

# CITIES IN TRANSITION

● Sustainability

● Formal and informal settlements

● Memory of places



La scuola di Pitagora  
editrice



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editrice



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Number one

## **Collana FAU**

Founded and directed by Florian Nepravishta

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# CITIES IN TRANSITION

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● Sustainability

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# CITIES IN TRANSITION

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**Abstract**

Could the memory be canceled? Somebody believes that erasing the symbols of the recent past history could be enough to inoculate the present, preventing the rebirth of bad periods.

Chiseling out from the buildings the stone symbols of the fascist period, smashing down the Lenin's statue, destroying the face of Saddam, taking it out on the monuments of the Civil War could be a temporary way to calm our thirst for vengeance, but memory denial – as the psychoanalysts could demonstrate – is the first step to a collective removing which blocks the drawing up process of the question. Memory, and sometimes the tradition itself, could be invented – or reinvented - for specific purposes. There are some cases where the challenge with the past is direct, obliged, site-specific based. For centuries, new buildings have been built on the ruins and foundations of previous works, using these materials in various ways. Is building not far from re-building? Anyway as architect, nor as historian nor as art critic who I am not, I suggest to consider that the presence of the past is project forming. Architecture is about carrying forward what has preceded us, providing a more advanced version of how we found it. As architect I suggest to consider that the presence of the past is project forming. Architecture is about carrying forward what has preceded us, providing a more advanced version of how we found it. We are not interested in embalming the past. We prefer to recognize its ability to accept the transformation without denying it. As personal experience I bring to IFAU17 the reconstruction of the Dom Römer quarter in Frankfurt. The case history is dedicated to the second reconstruction of the site, destroyed by bombs and by the first after war reconstruction.

*Keywords:* memory, tradition, constructing/reconstructing, identities

**Introduction**

It's a slippery slope, talking about memories and identities.

We live in a season in which monuments are bombed or erased.

This gesture is resounding.

The destruction is used for propaganda purposes.

Somebody believes that erasing the symbols of the recent past history could be enough to inoculate the present, preventing the rebirth of bad periods.

Chiseling out from the buildings the stone symbols of the fascist period, smashing down the Lenin's statue, destroying the face of Saddam, taking it out on the monuments of the Civil War could be a temporary way to calm our thirst for vengeance, but memory denial – as the psychoanalysts could demonstrate – is the first step to a collective removing which blocks the drawing up process of the question.

**Canceling or reinventing memory?****Could the memory be canceled?**

Twist of fate are always on hand. And the exit is often unexpected: sometimes the memory of the destroyed object makes stronger the object itself. Against the will of the evildoers.

The destruction reaches the opposite target, making eternal a memory which maybe wasn't worthy to be remembered for ever. Stronger than during its first life: no art critic celebrated as masterworks the carved into the side of a cliff Buddas

of Bamyán valley during their first long lasting life, but now they are anyway worldwide known and regretted, because of their destruction operated by Mullah Omar's troops (Settis, 2017). Memory, and sometimes the tradition itself, could be invented (Hobsbawm, 1983) – or reinvented - for specific purposes.

We can create a past we didn't lived, we can emphasize and reinforce a season or an era. Medina Lasanski researches about the reinvented Renaissance in Florence during the fascist period (Medina Lasansky, 2004). The author focuses on architecture and popular traditions as vehicles through which Mussolini's regime promoted and enforced the cult of a historical era that conveniently served Fascism's own political agenda and authoritarian goals. Lazanski studies how the fascists used the public spaces and the physical structures as background for spectacular stagings to build an identity politics promoting historical tourism and appropriation of the past. In her work on collective memory during the Fascist period in Italy, Lazanski studies the politicization of the past, the invention of tradition, and the globalization and commodification of tourism. In her contribution delineates how the practice of architecture practiced a selective use of the past. She exposes the urban-planning choices influenced by the cult of Renaissance in Tuscany under Mussolini and describes various Renaissance-inspired festivals demonstrating the modern process of cultural sentimentalization, and demonstrates the capacity of history to be packaged for mass consumption (Falasca-Zamponi, 2007).

The replicas are a particular aspect of memory deformation: they have the chance to recall past glories or successes. In the field of car's design this is really cool and trendy (the remake of Fiat 500, of VW Beetle or of Mini), even if side by side confrontation is merciless and we have no doubt, standing with the original one. In the architectural history the replicas had a certain success, evoking the issues related to the True, the False or the Fake. King Ludwig of Bayern reconstructs in Munich the Loggia dei Lanzi originally located just in front of the Piazza della Signoria in Florence, trying to recall – north of the Alps - the spirit of the Medici's dynasty. Not so far from the Bavarian replica of Palazzo Pitti. The Capitol in Washington imitates another successfully capital city and his main basilica (San Pietro in Rom). The Palladio's villas rebuilt in the British country are taking part to the neoclassical dream of the Aristocracy and suggesting the first step to an International Style.

There are some cases where the challenge with the past is direct, obliged, site-specific based. For centuries, new buildings have been built on the ruins and foundations of previous works, using these materials in various ways. Sometimes for so called spoliatio, redeploying trabeations and tombstones in the foundations of Byzantine or medieval walls. The ancient stones are used as building material or a ready made platforms.

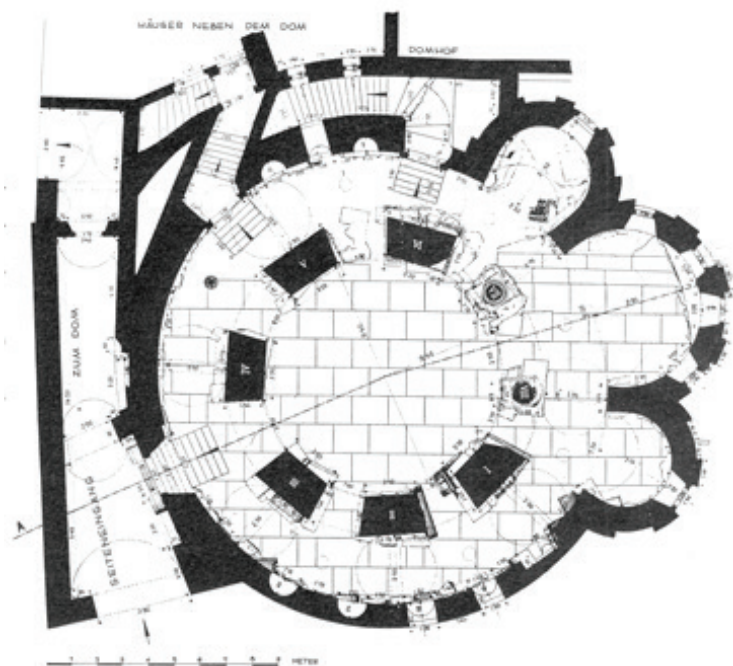


Figure 1: Survey of the Sveti Donat in Zadar (Hauser L., Bulic F.(1969). Die Donatus-Kirche in Zadar. Freiburg: Hammershmied)

All around the Mediterranean here is the experience of Naples, Arles, Nîmes, Milan, Ravenna, Split, Zadar, Thessalonica, Byzance/Constantinople/Istanbul, Amman, Aleppo, and Alessandria. We're interested in the deployment of these fragments or of these buildings as construction material for the architectural project. Sometimes reusing of old roman stones is considered or as ideological punishment against the Romans (as in Pisa) or as legitimization for new power using the fame of the Roman Empire (as in Venice). A typical example is the inclusion in new walls of upside-down-set roman stone inscriptions. Admiring them, and - at the same time - reusing them in a submitted way. Changing the sign, but exploiting the authority and the power of the monuments.

This practice is also typical for the popular cults and rituals practiced during the late Roman Empire, subsumed by the early period Christian Church, which tried to govern them, stated the inability to cancel them.

## Is building not far from re-building?

Given the above, the question could be: is building not far from re-building? Buildings such as the Orsini Palace by architect Baldassarre Peruzzi, built in Rome on the Theater of Marcellus, or the Cathedral of Syracuse, in Sicily, where the church was built in the cell of the previous Doric Hellenistic temple, all these examples demonstrate the use of a building concept not far from rebuilding. These examples are an invitation to calmly consider the trauma or the events that over the centuries have altered the buildings.

The physical presence of the ruin inevitably affecting the work of architects. In the case of the Balkans (but we could speak in the same way about Italy, Greece, Turkey) we note an extraordinary ability to fertilize with the ancient architecture the world of forms for centuries long periods. Contaminated, processed, amplified, measured and reconstructed or re-used in a second life, the classical and late classical ruins are here the material on which the landscape and the town is built in the following centuries. In Ljubljana the work of architect Joze Plecnik is dedicated avoiding the lost of memory. Maybe Plecnik reinvented the ancient Emona. His work is engaged to let remember old traces, a window, a gate, a piece of a wall, a lost topography. Once again constructing is reconstructing.

Anyway as architect, nor as historian nor as art critic who I am not, I suggest to consider that the presence of the past is project forming. Architecture is about carrying forward what has proceeded us, providing a more advanced version of how we found it. Consider, for example, how extended is the ottoman heritage in the dwelling forms of a huge region from Beograd's to Lahore?

We must recognize that memory is quite different than remembering. Remembering could be a a personal or a private gesture. Memory make sense as collective attitude. And architecture, as the town indeed, is always a collective experience.

We usually work as architects, by hypothesizing, by showing similarities, sometimes by associations or even by placing - by choice - side by side other far away buildings. Linking them to each other - comparing them - is an attitude capable of producing meaning. Did the giving-shape-to-the-memory replace the classical architectural language (Semerani, 1993)? Anyway as architect, nor as historian nor as art critic who I am not, I suggest to consider that the presence of the past is project forming. Architecture is about carrying forward what has proceeded us, providing a more advanced version of how we found it. In architecture, indeed, fast advances and antique gestures go hand in hand, the continuity is a condition, not a choice. We are not interested in embalming the past. We prefer to recognize its ability to accept the transformation without denying it.

What is the relationship between old and new, which continuity, at what distance?

These questions would be able to go beyond the absolute gap between restoration and anything-goes-project, in which the contemporary architectural debate seems to be confused.

On one side there are the supporters of total embalming implemented by mere restoration, and on the other we meet the prophets of that untidy and irresponsible design.

Is it still possible to think of a second life for old buildings?

How to use the old buildings or how to use the past to build new ones?

And where is the border between conservation and embalming?

In every project there is a necessary process of accumulation that our work from time to time composes and decomposes. As personal experience, the built one I mean, I bring to these paper the reconstruction of the Dom Römer quarter in Frankfurt.

The case history is dedicated to the second reconstruction of the Dom Römer quarter in Frankfurt am Main, Germany. The right bank of the River Main overlooks the hill where the Cathedral rises. An Outpost of Roman origin placed to protect the ford on the river. The most extraordinary Gothic quarters once standing at the foot of the cathedral recall the experience of the European city. Goethe describes it in his Faust: the tumult forced the bourgeois houses into the center of the metropolis, before the wide avenues and streets, here you have the narrow streets, the pointed gables, and a tight market of houses on all sides, and cabbage and onions and then the meat counters.

The city is built by types: two parallel walls distant the maximum of a timber beam, some passages that aren't even roads for wagons.

The Dom-Römer was shaven to the ground in 1944.





Figure 2: Building re-building at Dom Römer quarter in Frankfurt. The row houses of the side South (in the middle the wooden house by Francesco Collotti with Worzewski, Fantin, Acciai, Corrocher-picture Dettmar)

The fire after the bombing destroyed the wooden houses, but left the stone basements.

Immediately after the war, the remains and the rubble were cataloged and placed in a museum, as well as being sold by weight to private collectors. Now the City of Frankfurt has regained the old stones from collectors, finding many of the red weak sandstone house remains and some pieces of the basements in black hard basalt. During the post-war period the area was cleaned up and the quarter was poorly reconstructed in the late Fifties with a large underground parking and public buildings. Now, after a long debate, in the recent years the Municipality, who has the property of the lots, courageously decided to demolish again the post war buildings and organized an architectural competition, promoted by Dom Römer GmbH, a company of public development.

The old quarter is being resurged due to a meticulous job done by the Municipality on the plans of the old registers and on the ancient surveys of the facades. Some houses were rebuilt as they once were, where they once were. Some other houses have been composed, or recomposed, by a constant comparison with the old, but without sacrificing the new (among others architects Hans Kollhoff, Tillmann Wagner, Morger + Dettli, Berndt Albers, Jordi & Keller, Dreibund Architekten, and Francesco Collotti who is reporting the experience here).

Building here is re-building without making a copy, but seeking out the old measure and the proportion of the Gothic town while looking for a new possibility of warm life between these walls. Just a few hundred meters from the European Central Bank tower.

Building here is re-building, giving to experience of the town a slower tempo.

The quarter is crossed by the ancient route where the emperor's crowing procession was performed, in direction of the cathedral. A small altitude gap, not far from an high step, still marking the topography in front of the Schirn Exhibition Centre, the civic hall for contemporary art. For this place, the old Krönungsweg, we propose a monumental pergola in full stone blocks, properly reinforced and tensioned, cut in the red veined sandstone from the Main valley and rooted to the ground by black basaltic lava blocks.

The ancient route once lost has been rediscovered, not by reconstructing the old facades, but recomposing the sequence as a backstage. Attempting to return its lost identity (both the projects, houses and pergola, with Anna Worzewski, Valentina Fantin, Ilaria Corrocher, and Serena Acciai).

The measurements, proportions and details of the pergola stem from our basic survey of the nearby cathedral. The ancient existing stone being the project construction material.

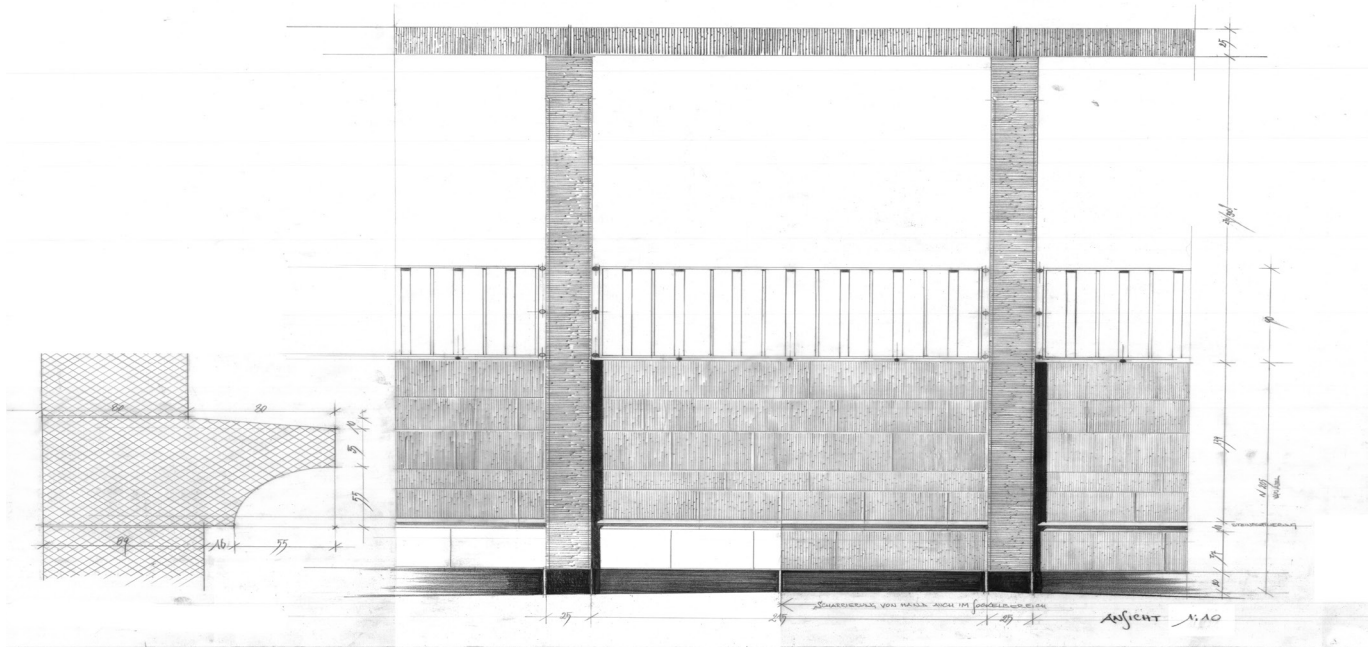


Figure 3: Recomposing the old Krönungsweg. Sketches for the monumental pergola (Francesco Collotti with Worzewski, Corrocher).

## Conclusions

Our attitude to re-read the urban phenomena and sort through the project is maybe forced to survive in fragments. For fragments of plans, of architecture, of ideas, lives the contemporary city. For fragments we can still evoke tasks often forgotten for this meter, obliging us to continue to build-up the city and landscape, relocating it with memory projection, as transfigured it may be.

The discussion is open.

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