way the architects Alison and Peter Smithson had conceived it. The Smithsons' weekend home has become an icon from the modernist era, extensively published, visited and discussed. Perhaps as a result of its iconic status, and the publication relying upon the same set of images, we perceive the pavilion in a somewhat static state. Now, the wood has aged and greyed; the aluminium sheets are no longer reflecting every beam of sun, it fades and approaches the same tint as the wood. But otherwise the pavilion stands there the way we remember it from the photos. When looking closer however, the Upper Lawn reveals several aspects of the unfinished; the choice of material and the particular design method have already been widely approached in diverse publications. The perhaps least examined aspect of unfinished appears to be the relation to the temporary character of its use and how this has affected its conception.

A simple climate house

Surrounded by slight hilly meadows and low forests, one catches a glimpse of an old stonewall in the midst of a colony of trees at the end of a dirt road. The trees make it difficult to make out; but surely there is a group of houses behind the wall; one in particular stands out. As one approaches, it becomes clear that the little house is not behind, but somehow placed on top of the stonewall. A simple door lets you enter through the wall, and directly into the little house, with an unobstructed view to the garden in front. The house is simple and quite small, only 8 by 4,5 meters. The whole place can be seen in a matter of minutes. Despite the limited space available, there has been found room for a small, thrifty kitchen and a simple wooden table, a tiny, but adequate bathroom, a little bench for reading, a staircase which is more like a ladder in wood and a little living room upstairs overlooking the landscape on all sides, heated by a bright new stove in black metal. The interior is simple,

dominated by natural stone, untreated wood and rough concrete; the openness invites the garden inside, or perhaps it is rather the interior that becomes a continuous part of the surrounding landscape.

The two architects Alison and Peter Smithson bought the land in Wiltshire and began to shape the idea of their weekend home 57 years ago.<sup>1</sup> The ground on which the pavilion is constructed is an inseparable part of the whole. The small stone house that used to stand here had already been somebody's home for some hundred years before this. The remains of the house were still present as the land was sold to the Smithsons, including the foundation and the old chimney, as well as the stonewall enclosing the parcel. The ruins were removed, but the foundation, the wall with two window openings, and the chimney was kept.<sup>2</sup> The Smithson's ambition was to create a 'simple Climate House', that would be able to open up to the landscape, visually though large windows on both levels, and physically though the simple opening and closing of sliding doors on the ground floor.<sup>3</sup> This way, the pavilion could simultaneously let the nature and garden in as if everything inside the stonewalls is one continuous space; but the pavilion would also be a shelter against nature and bad weather. The new structure, a wood and concrete structure, completely glazed towards the west, south and east, has approximately the same footprint as the original farmhouse, and in this way it is echoing its existence. However, it is slightly shifted towards the west, in order to accommodate the old chimney in the middle of the new structure. Now, one of the two remaining windows from the old house was suddenly outside, as well as a part of the foundation, creating an exterior room echoing the interior, to which the kitchen could be extended.<sup>4</sup>

The choice of materials and finishing; raw concrete, bare wood and glimmering aluminium, all in its natural colours and form, was something rather new at the time, and connected the Smithsons to the group of *New brutalists*.<sup>5</sup> It is a type of aesthetic we are now used to and gladly appreciate today, but was regarded as a rather unfinished expression at the time. Jonathan Sergison recalls:

1 Krucker, Bruno. *Complex Ordinarity. The Upper Lawn Pavilion by Allison und Peter Smithson*. Zürich: gta Verlag, 2002, p. 3.

2 Ibidem, p. 194.

3 Allison, Peter. 'Upper Lawn: The invisible Restoration. A conversation with Sergison Bates.' *2G revista internacional de arquitectura internacional architecture review* 34 (2005), p. 92

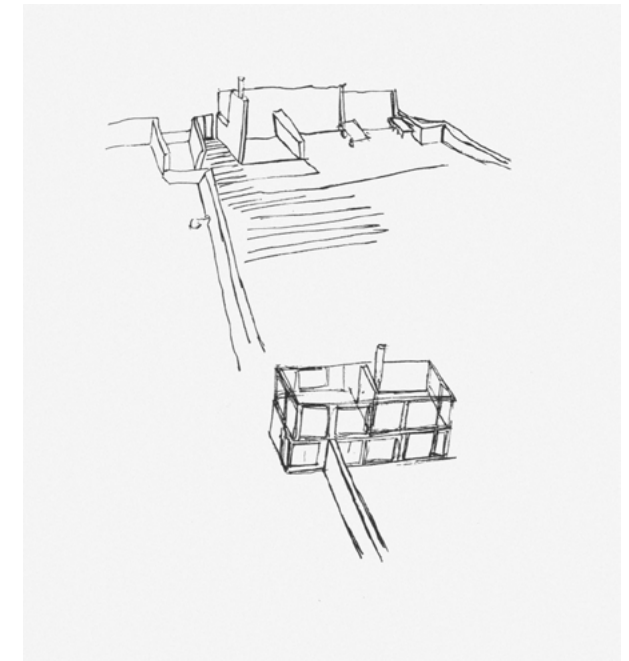
4 Krucker, Bruno. *Complex Ordinarity. The Upper Lawn Pavilion by Allison und Peter Smithson* (See note 1), p. 30

5 Lichtenstein, Claude, and Thomas Schregenerberger. *As found: the discovery of the ordinary. British architecture and art of the 1950s*. Baden: Verlag Lars Müller, 2001, pp. 124-130.



The new interior-exterior room, with the exiting window in the wall.

Alison and Peter Smithson:  
Preliminary sketches,  
1959



«When you look at the original photographs of the building in the *Architectural Review* where it was first published, you appreciate that it was silver and a rich brown, like a Greek temple in this hot, spare landscape. When you realise what these pictures looked like at the time, it must have been quite shocking.»<sup>6</sup>

The aesthetic of the raw and unfinished was to be completed by time, where wind and weather can make its imprints on the facades. The idea of seeing the materials for what they were came with distaste for the simulated, and was also a clear position for the Smithsons, and it became a central element in their approach to architecture.<sup>7</sup>

### As Found

The Upper Lawn Pavilion has often been presented as one of the first and most distinct examples of the way the *As Found* was originally approached in architecture.<sup>8</sup> The clash between new and old fragments produced unexpected and ambiguous situations that would never appear had the architecture been conceived from nothing. Peter Smithson describes the approach as looking carefully and choosing already existing elements to go with the new design. «The *As Found* is a small affair; it is about being careful. The *as found* [is] where the art is in the picking up turning over and putting with.»<sup>9</sup> The Upper Lawn is constituted of something new, but also of fragments of something that was found on the site. The intention was to continue an already on-going story by reinterpreting it. We know little about how the existing farm house, apart from that it was a farmstead belonging to a larger estate; the other houses are still standing on the land around the pavilion.<sup>10</sup> It would perhaps not be possible, nor make any sense to continue building in the logic of an already existing architectural 'intention', by re-erecting a new building in the style of a eighteenth century farmhouse. The value lies in conscious selection of fragments, putting with, but also leaving out, and redefining new and old in a new unity that did not exist before, to allow for a new way on living on the ground.

6 Allison, Peter. 'Upper Lawn: The invisible Restoration. A conversation with Sergison Bates.' (see note 3), p. 97.

7 Lichtenstein, Claude, and Thomas Schregenerberger. *As found: the discovery of the ordinary. British architecture and art of the 1950s* (see note 5), p. 40.

8 Ibidem, pp. 194-195. See also 'Recomposition of fragments', p. 46.

9 Ibid, p. 40.

10 Krucker, Bruno. *Complex Ordinarity. The Upper Lawn Pavilion by Allison und Peter Smithson* (See note 1), p. 29.



The Smithsons on the outdoor terrace east of the pavilion.

### Camping

Not only the architectural approach was based on the appreciation of continuity and redefinition, but also the nature of its habitation. For the Smithsons, their reaction to the site was based on a mere personal need and wish, related to their own way of inhabiting a space, well knowing that the architecture they had created would continue to be a subject to change. Not only would change be externally imposed, the temporality of their work was a conscious part of the design process: «the pavilion was designed as a device whose pattern of habitation could change.»<sup>11</sup> Life at Upper Lawn was much like the experience of camping, and therefore subject to an ever-changing type of inhabitation. The interior was raw and simple, the furnishing kept to a strict minimum.

11 Lichtenstein, Claude, and Thomas Schregenerberger. *As found: the discovery of the ordinary. British architecture and art of the 1950s* (see note 5), p. 195.



Upper Lawn: The kitchen in its original position towards the north and east.

The kitchen has been moved and a new bed has been installed in its place.



The kitchen did not have any fixed installations apart from a sink and funnily enough a dishwasher. The building had no bedroom; seemingly the family slept on mattresses on the first floor during their stays. On photographs we often see the family outside, with the doors open, sitting around wooden plank table that can easily be folded and stowed away. In an interview from 2005, Jonathan Sergison states:

«You get the feeling that everything they owned, apart from the building as a structure, was put on the roof of a Citroën for the drive back to London. It does feel, from the Smithsons' photographs, that it was more akin to a camping experience.»<sup>12</sup>

It appears as if the Smithsons, in the capacity of inhabitants, were not regarding the structure that they had raised so ceremoniously as we do today. Their way of inhabiting the Upper Lawn seemed rather informal, and the role they themselves played there were encountering nature, considering the pavilion only as a necessary infrastructure to make this possible, leaving the programmatic definition of each room undefined, and adaptable to change.

#### A changing pattern of habitation

During the twenty years that the Smithsons stayed at Upper Lawn, minor changes and alterations were made to the design. Not only did they work and think like architects, but they also made changes simply in the logic of the inhabitant, when realising that what they had planned did not entirely fit to their needs. For example was the kitchen moved, and the staircase turned around, to ensure a better utilisation of the space. Of course, the idea of *As Found* does not stop when the construction is 'finished'; the building and the surroundings evolve and develop. One would find the need to go through the same process again; looking at the situation as it presents itself, as found in this moment, and selecting what is of value, and what should be discarded, what needs to be changed, now that the reality around has changed.

<sup>12</sup> Allison, Peter. 'Upper Lawn: The invisible Restoration. A conversation with Sergison Bates.' (see note 3), p. 100.



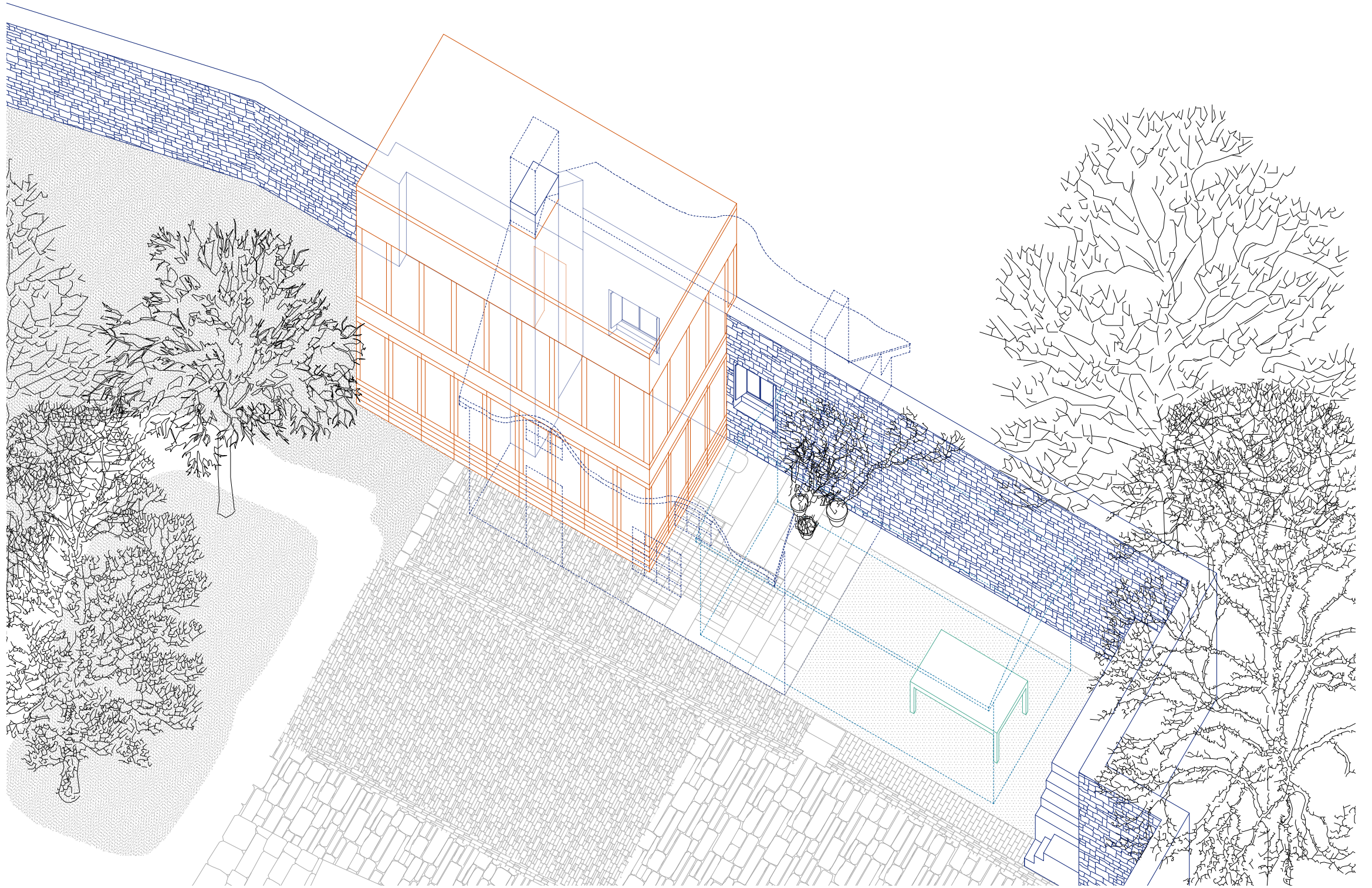
The pavilion was sold for the second time after the Smithson's occupation in 2002 to Ian and Jo Cartridge, who immediately engaged the architects Sergison Bates for a renovation project. There were water damage in the ground floor ceiling, and the heat was hastily escaping through the extensive glazing. A number of aspects had been changed since the sixties. A mini-hob, an oven and a fridge had replaced the dishwashing machine. Next to the house, the previous owner, Robert Clark, had built a shed in wood, almost the size of the footprint of the pavilion. The shed was later torn down, and the weathered wood came to use in the renovation.<sup>13</sup> When reflecting upon the idea of a changing pattern of habitation with a temporal, informal approach to the architectural plan, it puts the inhabitant in the role of determining the architectural definition. The Smithsons, in the capacity of inhabitants rather than architects, only felt the need for a simple climate structure, so they added this to the site. Later, Robert Clark considered the rather ascetic equipment in the house insufficient, and added a mini-hob

and a fridge. Later, he added the shed, ensuring more designated spaces for sleeping and living, and letting the pavilion grow in pace with its inhabitants.

As a side note, it is striking that there is no published evidence of the remnants of the 'Clark' period between 1982 and 2002, as if what existed in that time should be erased from history to avoid blurring the image of what could now be considered a modernist monument. The renovation performed in 2002 follows a rather traditional 'preservation' strategy, where old, weathered material is used as replacement instead of new, to hide the fact that it has been repaired. It is interesting to note, that the needs of the Cartridges seemed rather to be to recreate something 'original', and not to shape the place according to their own way of inhabiting. The building now presents it self almost as if had it not been touched since its completion in 1962. But what is now presented as the authentic Upper Lawn Pavilion, one could argue, is not at all this; it is constructed. It is a paradox, that this simple house, which was only regarded as a mere device for living, that could visibly age and adapt for different types of habitation, is now being preserved representing a frozen moment in time, relating to a static architectural image rather than an evolving way of inhabiting the space.

<sup>13</sup> Allison, Peter. 'Upper Lawn: The invisible Restoration. A conversation with Sergison Bates.' (see note 3), p. 102. There exists no visual documentation of the shed today.





Upper Lawn Pavilion.  
 South east axonometric view,  
 pavilion and garden.

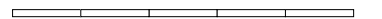
1750\*  
 1962



1980\*  
 2002



0



5m

## Second visit: Palais de Tokyo, Paris



Construction of the  
*Palais des musées*, 1936.

### Non-intervention

A few blocks from the Trocadéro Square in Paris, the *Palais de Tokyo* externally displays an image of a 1930's monumental building, but at the same time it hints of a more alternative, contemporary scene playing on the inside. The *Palais de Tokyo* tells a story about how we can approach what is already present in the existing situation. It is about curiosity and optimism; about asking oneself if it is really necessary to change, take away, add or finish something. There is, in this project, an attitude that the architectural story is not primarily invented by the architect, but told by the existing building or context itself, and that this story can be expressed most clearly by changing nothing at all.

### A palace for contemporary art

From the outside the building looks like a museum, or a perhaps even a parliament building. The building is a proud monument of its time, with two wings stretching between the Avenue du Président Wilson and the Avenue de New York on the river Seine. A central portico opens to terraces, a water mirror and the view to the Eiffel Tower on the other side of the river. The limestone facade is decorated with pillars and sculptures, inspired by ancient Greek mythology. In the centre figures Apollo, the Ancient Greek god of the sun, music, archery, prophecy and poetic inspiration. From the inside however, one has the feeling of entering an old abandoned industrial site, squatted by the 'alternative' scene. Bare concrete walls and ceilings unveil a bright contrasting world compared to the well-behaved exterior. One could call it a typical urban hangout of the 21st century. Many people come here to experience the new attraction: artists, hipsters, families and tourists. Certain things seem temporary and provisional, like the bookshop bordered by hoarding, and the ticket shop that is in fact an old caravan. The exposed concrete seems to not even have been washed. Nobody cared to plaster the repaired walls, and there are obviously some marble plates missing here and there. Some places one can see that a beam or a column has been repaired. It looks like the whole place has been torn down in a riot, and only the most necessary things

were repaired. However this cannot be a true squat, everything still has a feeling of being planned or staged. The only new installation appears to be the round steel staircase looking remarkably light in the rough interior. Installations, film projections, concerts, paintings, conferences; in every nook and corner something different is going on. The spaces are constantly changing, and the exhibitions and events last for three weeks, three days, or even just one night.

Despite the rough industrial impression of the interior landscape, this building was from the beginning conceived to be a museum dedicated to contemporary art. The story of the place begins in 1932, when the conservator of the *Musée des Artistes vivants installé*, Louis Hautecoeur, promoted the construction of a new museum dedicated to modern art in Paris, as the *Musée de Luxembourg* was running out of exhibition space.<sup>1</sup> Following an architectural competition where Tony Garnier, Le Corbusier and Robert Mallet-Stevens were among the 128 participants, the new building, was constructed by the young architects Jean-Claude Dondel and André Aubert, guided by the more experienced architects Paul Viard et Marcel Dastugue. At its opening the building was known under the name *Palais des Musées d'art moderne* and became one of three permanent constructions for the International Exhibition in Paris in 1937. The two museums were placed in two separate wings, orientated perpendicular towards the Seine; the *Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris* in the east wing, still known under this name today, and the west wing housing the *Musée National d'Art moderne*, later to be known as the Palais de Tokyo.<sup>2</sup>

#### Shifting occupants

The Palais des Musées was from the beginning regarded 'an ill-conceived twin' by many contemporaries.<sup>3</sup> Firstly, because there is an inherent contradiction in the fact that the contemporary art museum as it were, had a quite restricted view of contemporary art. Actually, it is a paradox that a contemporary art exhibition should be permanent; at some point the art is no longer contemporary.



Palais de Tokyo,  
reception area, 2002.

<sup>1</sup> De Loisy, Jean and Frédéric Grossi (ed.). 'L'histoire du Palais de Tokyo depuis 1937.' *Palais* (Palais de Tokyo Magazine) 15 (2012), p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris: <http://www.mam.paris.fr/fr/musee/>

<sup>3</sup> De Loisy, Jean and Frédéric Grossi (ed.). 'L'histoire du Palais de Tokyo depuis 1937.' *Palais* (see note 1), p. 32.



'Republica',  
exhibition at Palais de  
Tokyo, 2010.

A projection hall,  
rediscovered during  
construction work in  
1995.



Secondly, the location had never been right, and the museum never quite found its form and expression. The scene has been restless and had a touch of temporariness ever since its construction. People, artists and institutions have been coming and going as they please. After the 1937 Exhibition, the east wing opens its first exhibition again in 1940, and under its rightful name—the National Contemporary Arts Museum—for the first time during a couple of months in 1942, one third of the collection containing works brought to safety from the occupied zones of France.<sup>4</sup> The museum is inaugurated again in 1947, and works of among others Picasso, Braque, Rouault and Matisse filled the clean modernist interior, lit by diffuse daylight reflecting on the echoing marble floors. The collection of the National Contemporary Arts Museum stayed in the east wing until 1977 when it was moved to the newly built *Centre Georges Pompidou*.<sup>5</sup>

After this, the spaces of the east wing is occupied by a number of institutions during the years, among them the *Musée d'art et d'essai*, which organised temporary exhibitions under various themes, and borrowed works from the different museums in Paris.<sup>6</sup> The reserves of the *Fonds national d'art contemporain* (FNAC) were also stored here until 1991, and the schools of photography and cinema *IHEAP* and *la Fémis* were occupying the old sculpture halls of the museum. Visual art and photography was on display through the *Cinémathèque Française*. The daylight that earlier was so present in the building has disappeared more and more over the years. With time, the plan was to transform the spaces into a *Maison de l'Image et du Son*, devoted to cinema and the projection of images.<sup>7</sup> Following a competition, the French architect Franck Hammoutène starts the construction work starts in 1995, by removing the interior surfacing, partition walls and ceilings. The work goes on for a year, until the government again decides to stop the project, and despite the already performed demolition works, the motivation was to leave the place as it was.<sup>8</sup> The spaces stayed empty and stripped of its interior for three years, until the government again decided to open a competition for a temporary site for young artists in 1999.

4 De Loisy, Jean and Frédéric Grossi (ed.). 'L'histoire du Palais de Tokyo depuis 1937.' Palais (see note 1), p. 29.

5 Ibid, p. 21.

6 Ibid, p. 65.

7 Ibid, p. 73.

8 Anne Lacaton. Reinvent: *Enchanting the Existing*. Conference at Columbia University, 25 March 2013.

## Curiosity and optimism

During the preceding 62 years, the building had been continuously altered, if not in its bearing structure, then at least radically in the interior. Certain parts had been completely closed off and forgotten; in other places ceilings, floors and partition walls are almost all gone. Now the structure stands bare; an economic and modern column-beam-slab structure now apparent after hiding under a layer of plywood, plaster and marble. Slender concrete columns stand abandoned and seemingly misplaced in the middle of an enormous space, as hints of past room sequences and shapes. The thickness of the columns look under-dimensioned compared to the enormous spans. The space, although dusty, dark and stripped of its former glory, is nonetheless a powerful space, making a strong impression on the architects, privileged with the task of renovating it. Anne Lacaton and Jean Philippe Vassal—describing their first meeting with the Palais de Tokyo in 1999—express a deep fascination for the place as it was found.

«The architecture was already very interesting; the architecture was already there. We didn't find the need or the desire to add any architecture inside. We just wanted to allow the architecture that already existed to again be open to the artists and to the public.»<sup>9</sup>

To be able to see potential in a ruin, which is in essence what the building was at this point, one has to be able to see beyond the aspect of destruction and decay, to try to see the outlines of what the building really is—the significance of space and light—and know exactly what needs to be done to enhance the inherent potentials:

«Transforming, using what already exists. It means accurately observing from the inside and as close as possible, understanding, being curious, being attentive to the places, to the trees, to the people. It means looking positively, with optimism, and taking advantage of that which is already there as an opportunity and additional value.»<sup>10</sup>

It is about accepting that every place already has a history, it is about investigation of a place, and to trying to understand its logic. Furthermore, it is necessary to be positively curious, meaning looking for value, where one is perhaps not expecting to find it, much like in the logic of the *As Found* ideology. The history of events has left brutal traces, but as one could choose to see them as wounds, one could also say these traces reveal the true identity of the space, adding a new kind of value to the experience.

## Squatting

The task was to make 5000 square meters of the building available for young artists, as a temporary space of creation, where works would be created and displayed ephemerally, much like in the nature of artist's ateliers. With a tight budget, and a little time frame, it was evident that restoring what was once destroyed would not be possible, and more importantly—nobody seemed to be interested in that.<sup>11</sup> The architects found that the architecture was already complete; the only problem being that the building was potentially dangerous to the public. The approach consisted in doing as little as possible, meaning stabilizing the construction, installing the necessary infrastructure and performing technical improvements on each individual column or beam according to need, but otherwise leave out any unnecessary or decorative addition.<sup>12</sup> The only significant new addition that was done in the building, was the introduction of a new metal staircase, making access to all the floors more direct and easy. The project became a story of continuous building. What was initially concerning 5'000 square meters became 8'000, then 12'000 and at last the entire wing of 16'000 was refurbished. The architects describe the project to follow the logic of a squat.

«A squatter seeking shelter in a 10'000 m<sup>2</sup> factory building does not start wondering how to renovate the entire area. That squatter is looking for a place to bed down and feel safe. Over time, he or she might extend that space and maybe end up occupying 100 m<sup>2</sup>. Then another squatter might arrive and so on.»<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Anne Lacaton. *Reinvent* (see note 9).

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>13</sup> Anne Lacaton and Jean-Philippe Vassal in Conversation with Mathieu Wellner. 'Surplus'. *Reduce, Reuse, Recycle: Architecture as Resource. German Pavillon, 13th International Architecture Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia 2012*. Ostfildern: Verlag Hatje Cantz, 2012, p. 9

<sup>9</sup> Anne Lacaton. *Reinvent: Enchanting the Existing* (see note 8).

<sup>10</sup> Anne Lacaton. *Reinvent*. November Conferences at Polytechnico di Milano, 10 December 2013.



Sculpture hall,  
construction works,  
1996.

Sculpture hall,  
exhibition 2004.



Following this pragmatic logic, Lacaton & Vassal had renovated the entire building in the end, and opened it to the public, through the strategy of doing as little as possible. Within the logic of squat, there seems to be a different expectation as to when a work is considered finished, as opposed to a conventional architectural project. The squatter does not actually build, he only looks for a place suitable for his needs within the existing, only making the most necessary modifications to make the inhabitation possible, while everything else is left untouched. The inhabitation does not require every part of the building to be finished at the same time, but allows for a more pragmatic approach where the building in a 'conventional regard' is 'unfinished', but is at every stage finished enough for its use.

#### Doing as little as possible

The most expressive aspect of the Palais de Tokyo regarding the unfinished is the aspect of non-intervention. The first question that appears in the architectural process is, if is it at all necessary to do something. Will an intervention add value to what is already there? When talking about their approach to architecture, Lacaton & Vassal reveals a critical view to the way architecture and transformation is generally practiced.

«We feel it's our duty to start from scratch with each new project. That can also mean fundamentally questioning our profession—and with that, the way architecture is practiced. [...] It is not a refusal – it is a project involving a conscious decision to do nothing.»<sup>14</sup>

The building is now showing aspects of itself that were never meant to be exposed. There are thick columns, slender columns, round columns. There are rough concrete finishings and marble plates missing. The decision to leave these aspects of the building as they were, in their raw and incomplete state, means accepting that this unfinishedness is now part of the buildings identity, the destruction had already happened, it is the expression of a certain brutal honesty. But this has also been turned to an advantage; within this permanent structure with its unfinished character, anything can occur at any time.

14 Anne Lacaton and Jean-Philippe Vassal in Conversation with Mathieu Wellner. 'Surplus'. *Reduce, Reuse, Recycle: Architecture as Resource*. German Pavillon, 13th International Architecture Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia 2012 (see note 13), p. 6.



Palais de Tokyo.  
 Cutaway axonometric view,  
 interior first, first and a half and second level.

1937 ———  
 2002 ———

0 ————— 10m

## Third visit: Rot-Ellen-Berg, Flanders



The Rot-Ellen-Berg  
under (re)construction, 2009.

### Contemporary Ruin

On a small cobblestone crossing, we find a little house facing the street—as if it used to belong to a complete row of houses—standing quite alone on this side of the road. The old brick house, with a large front window and a red front door has some obscure inscriptions indicating that the house may not only be a house for living in, but perhaps a shop, a bar or a bakery. The house is old, but yet new, depending on which side of the village you are coming from. The story it tells is that of the contemporary ruin; a quite ordinary house, once lively and inviting, all of a sudden dead and left to decay. Then, a young couple discovers the ruin, and immediately starts dreaming of reanimating it, but at the same time, intrigued by the good old stories the building can tell, the dusty bricks, the crooked barn and weathered wood. The aesthetic of the rough, the weathering, the patched surfaces, and the exposed structure becomes a manifestation of a different aspect of the unfinished in architecture, notably the visual, tactile and olfactory.

One immediately wants to enter the bright red front door. From the outside one can get a glimpse of aluminium tubes and untreated wood slabs in front of the windows, which give us the impression that the interior is still under construction. One enters a very large room, filled with a light greenhouse glass and aluminium construction, with bright yellow slabs in wood, on several different levels, letting the light pass from the dormers on the roof, and all the way down to hallway. The levels are connected by little metal stairs, almost like little black ladders, and are held up by provisional adjustable columns, like the ones used in scaffolding. It seems that this construction is following its own logic completely, taking little or no consideration to the position of the windows, and the traces of the old slabs still visible on the wall. The old house is only a shell, and a new little house has been placed inside it. The place has some kind of provisional feel, but at the same time, it all seems carefully considered and executed, leaving the visitor an ambiguous impression of unfinished, but still complete.



### The Meurez-David Café

The house used to be a popular village café constructed already in 1870, where people would come in under low wooden ceilings and dim, yellowish light to have an Anglo Pilsner. It was the perfect place to wait for the cyclists in the annual *Ronde van Vlaanderen* that would come running down the cobblestones in a tremendous speed from the Koppenberg hill in front.<sup>1</sup> When the young couple Ellen and Piet bought the house in 2007 it had been used as a storage space for a long time, the internal wood structure was crumbling and the roof threatened to fall down. As most young house buyers, they were on a limited budget, which led them to the decision of making all the construction work themselves. This of course, is a determining factor in the nature of the choices the following process, and the rather pragmatic approach to the renovation work. Every decision would be justified by necessity, and everything superfluous and decorative is eliminated.<sup>2</sup> Their hypothesis was, that perhaps this economical and professional limitation could become a source of enrichment?

### The unfinished aesthetic

The Rot-Ellen-Berg is a good example of an architectural expression that is often ambiguously received by its viewers. The aesthetic of unfinished is both widely appreciated, and even represents a certain trend in our time, but also is clearly disliked by others. The uncompromising choices of pragmatism and simplicity resulting in a non-conventional architectural expression are often understood as unfinished projects, perhaps unrightfully. When confronted with the question of their projects often being described as 'unfinished', Inge Vinck points out that the interpretation of roughness and directness in materials, structure and details as unfinished architecture is a misconception.

«I don't really understand it. Our projects are worked out to the details and joints. They are truly finished. Everything is complete. Rough is being confused with unfinished. It is precisely by using simple materials that we want to develop a different kind of 'finished'.»<sup>3</sup>



The street façade viewing the Koppenberg.

The new house inside the old shell.



1 Meurez, Ellen and Piet Bodyn. 'Rot-Ellen-Berg'. *architecten de vylder vinck tailleu, 1 boek*

2. Gent : MER Paper Kunsthalle, 2010, p. 61.

2 Ibidem, p. 65.

3 Declerck, Joachim. 'Like a drawing. Conversation with architecten de vylder vinck tallieu.' *architecten de vylder vinck tailleu, 1 boek 2*. Gent : MER Paper Kunsthalle, 2010, p. 99.

«You could make the use of a fraction of the earlier infrastructure and live on it in an almost parasitic way, like fungus on a tree, and make the best of it. Whether it is here or there you will have to build something new, and leave the rest in its raw unfinished state, with the quiet dream of bringing it to life later, much later.»

Ellen Meurez, 'Rot-Ellen-Berg'.<sup>4</sup>



The existing slabs and division walls were removed, leaving the shell of two-and-a-half floors empty.

It is clear that there is an internal contradiction in the expression of this seemingly simple, provisional design choices, and the fact that everything is planned to the very last detail, and therefore is not at all simple and provisional. The unfinished is not a result of chance, but carefully considered and planned. The unfinished is in this case only a question of aesthetic preference. The lack of ornamentation or finishing, suggest for some an unfinished project, but in fact, the unfinishedness or roughness becomes in this case a contemporary kind of ornament.

We could draw a link to the *New Brutalists*, for whom the choice of materials and exposure of structure was a question of truthfulness. The truthfulness is a question of legibility in the architecture; that the architecture simply is what it seems to be; the materials are not treated, but clearly recognisable.<sup>5</sup> This understanding of truth and how the architecture becomes legible is perhaps what differentiate brutalism from mere superficial style. In the case of Rot-Ellen-Berg too, one has chosen to leave the wood boards with their default waterproof yellow varnish and the logo of the producer apparent, the aluminium structure is visible, the old brick walls are left half painted, with the imprints of its history still visible. It appears to be a result of non-decision rather than false 'unfinishedness'; the unfinished was already there, and why should we cover up the walls, why should we paint the floors? The notion

<sup>4</sup> Meurez, Ellen and Piet Bodyn. 'Rot-Ellen-Berg' (see note 1), p. 67.

<sup>5</sup> Banham, Reyner. 'The New Brutalism'. As found: the discovery of the ordinary. British architecture and art of the 1950s. Baden: Verlag Lars Müller, 2001, p. 125.

See also 'The aesthetic of unfinished', p. 40.



of aesthetic relates to an expectation of beauty, which many people find necessary in a finalised work. For Piet and Ellen however, the idea of beauty seemed of little importance; or, the truthfulness and pragmatism could be its own expression of beauty. «Beauty is now a matter of secondary importance. [...] It doesn't matter whether we choose an elegant staircase. A staircase is a staircase; it takes you upstairs.»<sup>6</sup> The non-decisions speak of a critical attitude where necessity and finish are treated like two extremes. Finish is in this case regarded as superfluous and unnecessary, and therefore certain details have been left visible. It is a manifesto of anti-decoration, where the non-decoration could be said to become a decoration in itself.

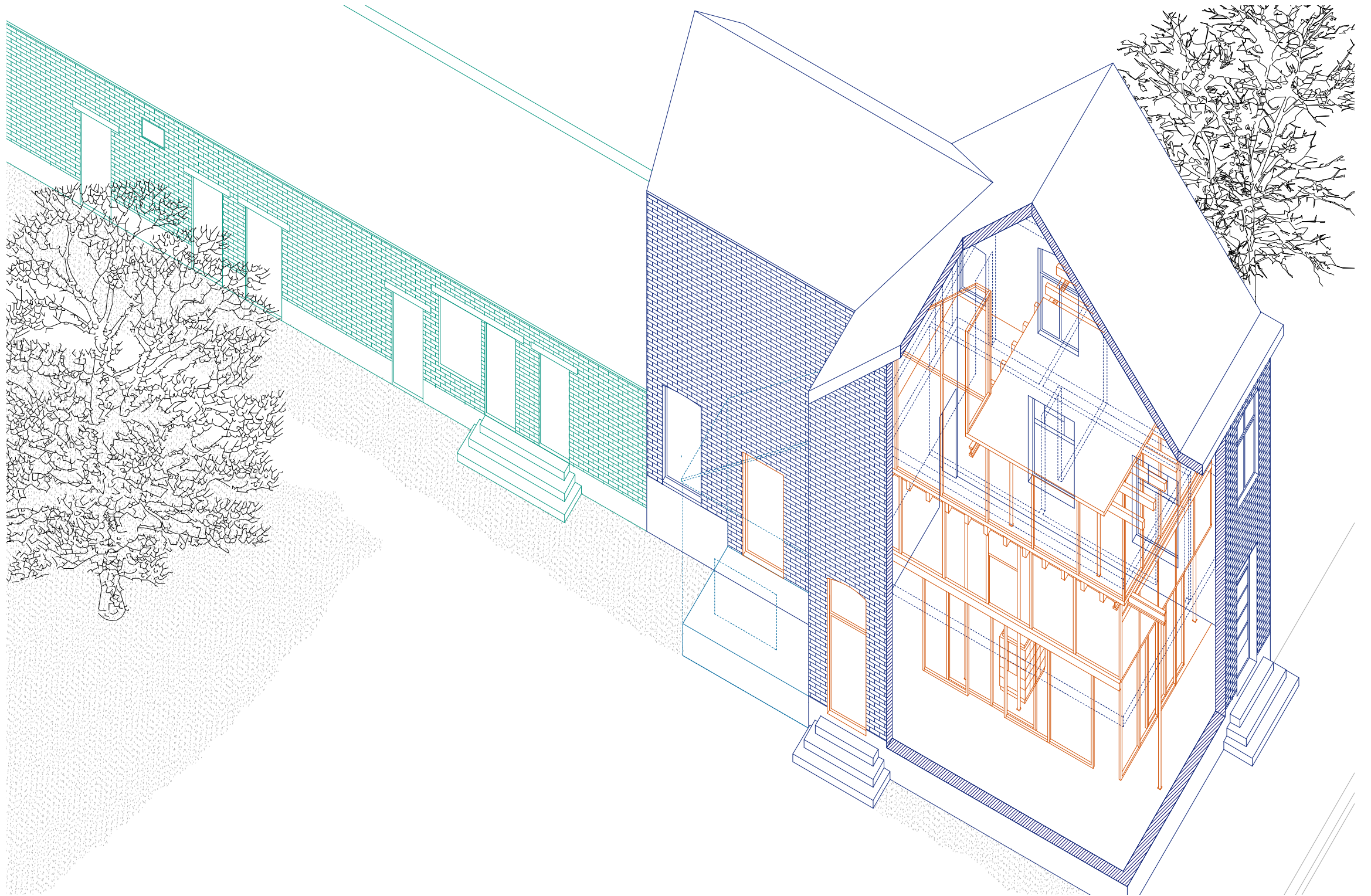
### Always and never finished

It can also be said, that the unfinished expression is a result of a certain way of working, which always looks for new potentials. There is an attitude, that the project 'works', or is finished already during the construction, and new potentials continuously appear, which can be realised or not realised.<sup>7</sup> There is a different understanding of the necessity of reaching a point of finishing between architect and client in an architectural process. The point of finishing appears less important for the architects, however for the clients there is a preliminary perception that such a point must be reached; that the architecture is only valid at the moment when it is completely finished, although most construction and renovation projects are never completely finished. In the case of Rot-Ellen-Berg, this moment of completion appears to be less important than the process of building. One could even state that it is exactly this last bit of potential for modification that is always present, which makes the house come alive.

«Passers-by and visitors expect a different degree of being finished after four years of renovation. We sense a lack of understanding for the achieved result. [...] Impeccable finish would stand in the way of the magical play between architect and builder. We have seen the sketches and drawings transformed into a living house, a house that's almost finished.»<sup>8</sup>

7 De Vylder, Jan. Difficult Double: Eric Owen Moss and De Vylder Vinck Tallieu. Lecture at FORM EPFL, 25 Mars 2014. See also 'Under Construction', p. 16.

8 Meurez, Ellen and Piet Bodyn. 'Rot-Ellen-Berg' (see note 1), p. 85.



Rot-Ellen-Berg.  
 Cutaway axonometric view,  
 garden, facade and interior of the front house.

## Fourth visit: Raven Row, London



Artillery Lane, 1920.

### Collecting memories

The Raven Row stands in east London and presents itself as a well-kept example of a Georgian townhouse. The fine, cream-coloured details of the rococo storefront windows so typical for the silk mercers' workshops in this part of the city greet us upon arrival, and quietly suggest an equally fine-tuned experience beyond the entrance. The bright white ornamented walls, bare wooden parquet and little cast iron details weave the Georgian and the contemporary universes together into a unified atmosphere. It quickly becomes clear however, that the very arrangement of elements, the choice of certain materials here, and others there, and the presence or absence of certain details suggest a clearly conscious process of investigation, selection and reassembly. The Raven Row today tells a certain story of its past, if not in a direct way, then in a more subtle sense. The unfinished in the Raven Row consists of fragments of events or memories from the past, subsequently reinserted in the architecture in a new way. The ordinary became extraordinary because its story has been discovered and reinterpreted.

### A silk mercer's practice

The story of the two houses from its construction in the 1690's and until today is long and rather ordinary and mostly unknown. We do know, that this row of houses was substantially remodelled in 1754 as luxurious shops in rococo style, just like many other houses in the Spitalfields in this time.<sup>1</sup> The block was built on what was previously a weapons practice land, and thereby got the name Artillery Lane, and the row of buildings went under the name of 'Raven Row' until 1895.<sup>2</sup> The area, which until the late seventeenth hundreds were only fields and farmland, developed rapidly over a short period of time in the beginning of the 18th century, as French Huguenot immigrants extensively took up a rather profitable business of silk industry. The house was built for a silk nurses' practice, and counted four floors with the typical disposition of fore and back rooms. The nurses' shop was found on the ground floor, the second floor was for more important costumers and transactions, and the two uppermost floors was where the family used to live.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Emerson, Tom. *We were never modern*. Lecture at ETH Zürich, 7 October 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Raven Row Gallery: [www.ravenrow.org/about/](http://www.ravenrow.org/about/)

<sup>3</sup> Emerson, Tom. *We were never modern* (See note 1).

«A site is the result of a multitude of interventions. Some are well documented, but most are part of the ebb and flow of life, of the whitening and darkening of things.»

Irenée Scalbert, *Never Modern*.<sup>4</sup>



Over the years there is not much knowledge of what these two houses has been used for or what happened there, as the silk industry declined. In 1827, number 56-58 Artillery Lane was modernised with a plain Regency front, only a few years before the weaving economy in Spitalfields collapsed and the area became impoverished.<sup>5</sup> In the early twentieth century, the two buildings housed many families who worked in the local food markets. It is known that a Jewish couple immigrating from central Europe served in the house from the early nineteenth hundreds, and their two daughters, Hannah and Rebecca, stayed in the attic of the house their entire lives, even as the rest of building was left empty in the 1970s. When current owner of the building, Alex Sainsbury, and 6a architects started working on a renovation project for the building in 2005, it had been consequently added to, converted, partially robbed of interior, neglected and damaged for over two centuries. Apart from the two sisters living in the attic, the building had been completely unoccupied for thirty years, and found itself in a derelict state. The client wanted to renovate the building to accommodate an art gallery, and add another two gallery spaces under the ground, behind the existing two buildings. A physical and intellectual process of excavation began to reveal the unknown, but nonetheless thrilling story of the building.

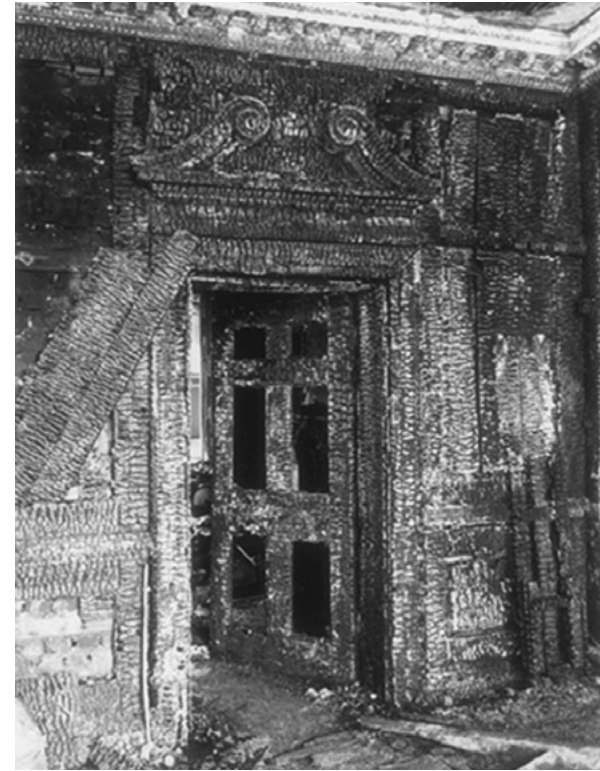
<sup>4</sup> Scalbert, Irenée and 6a Architects. *Never Modern*. Zürich: Park Books, 2013, p. 63.

<sup>5</sup> Raven Row Gallery: [www.ravenrow.org/about/](http://www.ravenrow.org/about/)

## Fire

Behind the entrance hall of the gallery, descending a little staircase, one enters a completely new space, a contemporary white box gallery space lit from above, with a view to little street on the other side of the house. One recalls that this must have been the skylights seen from above from the upper floors. It seemed that they belonged to another structure, speaking some other, more contemporary language than the rest of the house. They are like two small volcanoes rising from the courtyard. Volcanoes because of their form, but also because of the charred, black wood they were covered in, as if they just stopped emitting steam and smoke. The sight of charred wood is rare in the middle of brick-laid London.

In search for hints of the history of the building, the architects found a shoebox of some 50-70 photographs in London Metropolitan Archives.<sup>6</sup> The photographs were not signed, nor tagged, but the images still tell quite a story. The images show the interiors ranging from 1905 to the mid 1970's. Especially one picture, showing a rooms that had gone up in flames in a fire in 1972, clearly marked the architects. The two images of the doorway on the first floor, once completely charred black from a fire, and today white as a resurrected ghost, has become emblematic for the architects in their presentation of the intervention. It became clear, that in come way or other, the story of this fire had to be implemented in the design. People had to be reminded, but in a subtle way. Here is where chance steps in, as one of the architects in the team—being of Japanese origin—recalls that charred wood often is used as cladding material, because it withstands hard weather and protects from fire. In the Raven Row, the charred wood visible from the gallery spaces on the upper floors, would remain as indirect proof of the fire that once had left the building deserted for over thirty years. At the same time, the burned wood reminds us of the perishability of matter, and that nature will reclaim all that we have constructed on its ground.



Raven Row, After the fire, 1972.

Raven Row, Reconstruction, 2010.





The Chicago Room.

### Travelling

When arriving at second room on the left on the first floor, we find beautifully carved wooden walls painted light grey, a bright space overlooking the Artillery Lane. Every detail seem carefully retouched, however there is one particular detail grasping one's attention. The fireplace. At first one stop to enjoy the sight of the rough and dirty bricks, and the broken stone floor which contrasts distinctly with the rest of the meticulous interior. But then, of course, one realise what it is that has caught one's attention. The fireplace is missing.

The room, now called the 'Chicago room', had been on a journey to the other side of the Atlantic Sea. Some time after the Second World War—when America had a lot of money and no history, and Europe was quite in the opposite situation—the interior of this room, as so many others, was sold to an exhibition in Chicago.<sup>7</sup> The wood boards of the walls were all removed and sent out on a voyage to the new world. In the mean time, the house—as did Spitalfields in general—faced an uncertain future. When the house was sold, and 6a architects started the transformation works, one began to search for the room that had been stripped

away. About half of the room was found stored away in Chicago, and shipped back to London in boxes. The pieces then served as prototypes for the reproduction of the other interiors that had burned during the fire. When it came back, the recollection of bits and pieces began, and it turned out that the interior did not even fit the walls anymore, as the foundation had slightly moved, and the building was no longer completely level. In the precedent search for the missing interior, the fireplace had proved itself untraceable. The architects then decided, that instead of reproducing a new fireplace identical to the one that was missing, they left the spot empty, exhibiting the bare hole where the chimney should have been, as a reminder of the incredible journey the room had taken. In this case, it is not the insertion of an object that plays the role as a 'sign' of memory, but the very absence of an object.

### Non-decisions

When considering the aspect of the unfinished aesthetic, we found that there was a relation between the unfinished or rough, and the desire for truthfulness in the architectural expression. The consideration in the case of Raven Row was that the building substance had gone through so many changes that the question of what signifies the authentic become almost absurd. One example of this kind, was considering the question of the concrete floor installed on the ground some time after the fire. Should the 'original' floor be reinstalled, or should one leave the concrete as it is? Troubled to find an appropriate answer to these questions, a number of things were simply left as they were. 6a architects called them non-decisions.

«These non-decisions followed not a design intention but a simple question: should we just leave it? One later forgets that the exposed concrete and the timber floors were barely intentional and they become no less integral to the character of the place than the parts on which thought and effort were expended. [...] They are not set up as authentic relics or given aesthetic value. They are merely unfinished and they are allowed to collide, by an objective coincidence.»<sup>8</sup>





Raven Row, the skylights clad in charred wood in the courtyard visible from the gallery.

The non-decisions clearly show an ambivalent relation to the question of truthfulness in architectural expression, and how the relation between intention and authenticity changes over time. Bits and pieces, intentional or not, slowly become an integral part of the building's identity.

### Intellectual bricolage

The Raven Row, today referring only to the gallery, and not to the entire row of houses, appears to be a carefully constructed image. Although a house, just like a person, has a vast catalogue of experiences and memories that shape them, one can also choose which parts one would like to remember, and how we want to be perceived by others. Opposed to the traditional project of conservation, the project became less an issue of reconstructing a past, but

more a venture of picking up fragments, selected memories from the past, and carefully putting them together again to a new and coherent story.

Tom Emerson describes their method of working similar to that of a *bricoleur*.<sup>9</sup> As already discussed, the notion of bricolage could be transcribed to the intellectual work of choosing between objects found in a 'stock of memories', and exposing them in a new order. The signs—the physical representation of a memory—were inspired and shaped by something existing and prior, but reinterpreted in new forms.<sup>10</sup> Irenée Scalbert talks about the reciprocal dependency old and new objects all of a sudden acquire when inspired by one another and placed in a specific relation. «Until then, new parts had been shaped after old parts, for instance the charred timber panels and the cast iron handles and railings. All of a sudden old parts seemed to depend upon new parts.»<sup>11</sup> Scalbert underlines here the mutual dependency as the binding element between the old and the new, as the objects and events are now referring to each other, and standing alone neither the old nor the new parts would make sense in an architectural whole.

The mutual dependency is somehow parallel to the previously discussed superposition of moments in time. Scalbert further emphasizes that it is not the objects, or the memories in themselves that gives the project sense and interest, but the very fact that they are colliding with each other and with the new.

«What has been documented or listed is interesting, but not as interesting as the manner in which the canvas has become interwoven. Likewise, every project involves not only what the architect makes, but also all the things that were previously made.»<sup>11</sup>

In this logic, the project takes on its own power, which is superior to the intentions of the architects. The architecture is the sum of all intentions of all architects ever to have intervened on the site, of all the people who have lived and worked there, and every incident that has marked the building. Today it presents itself as a new 'whole', which will be continued, altered, destroyed and recomposed by someone else tomorrow.

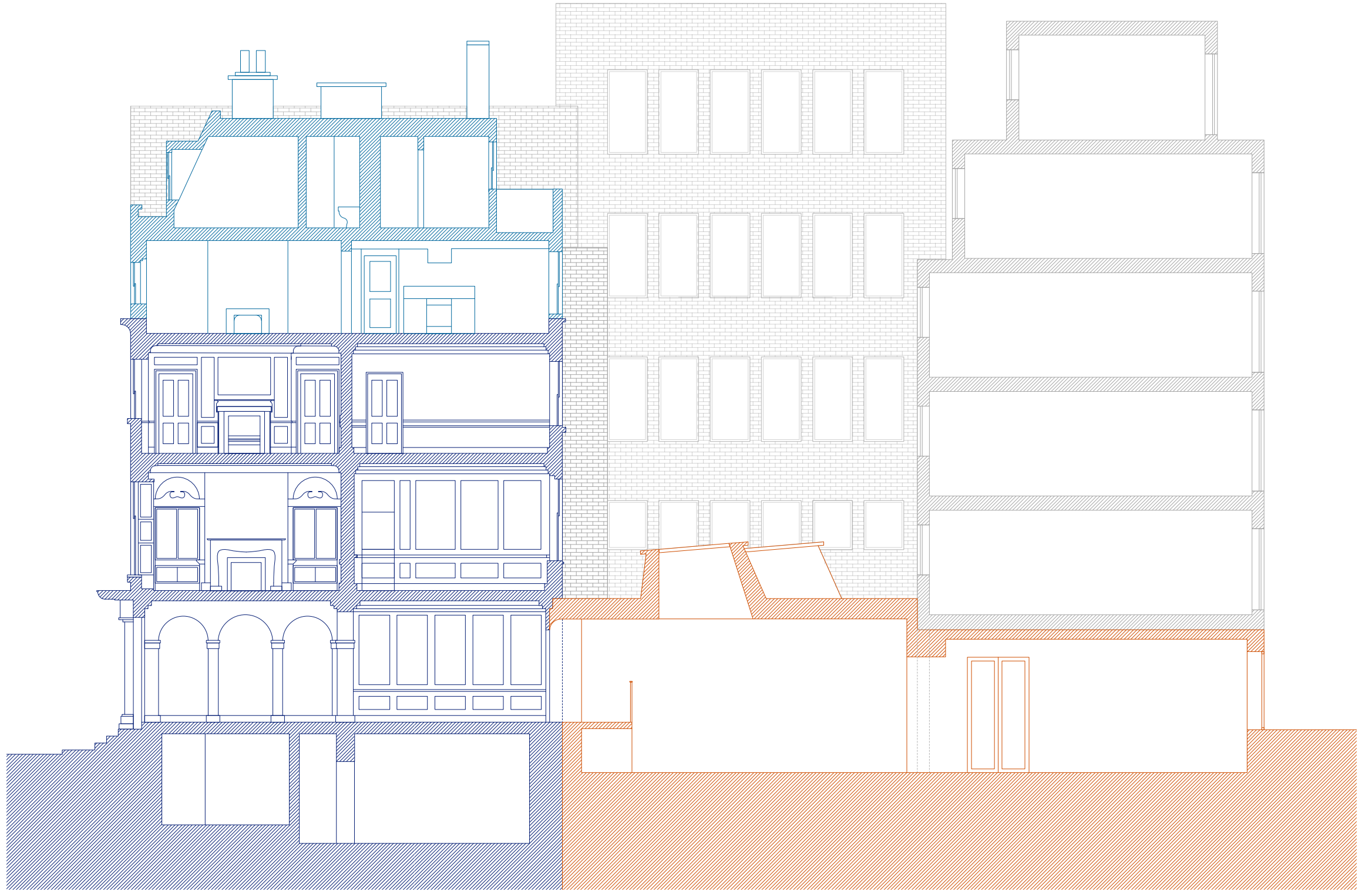
<sup>9</sup> Emerson, Tom. *We were never modern* (See note 1).

<sup>10</sup> Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *The savage mind. Chapter one: The science of the concrete*.

Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966. See 'Recomposition of fragments', p. 46.

<sup>11</sup> Scalbert, Irenée and 6a Architects. *Never Modern* (See note 7), p. 53.

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem, p. 66.



Raven Row.  
 Long section,  
 98 silk mercer's shop and new gallery extension.

1690 ———  
 1920 ———  
 2009 ———

0 1 5 m

## Fifth visit:

### St. Kolumba / Kolumba Museum, Cologne



The Chapel 'Maria in the Ruins', 1951.

### Metamorphosis

The Kolumba exhibits an architecture that in a certain way can be considered finished. Yet it tells a story of layers, one building built on the top of the other, every time finding its point of departure in the plan that was already there, and every time redefining the formal lecture of the construction. Each time the building is growing bigger in volume, enclosing the existing form, with only one little, but essential exception. Now, the contemporary form has expanded vertically rather than horizontally, and the introduction of a new material on the site implies a new type of use. When looking at the evolution of this building over time, one finds an ambiguity in the fact that it is at every instance a completed form, but in the perspective of time it can be regarded as indefinite form. At every step in history, the building undergoes a transformation, a metamorphosis, which includes something of the old and something of the new, and which after a while completely redefines the identity of the building.

### A place for contemplation

The today well-known Kolumba Museum is to be found in the heart of the city of Cologne, half way between the Ringstrasse in the west and the Rhine in the east. The massive grey brick building does at the same time blend in and stand out among the heterogeneous fabric of twentieth century buildings offering office space and commercial services. The streets around are busy with cars and shoppers. Tourists are stopping to take pictures, blocking the footpath. Weaved into the grey bricks are fragments of an old gothic church; the wall bears no windows, but is perforated with numerous small openings, all of which suggests the place to be both sacral and contemplative.

One enters into a dimly lit vestibule, which could just as much be leading to a theatre or a concert hall as to that of an art gallery. From this space, one first arrives at a larger space further into the deep of the building, where a path zigzags between slender columns of pale concrete, revealing multiple layers of ruins spread out under the path, lit by sparsely distributed spotlights. By closer inspection,

the fragments form the outline of a church with five naves. At the end of the path one get a glimpse of daylight through a door, leading to the remnants of a small room with an altar; now opening itself to the sky. Back in the vestibule, a narrow staircase entering the thickness of the wall, leads upwards, to an unknown destination. Once we arrive upstairs, a suite of smaller rooms form a contemporary art exhibition space, with light grey walls filled with paintings and prints, polished floors with installations and sculptures, large windows reaching from floor to ceiling, overlooking Cologne. At this moment, the building presents itself as a place uniting different spaces for contemplation—a church room echoed in its ruins and a connected art gallery exhibiting contemporary art—into a kind of contemporary, non-religious church. Peter Zumthor refers to the new Kolumba as a time machine, where one can travel from the busy city streets of the 21st century, back to the late gothic, and even the roman times.<sup>1</sup>

#### The Church of St. Kolumba

Through the incorporation of the building fragments into the new fabric, the building outlines the classic typology of a church that has been altered, extended, repaired and renovated several times. According to the archaeological findings, the church lies on fragments of a former roman insula of buildings originating from some time between the 1st to the 4th century A.D. History has it, that the parish of St. Kolumba, named after the *Saint Kolumba von Sens*, started expanding around this time, making the building of a parish church necessary. The traces of the first religious building built on the site, appears to have been built in early medieval times; some time between the 6th and 7th centuries—after the depart of the romans—seemingly a modified roman house, with an apsis added to it.<sup>2</sup> A new and larger church emerged from the structure of the old in the 9th century, still with one single nave. As the parish grew more populous through the medieval times, and space became scarce, the parish church was extended more or less consequently with one nave at the time, close to every two centuries up until the 15th century.<sup>3</sup> The remnants that



Kolumba, Courtyard.

<sup>1</sup> Durisch, Thomas and Peter Zumthor. *Peter Zumthor: buildings and projects. Vol. II Peter Zumthor 1985-2013*. Zurich : Scheidegger & Spiess, 2014, p. 166.

<sup>2</sup> Kraus, Stefan and Joachim Plotzek (ed.). *Kolumba. Ein Architekturwettbewerb in Köln 1997*. Cologne: Erzbischöfliches Diözesan-Museum. Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 1997, p. 65.

<sup>3</sup> Ibidem, p. 32.



St. Kolumba and the newly built Hotel Disch, 1930.

St. Kolumba in ruins after March 1945.



we can see in the facades today are fragments of a gothic church completed some time in the late 1400, and known as the Church St. Kolumba since then. At the time, the parish was at its most populated—counting 8000 souls—a fifth of the Kolumba district's population. The inhabitants of the St. Kolumba parish were at this time of the more wealthy; merchants, aristocrats and officials, who contributed to the building of the fifth nave on the north side, as well as considerable investments in decorations, such as altars, sculptures and paintings.<sup>4</sup> A significant change in religious practice came with the Reformation through the fifteen hundreds. There was a shift in the social status of the population of the Kolumba district, as well as a general weakened position of the church. Since the age of Enlightenment, the number of souls in the parish went slowly, but surely down, reaching 1500 souls by the time of the First World War. The result was a more restricted church economy, which lead to the fact that the parish church remained practically unchanged for almost 500 years.<sup>5</sup>

#### A Madonna remains

Following the destructions of the church, caused by the extensive bombings of Cologne during the Second World War, a statue of the holy mother of God remained the only first hand witness. The church was completely damaged during the air raids; first losing its wood roof structure in a fire in 1942, and later bombed to ruins in several attacks in 1945. During the war, all removable objects were taken and stored in safety in the cellar of the neighbouring Hotel Disch, but the church itself was beyond rescue. At the end of the war, the only remnants of the church was the external south and north walls on the ground floor, the sacristy, and a stone pillar with the mentioned Madonna attached to it, overlooking the ruins.<sup>6</sup> The Madonna became a symbol of hope in the midst of all despair, and the ruin a place for contemplation and grief. She was considered a contemporary witness, being the only one who could fully understand and acknowledge what had happened. «Only this tremendously majestic visage of the Madonna remains, that each day looks into this immeasurable suffering, a suffering who's ultimate reality only she can know.»<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Kraus, Stefan and Joachim Plotzek (ed.).

*Kolumba. Ein Architekturwettbewerb in Köln 1997* (see note 2), pp. 38-39.

<sup>5</sup> Ibidem, p. 45

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, pp. 47-49.

<sup>7</sup> «Es blieb nur dies auch jetzt noch überaus hoheitsvolle Antlitz der Frau, die in das masslose Leid der Tage blickt, in ein Leid, um dessen letzte Wirklichkeit einzig sie allein wissen kann.» Franz A. Hoyer. Geleitwort. Cited in: 'Kolumba. Ein Architekturwettbewerb in Köln 1997' (see note 2), p. 52.

Following this traumatic event, the discussion circled around a removal of the Madonna, bringing her to safety from the open air and the unstable ruins. The building of a chapel and a memorial for the victims of the war was decided. A commission was given to the young architect Gottfried Böhm, to make a design for a small chapel dedicated to the Madonna; it appears, while waiting for a decision of the future of the ruins. His initial idea was to build a light tent-like structure of slender concrete columns, and glass around the remaining pillar with the Madonna, making it the focal point of the chapel. During an eventual later reconstruction of the church, the glass around the chapel would be removed, and the former chapel would become the main altar in the new church.<sup>8</sup> However, the vision of reconstructing the gothic church was abandoned, because of high costs and lacking support in the parish. The chapel dedicated to the *Madonna in den Trümmern*—meaning ‘The Madonna in the Ruins’—was erected in 1950, and remains an important memorial for the war victims of Cologne, in correspondence to Böhm’s initial design. The chapel was somehow conceived as temporary structure, welcoming an eventual later intervention on the site, and for the first time, the new structure did not aim to enclose all the existing fragments. The building of the chapel was not regarded as a definite new formal configuration, but a ‘band-aid’ on a wound, while waiting for the wounds to grow. In the mean time, the ruins of the church lied under the open skies, allowing for nature to regain the possession of the remnants by growing moss and trees, and for the public to be reminded of what was once lost.

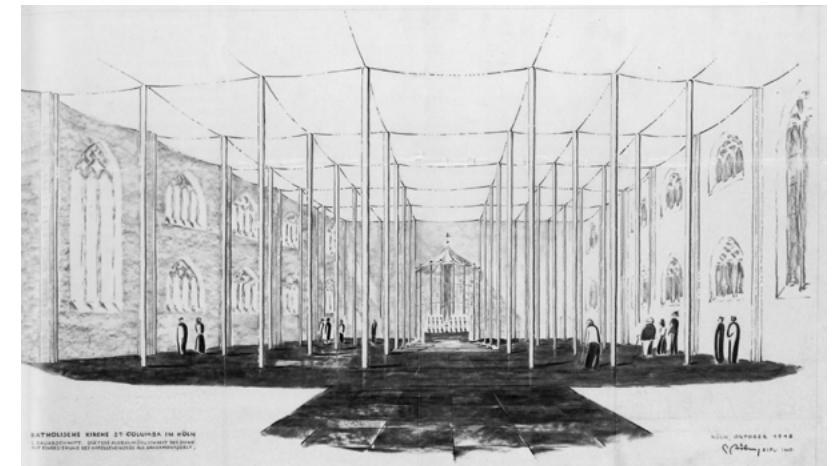
### Filling in the void

The Kolumba-quarter has consequently since the early medieval times been a religiously important centre, and still is a part of the place’s identity. The conception of the Kolumba Museum, as we see it today, appears to be based on—if not a reconstruction of the church—a fill-in of the volumetric void that remained after the ruined church, a completion of the city block. Peter Zumthor writes about this in his description of the competition proposal:



The Madonna in the Ruins, 1946.

Gottfried Böhm, Chapel for The Madonna in the Ruins, sketch, 1948.



<sup>8</sup> Voigt, Wolfgang (ed.). *Gottfried Böhm (aus der Sammlung des DAM, Deutsches Architekturmuseum, Frankfurt am Main)*. Berlin : Verlag Jovis, 2006, p. 85.



«The new construction rises on the walls of the existing and gains its form through the binding of the fragmented and heterogeneous into a new whole, to extend and to combine according to the logic of its function.»<sup>9</sup>

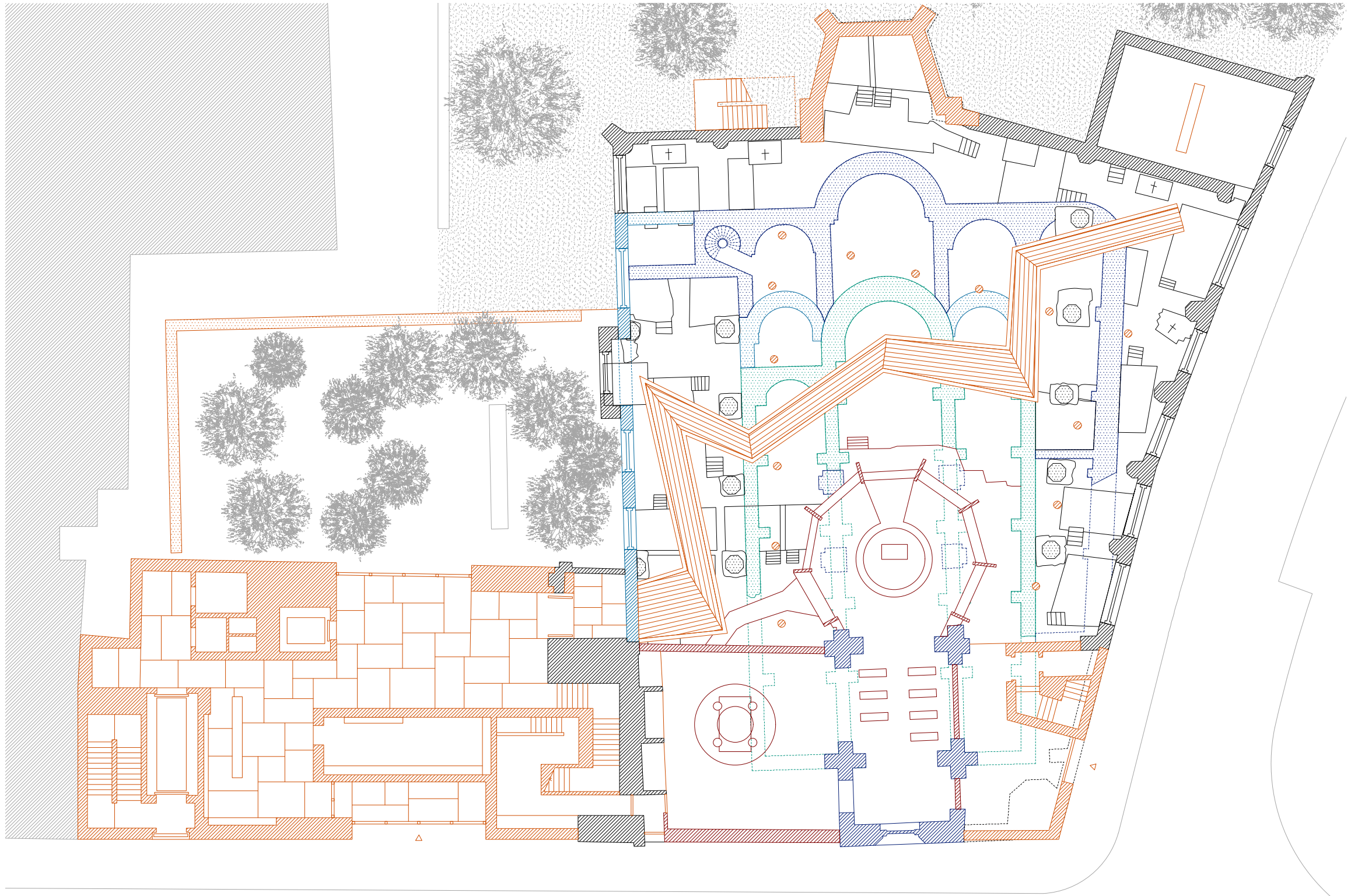
Zumthor is speaking about a whole, a logic to be found in the fragments of old bound together by the new matter. As opposed to the many other proposals for the museum—where the reaction to the existing and somewhat heavy material were the proposition of light, contrasting forms and structures—Zumthor went for a unifying strategy, looking for harmony and homogeneity, and not the contrast between the old and the new.<sup>10</sup> The work is impeccably and respectfully realised, not a single stone of the remaining church has been removed, the new and old is interweaved, but still separately

<sup>9</sup> «Der Neubau erhebt sich auf den Grundmauern des Bestandes und gewinnt seine Form, indem er die neue bauliche Masse dazu verwendet, das Fragmentarische und Heterogene nach der Logik seiner Funktion in das neue Ganze einzubinden, es zu ergänzen und zusammenfassen.» Zumthor, Peter. From the competition description, cited in 'Kolumba. Ein Architekturwettbewerb in Köln 1997' (see note 2), p. 126.

<sup>10</sup> Durisch, Thomas and Peter Zumthor. *Peter Zumthor: buildings and projects. Vol. II Peter Zumthor 1985-2013* (See note 1), p. 165.

readable. One can argue that the aim of this work is to unify fragments of different times into one whole. It is to repair a wound, or somehow complete the 'unfinished'. The presence of unfinished is in the case of Kolumba was not something that the architect had chosen voluntarily, but a result of an unpredictable event. One could also argue, that conscious play with the aspect unfinished does not inscribe in Zumthor's method of working. The unfinished situation had already imposed itself, and the architectural question became rather how to reassemble the fragments, than to welcome the ambiguity that the unfinished provides.

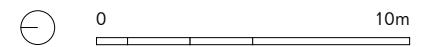
The unfinished in Kolumba, does not relate to form only the way we see it today, but how the form has constantly changed and evolved over the course of time. The unfinished relates to temporality; that what we understand as definite and complete today can be put back into question tomorrow. Visiting the Kolumba Museum today is a rich and complete experience, and we hardly imagine how this place will be in a hundred or two hundred years. We tend to think that the way we see the architecture today, is the way it will remain forever. The Church St. Kolumba was a result of constant extension and renovation for over 900 years, and one could imagine that it was at all times understood and perceived as 'complete', or finished form, by its contemporaries. In 1930, who would have thought that 70 years later, one would find an art museum here? The events leading to a fragmentation of the whole can be—as in the case of Kolumba—impossible to predict. Now it is again complete, but in a different way than last time, with a stark image and a strong voice. But this voice that will surely also weaken over time, the new will soon become old, and unforeseen events will again put the architectural definition—and the form—back into question.



Church St. Kolumba / Kolumba Museum.  
Plan, ground floor.

110 Entrance, vestibule, Chapel and excavations.

800/1050*		1480*	
1150*		1950	
1230*		2007	





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