

**NATURAL VERSUS MISE-EN-SCENE**

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At a time section when the whole universe at stake has become subject for conservation, considerations for built environment have been undergoing profound changes. These considerations have striking and profound effects on conservation at different scales.

Until the middle of the Twentieth Century a single monument or a group of them was the scale for conservation. It was about the same time that transportation of individual buildings to other locations and to open air museums became the compromise when quarters of towns were torn down to be renewed. Awakening of interest and concern for urban tissue became a wider issue after the Sixties. This is the period when small towns in Europe were started to be preserved. Bath, York, Carcasson, and several other small towns can be listed in this context. In these examples, although the scale of the project is large, the individual buildings are at the heart of the conservation project.

At a further step, concern for preservation shifted from individual buildings to urban tissue. The shift of importance was from the individual building to its volume as well as its exterior features that contribute to the townscape. It meant that the spatial qualities were no more deemed worthy of conservation. This approach, which can be called *volumetric conservation*, led to the preservation of only what was related to the exterior and destruction of interiors to create completely new and different interior spaces was more suitable for the needs of the day. The Seventies and the Eighties strongly felt the impact of post modernism in countries like Turkey where the post-modern interpretation of the Turkish house took place next to the authentic. This co-existence radically influenced the conservation of individual buildings as well as the tissue.

The declaration of several towns as World City brought them to the limelight with expectations far beyond that of conservation and continuation. Although the attribute was at the scale of the “world” they became objects of local, regional, and national pride. They are now sources of prestige, but far beyond that, resources for economic activity. Tourism, especially mass tourism, which developed in the period mentioned above, becomes the major target, criterion for vital decisions, and consumer. The urban tissue becomes a tool for tourism, a tool similar to gambling casinos, similar to vantage points for the cameras. The definition of the “tourist” is wide and vague, depending on the desires of the shopkeepers, hotel owners, tour operators, planners, and the politicians. When there are so many images to create and groups to intervene, the urban tissue ends up to be an elaborate stage-set to comply with several different images set by these different and mostly conflicting parties.

The intention for display and attraction for the tourists on one hand and the overall planning and implementation on the other hand, turn these examples to spectacles of different sorts. Elaborated, enriched, and highly repeated details and retouches turn the urban tissue into a stage set. This approach and chain of targets is in no way limited to

the towns declared to world monument, but is shared in different degrees all over the world.

The effects of this phenomenon, within the historical perspective summed above, will be presented in relation to the individual building as well as to tissue and discussed in relation to the natural and make believe.

In many parts of the world, the dwellings of the conserved urban tissue have not reached our time with all the givens that contributed to their design and construction. In Turkey, the extended family house was designed to include the families of the married sons as well. Therefore the house was provided with several multi-purpose rooms, which were similar to each other. These rooms became obsolete when the family shrunk to nucleus family. The multi-purpose rooms designated as “house” to each son, were changed to be used for one function only, such as living room, dining room, etc. The house consisted of one or several outbuildings around a courtyard, like storage, stables, coach house, bath, kitchen, and W.C., besides the living quarters in a separate building. The wet services, which took place around the courtyard, were transported to the building proper, causing alterations in the spaces, effecting the horizontal and vertical circulation of the building. Changes in comfort technologies like heating and cooling, new fuels and changes in cooking, plumbing and sewage technologies imposed their own requirements and alterations in the dwellings. The last but not the least is the alterations due to the changing needs of the family. Parallel or similar changes happened all over the world geography.

An average sized house accommodated all these changes with all the furniture and equipment that accompanied, without radical interventions to the plan. In the majority of the cases the needed alterations and/or additions were moderate and not disturbing. They took place gradually, thus the individual dwellings of the urban tissue assimilated the changes in a casual and natural way. The house is the only building type, which is continuously adapted to the way of life by the technologies used, not only for construction but also for cooking, preservation of food, warming up and cooling. This adoption is itself a document to the changing ways that leave their impact on the dwellings. Unlike the public and religious monuments they do not represent sovereignty but the common the human being about whom we our knowledge will be almost nil if the above discussed interventions continue.

It can easily be said that the changing ways of life, even if they are radical, are not the reasons for the major changes and dilapidation that the dwellings suffer. The more critical factors are multiple ownership or division due to inheritance, too many families in a single family house because of need or for more rent revenue, and dilapidation due to lack of maintenance. Changing ways of life, the aspirations and clichés relating to being “modern” are to be listed as well. This had two results: either the house was abandoned and sold, or was torn down to build a new apartment building. But the reason for demolition was mostly due to land speculation or development.

Permission was freely granted for major changes in the interiors of the dwellings, as was also the case in several European countries. The renewal of the Les Halles area in Paris in the Seventies is an example to the beginning of a new trend that is still continuing: only one façade of the buildings was kept to become a screen for the completely new buildings to be constructed behind them (Figure 1).

A practice that lasted for about twenty years and later abandoned in Turkey, was to give permission to tear down timber houses, change the interior, even the number of floors and re-build with contemporary materials and techniques, which is usually concrete. What were kept were the volume and the exterior features. Creation of the *new-old* is the reflection of *volumetric conservation* to the single building scale. The *new-old* is not new, not old, not authentic, not a copy, and not a reconstruction. It is a new category of building, which aspires to be a cultural property without being a document.

Concern for the integration of the old with the new, where an infill was necessary, encouraged the use of the traditional vocabulary with a minimum concern for the harmonious integration of the old with the new. It was repeated in locations and areas other than infill. Most of the *new-old* buildings are designed for other functions; usually hotels are disguised as oversized houses. This attitude resulted in *old-new* buildings that are impossible to differentiate from the authentic next to it. Post-modernism, which enjoyed a long lasting welcome in my part of the world, is one of the responsible for this approach. The *new-old* and the *old-new*, which are more common than is realized, are the fruits of post modernism inspired by the tissue to be conserved. If they were not so closely woven with the authentic in the urban tissue they may not have been so questionable.

Desire for harmony paved the way for the old-new; it is accepted by the owners may be the prestige of owning a cultural property just because they look like the authentic. What is critical is that, within a very short span of time, the *new-old* will be treated as the authentic. The conclusions a student of architecture or art will draw from studying these buildings will in no way reflect the reality.

The *new-old* and the *old-new* are monsters of genetic mutation. They negate authenticity. They negate time, the fourth dimension of architecture. Architecture is deprived of its spaces and is assumed to consist only of a volume and an exterior features. This ironically overlaps with L. Venturi's definition of architecture at the UIA International Conference at Istanbul last July: Architecture is not space; architecture is sign. Within the scope of this definition, these buildings are signs to time unknown. The *new-old* and the *old-new* are not only negating all the values of the architecture of the past but of the present day as well. Towns, that are protected because of the tissue that the individual buildings weave, are also devoid of any architecture that reflects the present day in harmony with the existing. This is obliterating evidence and document belonging to the present day that has to pass to the future. What will remain of the present day to the future will only be a large lacuna.

At the urban tissue scale, the vocabulary of the *old-new* houses is used for buildings that have other functions and with more *mis-en-scène* approach. Façades of traditional timber houses hide completely different functions. In Bursa a house hides a water reservoir behind it (Figure 6) and another is disguised for an electric plant (Figure 7). A large-sized mansion is built as an administration building for a bank (Figure 4). The bus stations in Bursa (Figure 8) and Safranbolu (Figure 9) are treated as houses or parts of houses. If the question "how would Violet le Duc design an Ottoman bus stop?" were asked these designs would perfectly be the answer to the question. Any good willed tourist is free to return from these towns believing that the cities possessed transportation systems as old as the style of the bus stops. The ticket booth at the train station in Cartage, Tunis, is a tiny house, befitting the model discussed above (Figure 11). The

ATM machine in the suq in Tunis is a minute arched gateway; the souvenir shop in Mudurnu, Turkey, is reduced in scale to more than one half, almost to the size of a dollhouse (Figure 10). Only the door and the window opening are kept at the scale of the regular houses. In several towns, newspaper kiosks and information booths in front of hotels repeat the features of the houses at a reduced scale. On the other end of the scale is a new school in world city Safranbolu, that looks like a house but extends half the length of a street. In all the above-discussed cases the design language is reduced to the vocabulary of houses only, it becomes very basic and naive, as the vocabulary of a two-year-old child.

Interventions to the urban tissue that are not related to the buildings are for make-believe. The *mis-en-scene* effect is more obvious in streets specially treated as show pieces. These will be discussed from the less to the more imaginative examples.

In the first group color is used to enhance the impact and create harmony. One of the earliest examples of this approach is around the Seventies, in Kreuzberg, Berlin (Figure 1). The façades of blocks were chosen to match each other and enhance the perspective of the street. The Turkish forerunner is the Soğukçeşme Street in Istanbul (Figure 2,3). The houses lean onto the back of the Topkapı Palace wall and face the exterior wall Santa Sophia. Permission was given for re-building, keeping the exterior and changing the interior to use all the houses together as a hotel. The new-old buildings were painted to different shades of green, beige, pink, and purple. None of these colors matched the original colors of the houses. The success of this pleasantly recreated Ottoman street has led to the repetition of the experience in several other towns. In Bursa, during facelifting applied to some groups of houses, the chosen color scheme was less sophisticated as pink, yellow, and blue. The plain light colors used on the façades of these Bursa houses aim at reminding the “faded images of the romantic past”. The beautifying touches also included addition of window lattices, shutters, knockers, and flowerpots. Generally, change in color of a continuously used building, like a house, depends on the choice of the owner or the user. The bloom of very bold and imaginative color schemes and designs on the façades of the Victorian houses in U.S.A., nicknamed the “painted ladies”, is of this sort, not overlooking its “fashion” aspect. In all the examples given above, the decision is made for all of at one stage, to enhance the overall effect of a group of buildings or a street.

Blank walls that were once party walls between two buildings, as well as plain exterior walls are being painted. They are treated as canvasses for painting; to produce an image related to the particular building or any other subject. This very wide practice all over the world is really the least harmful because the paintings are mostly reversible and can always be removed without much damage. Some of these paintings are directly related to the tissue because they aim to create impression beyond the existing. The warehouses near the New Tate Gallery in London are given the guise of town houses by lightly painting on the wall surfaces (Figure 12). Looking from the other side of the Thames, the waterfront full of old warehouses they give the impression a neat neighborhood with three story houses. Some of these paintings have more elaborate scenarios. In Bursa, the small park opposite one of the oldest mosques of the town is delineated with a traditional house on one side (Figure 13). Two smaller buildings with pitched roofs are painted on its side facing the park. The taller one is in two shades of blue and the smaller one on the left is painted in bright yellow. At a first look, it is not possible to decipher what it is. A

rather good guess is that it could be part of a stage design or outdoor set that remained from a movie set. A further investigation reveals that the house that stands alone now, was part of a row of houses. With this information, it can be imagined that the painted houses reflect the presence of the missing houses of the row, or they try to hint that there was something there in the past. But the window and door openings on the yellow house negate this assumption since side windows cannot take place on party walls. The door and the windows are in actual size and they are constructed, not painted. They do not seem to be opened later to benefit from the new position of the party wall that became an exterior wall, because all openings are blind. This shows that they are only built to complete the décor of the painted houses. The décor goes a step further by matching the already existing windows of the house with the false ones, most probably to emphasize the “real” quality of the “make-believe”.

There is a 17<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman commercial building, Bali Paşa Hanı near to the park discussed above (Figure 14). The building, which has lost some of its parts, has been excavated and consolidated in early Nineties. The remaining part of the building has been given a new function. The multi-story galleries of the building have been lined with tables covered with red table clothes, decorated with flower-filled vases, and white chairs placed around them. The building has been turned into a charming coffee house with a very pleasant view of the old town. One may make the mental note of drinking a coffee at an opportune time there. However, this place misses its costumers since there is no one there at any time of the day. It is a stage set prepared for the summer and taken down when the show season finishes. The arches of the gallery have been turned into a proscenium arch, curtains open, complete with its décor but there are no actors to perform in front of it.

In several towns, street furniture assumedly of a date befitting the setting is used. In the Yeşil Köşk Hotel in Istanbul, which is a new-old mansion converted to a hotel, the lampposts in the courtyard are copies of those in the Dolmabahçe Palace. In Alanya, the lampposts that are erected on the narrow streets cannot claim to belong to any period or location but it certain that they are not contemporary. Carriages that are operated by drivers in costume also belong to implications to the past of the town. In several cases there are also actors to complete the set. Several squares and open areas in front of important monuments are used as background for actors performing in costumes of the time of the setting. The two young boys playing violin in Krakow, Poland (Figure 16), the gentleman in Vienna (Figure 17), and the gladiators in front of Coliseum in Rome are the actors to enliven the stage-set (Figure 18).

The examples given above, in different degrees aim at producing an environment which gives clues beyond the reality, ranging from loosely copying to dress rehearsals at an open air theatre. In all variations, the town becomes a background to plays or other activities. In these towns the inhabitants are only passer by, not part of the show. All these stage tools to create something “as if it were” distances the individual from the everyday life, which is going on and turns it to show days and off days, like the coffee house set in Bursa. The life in the city is oriented to the onlooker, the tourist, and not to the resident.

All that is discussed to this point is what can be discussed within the limits of conservation and most serving tourism. Beyond this point the impact of tourism on the exceptional and better preserved areas, world heritage/world city or not, is much more

wild and uncontrollable. It is not a prediction to say that architects and planners involved in conservation has to spend much more effort to tame tourism to conserve the world cities.

**Figures:**

1. The area around Centre Pompidou, Paris, 1979
2. Soğukçeşme Street, Istanbul, Turkey, before conservation, 1962
3. Soğukçeşme Street, Istanbul, Turkey, after conservation, 1987
4. Old-New Faisal Finance Building, Bursa, Turkey, 1989
5. New hotel building, Antalya, Turkey, 1993
6. The house-water reservoir, Bursa, Turkey, 1990
7. The power station near Tophane Park, Bursa
8. The bus stop at Yeşil, Bursa, Turkey, 1990
9. The bus stop in Safranbolu, Turkey, 2003
10. Souvenir shop in Mudurnu, Bolu, Turkey, 2004
11. Ticket control booth at the train station, Cartage, Tunis, 2001
12. Painted warehouses, London, Great Britain, 2004
13. Painted houses on the side of the house opposite the Yıldız Park, Bursa, Turkey, 1990
14. The coffee shop inside Bali Paşa Han, Bursa, Turkey, 1990
15. Bus and the carriage, Warsaw, Poland, 2004
16. Violin concert, Krakow, Poland, 2004
17. Gentleman-guide, Vienna, 2003 (courtesy of G. Asatekin)
18. Gladiators, Coliseum, Rome, Italy, 2003 (courtesy of G. Asatekin)

