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Visualizing Traces of Destruction
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The uncovering of a building's historical layers and the visualization of its ruin and decay has been a central theme in recent architecture. This is not only a symbolic practice connected with famous rebuilt monuments that had been destroyed in war or accident, such as Berlin's Neues Museum or the Venice Opera House. It is equally applied to more humble structures, where architects have decided to acknowledge and incorporate a ruinous condition as an intrinsic element in their design.

Our paper analyses this approach with the example of the private residence, no. 4 Linsiadar on the Isle of Lewis in the northwest of Scotland. We argue that the visualization of past decay is rooted in a nineteenth and twentieth-century approach to historic conservation as well as in the particular conditions of current architectural practice. We also argue that such visualization is an effective strategy to come to terms with the ravages of time and the inevitable temporality of any architectural work.

Our argument is situated in the recent debates over historic conservation. It is particularly the complete rebuilding of destroyed structures that has roused harsh discussions, derided as post-modern "dummy cult" by some[1] and defended as unavoidable, centuries-old practice by others.[2] It also relates to the ambivalent evolution of the heritage movement in the last decades, which along with the expansion from monument to historic ensemble to immaterial heritage experienced a waning influence connected to the gradual "destabilization of authenticity" – that is, a waning concern with real old structures.[3] We hold that while authenticity is untenable as a concept, the selective exposure of decay is a valuable response to the inherent contradictions of conservationist practice. In this respect our approach aligns with conservation as defined by the British architect Robert Maguire "retaining and, where necessary, adapting or adding to old environments, in such a way that a fresh entity is created to serve modern life."[4]

1.
No. 4 Linsiadar was built in 2011 and designed by studioKAP, Christopher Platt's architectural practice. It is a private residence, commissioned and inhabited by a couple with two teenage children. The husband is from the north of England and his wife from the island itself. The new residence was to be built on the site of a former 19th century gabled Tacksman's house built in harled stone masonry. Being unoccupied during the latter part of the twentieth century, the building's physical condition deteriorated. By the time the new house was being commissioned only the stone shell remained in a partly unstable state. The house was grade C listed and considered a significant landmark on an island with few historic structures. Tabula-rasa design was thus not an option, nor a preference for the client whose brief to the architects could be summed up with their simple and direct plea: "Do something bold with the new and the old". That opened up the possibility of the architects exploring an alternative strategy to the local tradition of ordering generic timber-framed bungalows and siting them adjacent to an already-dead stone-built croft.

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[1] Adrian von Buttlar, Gabi Dolff-Bonekämper, Michael Falser, Achim Hubel and Georg Mörsch, eds., *Denkmalpflege statt Attrappenkult* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2010)
[2] Winfried Nerdinger, in Winfried Nerdinger, Markus Eisen, Hilde Strobl, *Geschichte der Rekonstruktion – Rekonstruktion der Geschichte* (Munich: Prestel, 2010) [catalogue for an exhibit at the Architekturmuseum Frankfurt]
[3] Miles Glendinning, *The Conservation Movement: A History of Architectural Preservation* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 446.
[4] Robert Maguire, "Conservation and Diverging Philosophies" *Journal of Architectural Conservation* n. 1 (March 1997), 7-18.

In such an exposed landscape, anything vertical has a powerful presence, such as the Calanais stone circle nearby. The abstract quality of the ruined gables became the point of departure for a new architectural composition. The design strategy and redevelopment of the site included the other ruined utilitarian structures on the site. Each contributed to new external spaces as well as internal living or working environments.

The new ensemble could be compared to a three-fingered hand. The newly built house was the first finger, defining the garden to the west. The former adjacent outbuilding, converted into a workshop and store, was the second. It contained the garden and differentiated it from the smallholding beyond, which was the third, most westerly finger. The new house engages physically with the ruined shell of old structure, re-inhabiting and preserving its footprint with a raised sheltered garden, greenhouse and study tower. By integrating a new intervention within it and making a physical link, it redefines it as a wing in the new composition.

The redesign of this rural building in an extremely remote part of Scotland thus had to come to terms with a tension that in one way or another has been vexing theorists and conservationists since the beginning of the modern era. It was caught between the poles of John Ruskin's famous dictum "conserve, don't restore" and Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc's call for rebuilding destroyed structures in the spirit of the past. In its most extreme guise, the former would have entailed a twenty-first century house next to a picturesque ruin. The latter would have led to something like a miniature version of Pierrefonds Castle, the ruined fourteenth-century chateau that was famously rebuilt in the 1860s under Viollet-le-Duc's auspices.

2.

Somewhat surprisingly, the local planning department argued for the latter, namely they promoted full-scale reconstruction "in the spirit of the past." Their argument was related to an idea of tradition and commitment to local peculiarities. At the same time, it would have also been a statutory requirement that every contemporary building standard, with regards to structural stability, environmental performance, accessibility, comfort and so on, be adhered to and satisfied. The result would have been a hybrid; a nostalgic image that would breathe the spirit of the twenty-first century, similar to the much-debated Pierrefonds Castle, or at best to the lift-equipped Venice Campanile.

The planning department's ideas were not only problematic on conservationist grounds. But they were also financially not viable. One of the stone gables was in danger of collapse. Any reconstruction plan for the Tacksman's house, would have required disproportionate investment into its immediate stabilization before even considering any further building work.

3.

The designers proposed an idiosyncratic approach that nonetheless was firmly rooted in late-twentieth century theory. Context is seen as a significant. Historical and ccological awareness demands adaptive reuse, and memory is considered a resource.[4] It also draws from a set of values that since Alois Riegl have become mainstream in conservation related work. Age-value is now a cherished good. Although less noticeable in Scotland, this applies particularly to a world in which unprecedented population growth has turned the experience of old structures into something exceptional. And the art value of a historic building always has to be balanced with its use value, which in this case required the construction of new structures. These new structures were carried out in line with the principles that the Italian conservationist Camillo Boito promoted in the late nineteenth century: additions to a historic structure are permitted as long as the distinction between old and new is clearly visible.

It is particularly important that the designers considered the existing structure in its ruinous state to be of value in itself. From their point of view this value in many respect surpassed that of an intact structure. First, to use Aby Warburg's term, the disfigured artefact "bears witness

[4] This view is promoted in the classics Rossi, Aldo *The architecture of the city* [1966] (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982), Rowe, Colin and Fred Koetter, *Collage City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1978),

to its own antiquity." [5] Second, the ruin created a strong abstract physical quality that reflected a landscape already familiar with vertical stone objects. And third, the being set into and in relation to the surrounding hills, beaches, and stones, the building frames them into a landscape - landscape that only exists as a harmonic entity because it is framed as such by human observation and human intervention.

4.

Whilst no. 4 Linsiadar lacks the symbolic baggage of wartime destruction or claims for monumentality, the designers' approach is nonetheless similar to David Chipperfield's in the Neues Museum in Berlin (1997-2009) or Basil Spence's St Michael's Cathedral in Coventry (1956-62). The violent history of the building is shown rather than obliterated, and the traces of time are exposed rather than removed.

The result is a hybrid building that can hardly be described as traditional. Most importantly, the building incorporates the old as a particular collaborating element, different, but complimentary to the new; the past as something removed from the present and yet still an intrinsic part of it. Along similar lines, the building "constructs the landscape." It takes advantage of sunlight and allows for intense observation of the surroundings – qualities that no nineteenth-century inhabitant in rural Scotland would have cherished. In this respect the building constitutes the surrounding – it converts hills, meadows, and beaches into an entirety that the inhabitants perceive as a source of inspiration, as different from their domestic life, as beautiful and attractive. This is enhanced by the tower connected to the house on the upper floor. The spectacularly located tower room was initially used as a withdrawal space for the husband, later as music study for the teenage son. In both functions it combined the idea of a secluded personal space with the possibility to survey the landscape from an intimate vantage point.

5. Conclusion

The design strategy applied in no. 4 Linsiadar is not only appropriate for the present time in which, at a global level, living in an historic building has become the exception rather than the rule. It is equally significant for any environment in which the obliteration of destructive impact would mean to eradicate uncomfortable parts of history. This applies not only to buildings that stood at the forefront of political debate such as St Michael's Cathedral in Coventry or the Neues Museum in Berlin, but similarly to more humble structures that bear witness to the disruptions of the past. The visualization of past destruction allows for restoration without denying the changes of time and for conservation without giving in to the illusion of immutability. It reinstates the creative power of the designer, the acknowledgement that adaptation can create a fresh entity to serve modern life while at the same time acknowledging his or her commitment to heritage and continuity.

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[5] Jonathan Miller, *Subsequent Performances, (London: Faber and Faber, 1986) 28*