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Twice-Told Tales - About Love Toward Immortality

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Abstract

Aside from design, adaptive reuse in architecture is underpinned by a complex interplay of aesthetic, historical, environmental, and economic considerations. This paper discusses the rationale behind salvaging old structures rather than opting for demolition and new builds, examining three key aspects: Firstly, architecture transcends mere functionality, encompassing history, memory, and 'human desire'¹ to shape the built environment. Old buildings serve as historical witnesses, embodying² a narrative that contributes to the cultural richness of their surroundings. Secondly, the sustainability imperative favors the salvage of existing structures over demolition, acknowledging the embodied tangible and intangible resources and energy within them. Finally, the intrinsic value of irreplaceable elements such as traditional construction methods, spatial experiences, and authentic materials underscores the unique character of old buildings. Critical to the success of adaptive reuse projects is meticulous documentation, serving as a vital tool for architects, designers, and preservation experts. But most importantly, adaptive reuse allows architecture to retell historical and contemporary stories multiple times.

Keywords: Adaptive Reuse; Architecture; Building Documentation; Memory, Storytelling.

1. Introduction

Integral to the broader architectural discourse, this paper begins with an emphasis that adaptive reuse transcends conventional sustainability metrics, extending into a framework that reexamines history and fosters a fresh understanding of ancient or simply bygone sites and buildings (Amen, 2021; Amen et al., 2023; Sansen et al., 2021; Ülker et al., 2021; Yilmaz, 2021). Kontozoglou and Wang (2021) emphasize the evolution from old to new, illustrating how preservation connects to sustainability. Within this context, adaptive reuse embodies a philosophical dimension, rooted in our relationship with nature³ and the role of memory, which serves as the foundation for poetic storytelling, where each retelling unveils a new interpretation, shaped by time and perception. Above all else, the phrase 'poetic storytelling' is used throughout the paper. Why are these words, 'poetic' and 'storytelling,' central to adaptive reuse? In his book "Nineteen Ways of Looking at Wang Wei," Weinberger (2016) underscores the importance of the word -- poetic, explaining how the essence of a poem changes with each retelling, influenced by time and the perspectives of the storyteller and the listener (p. 46). Drawing on Weinberger's description, this can illustrate how adaptive reuse can be executed, highlighting the holistic engagement with repurposed buildings from their documentation and design to eventual occupation. At each stage of interaction, unique and evolving experiences are communicated. Moreover, Pérez-Gómez (2008) frequently employs the term "poetic" in architectural discourse. Given its etymological origin "*poiesis*," which describes the perpetual creation of something new into existence, the term 'poetic' suggests transcending practicality through the lens of the hermeneutic tradition – interpretation and translation – where no two meanings are equal in translation. This, once again, is pivotal for expanding the significance of adaptive reuse to encompass the notion of rewriting and retelling history.

The call to transcend conventional sustainability metrics has been underscored on numerous occasions by architects and industry experts, getting widespread consensus. Lucy Taksa (2007) talks about the importance of "not only the

¹ Desire, in reference to love (eros), which Pérez-Gómez explains as "our greatest gift" that has shaped the built environment from the beginning of our time. (Pérez-Gómez, 2008, p. 3)

² Embodying narrative in reference to Embodied Perception; Merleau-Ponty argued that perception is not a passive reception of sensory data by a disembodied mind, but an active, embodied engagement with the world. The stories thus embody experiences and interacts with the world. (Merleau-Ponty, 2002)

³ Our relationship with nature evolves and transforms from the sacred view of nature in Medieval times, to the logical conquest of the Renaissance, to the contemporary belief in quantifying nature empirically.

preservation of their tangible remains but also the approach taken to the interpretation of their intangible cultural heritage (p. 1).” Taksa (2007) demonstrates the challenge of preserving intangible aspects, as seen in the Ipswich Workshop. She considers it the most successful in safeguarding intangible heritage among the four case studies she discusses in her paper, “Nostalgia or Nostophobia? Trends in the interpretation of Australia’s railway industrial heritage. Interpretation Australia Conference.” She explains that even Ipswich Workshop project, it fails to acknowledge “the psycho-social benefits of preserving and interpreting this site for current and future generations, [and] no mention is made of the industrial struggles undertaken by Queensland rail workers against poor conditions at Ipswich nor of their hard-won improvements (p. xxxvii).” Many others have proposed various approaches of a similar tone, and while most agree with this approach, they are often unclear on how to put them back into not just practice, but also theory⁴. Based on this observation, the question addressed in this paper is: How does storytelling manifest in adaptive reuse projects, and can it inform the mood, spatial layout, material composition, and other architectural elements to make them comprehensible and engaging for their audience? How do new designs communicate with existing conditions where stories of the past are embodied in the building, waiting to be revealed? The answers to these questions do not all lie in the tangible.

To respond to those questions, the Bob Carr Theater in Orlando - Florida, will serve as a case study employing a mixed methodology, including documentation and its interpretation. First, the documentation reveals the different layers of time embedded within the theater building. Although identifying a clear distinction between old and new building components is preferred, they often blend together on-site. Achieving this separation may prove challenging, as past design and construction practices prioritized pragmatic concerns over delineating distinct historical periods. Or, to put it bluntly, the architects and engineers failed to grasp the significance of their roles as storytellers tasked with crafting stories for future generations to appreciate. When documentation effectively compares old and new constructions, this can inspire future designs to allow old and new to interact while remaining distinct. Historical continuity does not need to become singular in meaning and design. Plevoets and Van Cleempoel (2011) proposes that this can be achieved by employing the three methods suggested by Brooker and Stone (2004) for design intervention in adaptive-reuse projects: interventions, incisions/intersections and installations. The objective is to offer theoretical, and perhaps some practical, insights and recommendations for architects and industry experts, facilitating informed decisions regarding the adaptation and reuse of this building, or buildings in similar condition.

The structure of this paper comprises an introduction, five subtopics, and a conclusion. The conclusion underscores the importance of addressing a key aspect in adaptive reuse projects, adopting **the paradoxical concept of "the history of the present"** as a proposed design methodology, a concept frequently evident in the work of Carlo Scarpa. The expectation is to bring the old into current relevance without compromising, repeating, or mimicking it, allowing the old and new to coexist as historical witnesses. These five subtopics include memory, storytelling, documentation/interpretation, the Bob Carr Theater (a case study), and the history of the present.

2. Memory

In his seminal work "The Ten Books of Architecture," Vitruvius presents a trio of what he deemed the fundamental principles of architecture: *Firmitas* (Firmness, Strength), *Utilitas* (Utility, Function, Program), and *Venustas* (Beauty) (Trans. Morgan, 1960, p. 2, Book-1, Ch. III). Kontozoglou and Wang (2021, p. 5) point out that the elements of memory and site are notably absent from his discussion. They argue that Vitruvius did not overlook these aspects, because in Greek and Roman societies, the concept of memory was so ingrained in everyday life that explicit mention was unnecessary (Yates, 1966, pp. 2–3).

The citizens were trained in the art of memory. As a method for orators to memorise their speeches, they would recall an everyday journey through a familiar place, their house or street or hometown, and place in particular locations within it the crucial elements of their speech. Because of their familiarity, these were the best keepers of one’s new memories. In order to recall them, all one had to do was to walk through the house, or down the street or across the town and pick up every item from the niche where it had been placed. (Wang, Kontozoglou, 2021, p.5)

⁴ The term *praxis* is not used to avoid misunderstanding that all theory must be translated into practice. Pérez-Gómez explains that Vitruvius term, “*fabrica et ratiocinatione*”, has been reduced “practice vs. theory” or even worse, “craftmanship vs. technology.” (Pérez-Gómez, 2016, p. 45)

Vitruvius might have assumed that his readers already understood the significance of site in architectural design. This inference comes from the inherent relationship of site and the buildings being erected in those eras, as well as its broader contextual aspects such as cultural context and historical significance, all of which were intrinsic to Greek and Roman societies. However, Hui Zou (2016, p.117) contends that memory is, in fact, addressed in Vitruvius's *The Ten Books on Architecture* (1st century BC), but it is not included alongside the trio fundamental principles of architecture. In Book V, when discussing about the location and design of theaters, Vitruvius mentions about memory. He contrasts the characteristics of historical writing, poetry, and architectural writing, suggesting that while history offers new insights and poetry conveys emotions, architectural writing imparts knowledge intended for 'memory.'

Many years later, in *The Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects; Le Vite de' Piu Eccellenti Pittori Scultori et Architettori* (2007; 1550, Vol.1; 1568, Vol.2), Giorgio Vasari uses the term *architettori* for the first time, referring to it as a new profession and school of thought. He describes architecture as the mother of all arts. In Hesiod's *Theogony*, the mother of all arts is named Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory. Thus, architecture, the mother of all arts, finds unity with 'memory' in the figure of Mnemosyne. In adaptive reuse, memory is inseparable.



Image-1: the image of Mnemosyne in an etching, titled "Amor Poeta Et Mnemosyne Musarum Mater" (Cupid and the Muses), by Pietro Santi Bartoli (1635-1700), after Raphael D'Urbino (1483-1520).

3. Storytelling

What purpose does memory serve if not shared through storytelling? With countless stories waiting to be told, even from the most mundane building in the most ordinary place, it is an opportunity for architects to tell a story through adaptive reuse. Storytelling can begin with describing "what's there" at a specific moment in time, encompassing both tangible and intangible aspects, and then crafting another story from recollections of that place. The past participates in the story and the present shares its responsibility to preserve the past. Storytelling serves as a means to reveal truths that deepen our understanding of who we are as human beings. Rushdie (1990) explains that "we need stories to understand ourselves" (p. 20). Without stories, we lose our purpose in life. In his novel, "Haroun and the Sea of Stories," Rushdie (1990) presents the journey of Haroun Khalifa, the protagonist, a young boy who embarks on an adventure to restore his father Rashid Khalifa's storytelling abilities. Rashid, known as the "Shah of Blah" or the "Ocean of Notions," is a famous storyteller who suddenly loses his gift of storytelling after his wife Soraya leaves him. Haroun, feeling responsible for his father's plight, sets out to help him regain his lost talent – storytelling. Similarly, architects have a common quest to restore old buildings to retell their stories.

One could say, without too much resistance, that we all love stories. In fact, Rushdie claims that we are born from and for stories. Thus, stories are indeed ingrained in our very nature. Stories serve to validate the significance of our existence, affirming that our lives matter and have meaning. Although related, stories and history are distinct from each other, and the lines between them are sometimes blur. While history often emphasizes the past, stories connect us across barriers of time⁵, place, cultures, and beliefs. Stories enable us to acknowledge both our differences and, most importantly, our similarities. There isn't anyone whom one couldn't come to love once exposed to their stories, which evoke our care for them or for the things that hold significance. In this way, stories connect us as members of humankind. The role of history serves as both a measure and a tool that enables us to understand the context of our stories.

In the introduction, reading and translating a poem were used to describe how adaptive reuse can be conducted. Storytelling can also be likened to the numerous translations of a poem, reflecting Roland Barthes's theory of the text. Translation is a reimagining of the poem... Each reading of a poem is an act of translation, integrating it into the reader's intellectual and emotional world. The same poem cannot be read in the same way, mood and perception twice (Zou, 2019, p. 112). Twice-told tales, stories are retold more than once, yet they cannot be told twice with the same meaning. In essence, adaptive reuse could also be seen as a poetic act, transcending mere occupation of an unused architectural volume for pragmatic efficiency. Through adaptive reuse, architecture incessantly retells our stories in a multitude of ways, with the narrative taking its own unique turn in any given moment.

In adaptive reuse, this process of discovery is ongoing, starting with documentation, proceeding through the demolition of certain parts, adding new elements to existing structures, and ultimately inhabiting them. The stories should not be imported into, but rather uncovered and revealed from the place. The subsequent steps rely on the success of the initial stage, documentation, which resembles an archaeological act involving uncovering and discovering. It continually yields new information about what is being documented. Demolition embodies a decision between erasure and revelation, unearthing what lies buried beneath while preparing for new elements to be introduced to the site. Additions must be made with utmost care, ensuring they enhance rather than compromise the integrity of the stories from the structure and site. The stories being uncovered, told and re-told are constantly transforming and never singular.

⁵ Heidegger argues that conventional conceptions of time as a linear succession of moments (past, present, future) are inadequate for capturing the existential experience of time. Instead, he proposes that time is characterized by the interconnectedness of past, present, and future within the existential structure of Dasein. (Heidegger, 2010)

4. Documentation/Interpretation

In his book "The Archaeology of Knowledge" (1982), Michel Foucault introduced a departure from traditional historical methods focused on uncovering a linear progression or coherent narrative. Instead, he adopts approaches used by archaeologists, emphasizing the significance of grasping the underlying structures and systems shaping knowledge production and their evolution over time. Therefore, in this research, the documentation process aligns with the archaeological approach, emphasizing the understanding of these dynamic structures and systems, both tangible and intangible, obvious and concealed. Foucault's approach revolutionized our perspective on history by introducing archaeology as his method of historical inquiry, viewing it as a means of examining the remnants of the past to construct a 'history of the present.' Through this approach, an archaeologist documents, identifies, understands, and interprets the processes that have shaped our current state—methodically but not necessarily in a linear fashion.

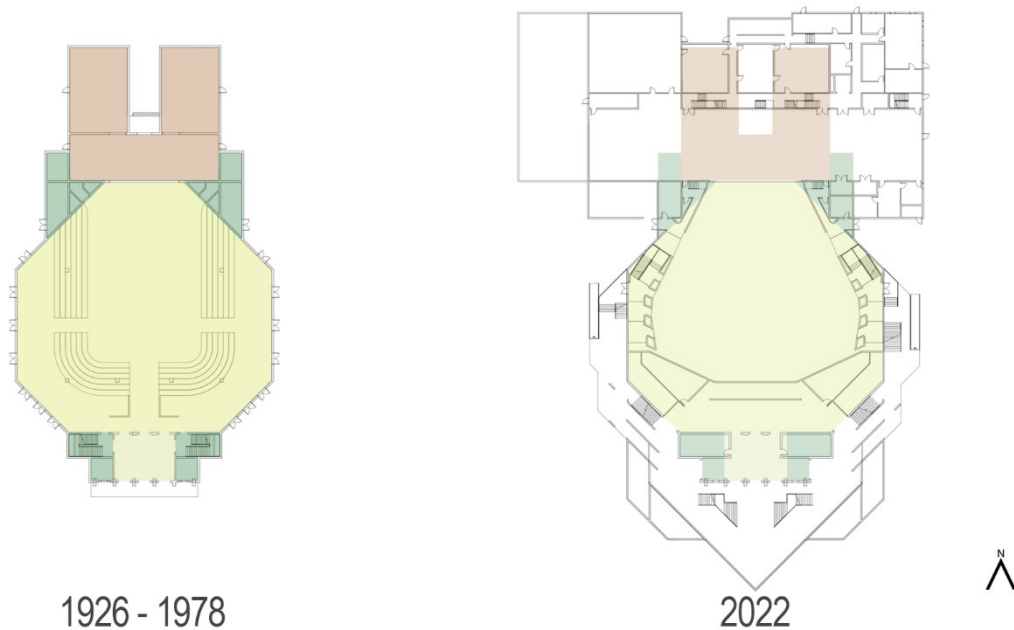


Image-2: Floorplans in 1926-1978 and 2022. Drawing by: William Pawlack.

Building documentation begins with conventional textual and graphic records, gathering information and eventually embracing interpretation⁶ (Gadamer, 1989) to enrich understanding, allowing for multiple alternative perspectives. Demonstrating how historical comprehension of a building can infuse seemingly ordinary projects with new vitality, documentation and its interpretation lay the groundwork for innovation. This phenomenon finds exemplification in Carlo Scarpa's work, where he meticulously documents, uncovers, and reveals context, enabling him to layer, incise, cut, remove, and juxtapose his designs upon or into it. In his adaptive reuse projects, matching and imitating are absent from his vocabulary; instead, there exists dissonance and syncopated design decisions, yet all contradictions are complementary, offering poetic narratives retold differently each time one encounters his work. Scarpa allows the context to celebrate his new designs, and vice versa, maintaining separate yet interconnected relationships between the context and his design, between an existing old building and his new design. Each design preserves its details as individual complex systems, but in constant interaction with each other – resurrected and impatient to tell the forgotten stories.

To establish the foundation for this hybrid methodology combining documentation and hermeneutic interpretation, this paper engages in a case study analyzing a documentation project for a historic building located in Orlando, Florida: the Bob Carr Theater. Supported by a grant from The Florida Department of State, this documentation initiative serves as a compelling illustration. As Bob-Carr theater approaches the end of its lifespan, the building is

⁶ Hermeneutic interpretation (Gadamer, 1989)

situated in a precarious position between preservation and demolition—not quite suitable for preservation, yet too valuable for outright demolition. Throughout its history, the theater has undergone numerous renovations, often lacking a nuanced understanding of the necessity to delineate distinct layers from different periods. Consequently, many design and construction decisions inadvertently blur the lines between past and present. The primary concern lies in the blending of old and new elements without clear differentiation of their respective temporal layers (re. Image-2, temporal layers are often blur).



Image-3:
The original façade of the theater (1926)
Source: Orange County History Center Archive Photos

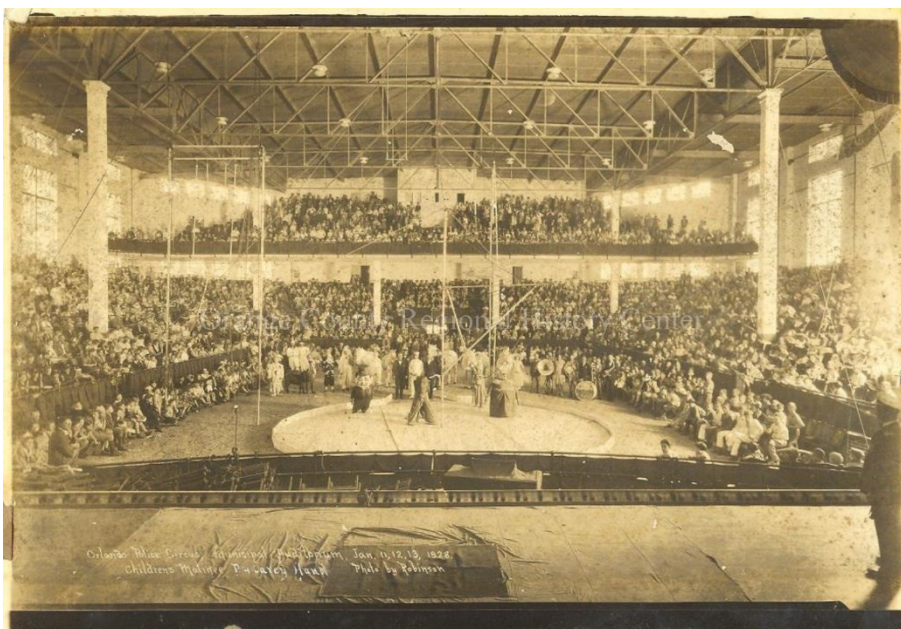


Image-4:
The interior of the theater (1926)
Source: Orange County History Center Archive Photos

5. Bob-Carr Theater, A Case Study

The Bob Carr Theater in Orlando, Florida, a nearly century-old landmark, faces economic pressures prompting a significant transformation. Since the opening of the Dr. Phillips Performing Arts Center in 2014, the Bob Carr Theater has been unable to maintain its original role as Orlando's primary performing arts venue due to contractual obligations. Consequently, the community must navigate a path that respects the building's heritage while fostering economic viability and innovative adaptation, potentially through adaptive reuse.

To address these challenges, the Small Matching Historic Preservation Grants, in collaboration with the City of Orlando and sponsored by the Florida Department of State for Historical Resources, are supporting efforts to compile comprehensive documentation for the Bob Carr Theater. This initiative aims to create a valuable documentation for the city, as well as for future architects and planners, in assessing the potential for adaptive reuse of this historic structure. The documentation process includes a multifaceted approach, beginning with gathering written and graphic historical overviews of the Bob Carr Theater (Images 3-4). Experts will provide insights into the building's historical significance, followed by detailed documentation collection. Utilizing methodologies such as literature research, archival drawing retrieval, 3D scanning, and refinement of architectural drawings, we endeavor to capture a comprehensive understanding of the building's physical and historical attributes.

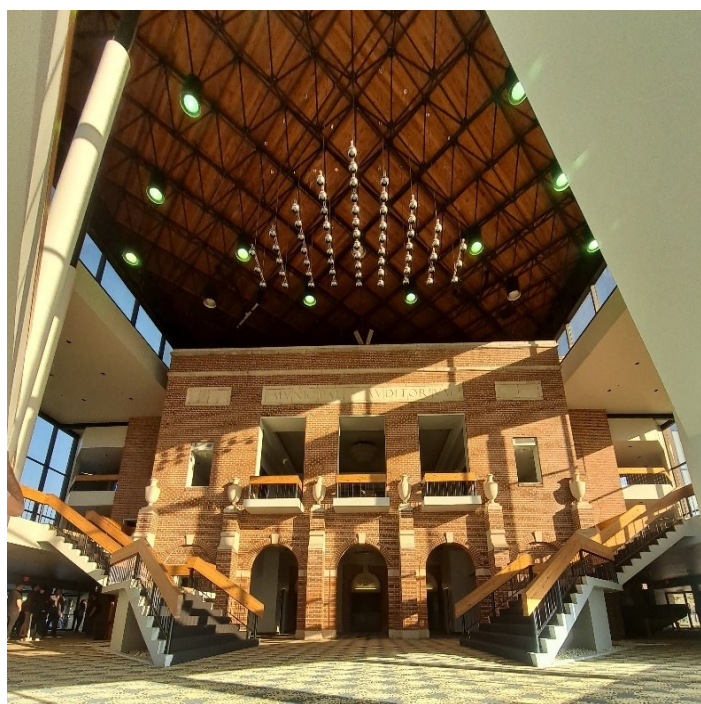


Image-5: The current condition of the theater façade (2022)
Photo: W. Pawlack



Image-6: Side view, showing the glass enclosure
Photo: A. Wang

The current state of Bob Carr is a testament to an older approach to adaptive reuse, where the fusion of old and new makes it challenging to discern original elements from additions. Both the exterior and interior of this building will undoubtedly require another overhaul, calling for a more considerate adaptive reuse strategy. A contemporary design must be seamlessly integrated into the existing structure, with new elements introduced as distinct yet complementary insertions. Given the pronounced contrast between the classical architecture of 1926 and the geometric massing of 1978 (Images 5-8), any new additions should interpret these styles in a manner that enhances the existing aesthetic without fully assimilating into it.

The historical significance of a theater building such as the Bob Carr can be examined through three lenses: its importance to the local community, its role in hosting traveling performances, and its association with renowned musicians and performers. However, beyond notable events and individuals, the true essence of historical significance lies in preserving the memories and heritage of a space that held significance for the community and its residents. Given the limited number of historical landmarks in Orlando, the preservation of such history becomes all

the more crucial. The Orlando archives feature photographs depicting community members utilizing the venue for various events such as dances and graduations, underscoring its integral role in the community long before the era of touring Broadway shows (The Historical Society of Central Florida, n.d. and images 9-10). According to Richard Forbes (2016), any modifications to historical landmarks or structures within Historic Preservation Overlay Districts necessitate a Certificate of Appropriateness. He clarified that the intent behind this certificate is to guarantee that any construction, renovation, restoration, relocation, or demolition activities concerning historical landmarks or structures within such districts align with the established standards, values, and unique characteristics of the respective district or landmark. Forbes asserted that this measure is crucial for safeguarding and conserving the historical assets of the city. However, existing conservation guidelines typically outline the need to harmonize new elements with the old, but these guidelines are often vague and can be misleading. This is especially true from the perspective of this paper, which suggests complementing the old with the new through a carefully considered contrast and juxtaposition.

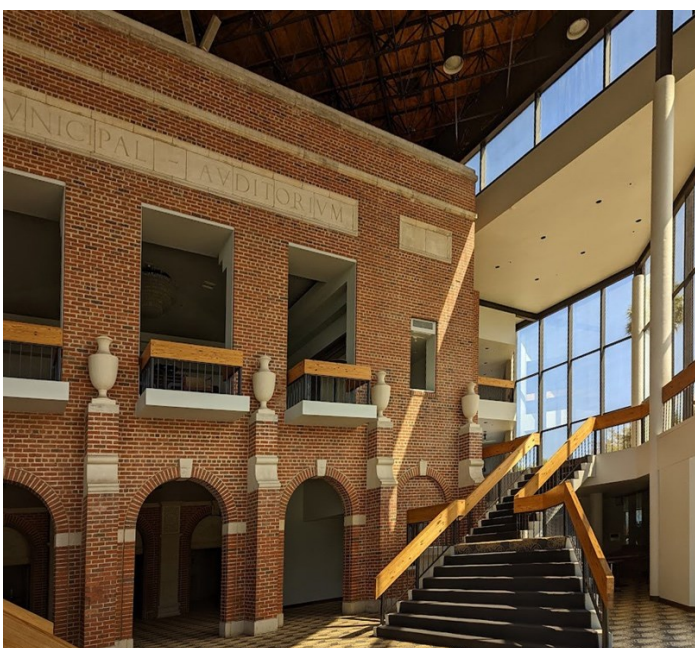


Image-7: The 1974 addition of the two stairs connecting to the mezzanine against the theater façade (2022). Photo: A. Wang

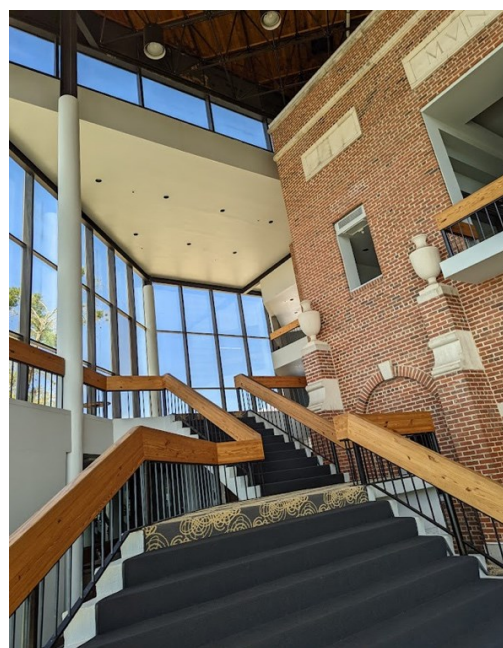


Image-8: The 1974 addition of the two stairs connecting to the mezzanine against the theater façade (2022). Photo: A. Wang

Above all, the success of storytelling lies not only in the stories or the design, but also in the perception of those who will visit or occupy the place. Maurice Merleau-Ponty (2002) discussed the notion of embodied perception, explaining that perception is not a passive reception of sensory data by a disembodied mind, but an active, embodied engagement with the world. Our body is not just an object among others but a subject that experiences and interacts with the world. Therefore, in adaptive reuse, architects intervene, intersect, incise, or install new designs into the old, and reveal the old to their new design. All in all, it is how all these elements arouse visitors and occupants to perceive and interact with the space, the structure, the materials, the light, the sound, the smell and the mood, something that has been ignored in architects' vocabularies. Scarpa's work compels us to return time and again, with each visit revealing a new story. From the documentation of the Bob Carr Theater, that building carries so many different stories from many bygone years, and the tales are waiting to be retold, twice or more.

6. The History of the Present⁷

⁷ (Wang & Kontozoglou, 2021) (p.221)

The questions on how storytelling manifests and informs the design in an adaptive reuse project, and how the new design interacts with existing conditions spatially, structurally, and materially, are the core of this discussion. Marco Frascari (1983, p. 325) points to Mies van der Rohe's famous sentence, "*Der liebe Gott steckt in Detail*," translated as "God lies in the detail." He continues that "the details are then the *locis* where knowledge is of an order in which the mind finds its own working, that is, *logos* (p. 325).



Image-9; Photo by A. Wang



Image-10; Photo by A. Wang



Image-11; Photo by A. Wang

However, he points out that the details he refers to are not the industrially commercial ones focused solely on production, but rather on their *Geist*, their spirit. He explains that before the advent of industrial society, the creation of architectural details catered to diverse cultural needs. However, in a predominantly economically driven society, this approach became problematic. Buildings, once regarded as enduring cultural and social assets, began to be seen primarily as economic investments designed for short-term use. Furthermore,

Draftsmanship was substituted for workmanship, and the development of "real details" was replaced by "virtual" procedures. From this point of view the detail was no longer part of the building. The detail was no longer seen as a joint; instead, it was seen as a production drawing (p. 325)

Frascari suggests learning from Carlo Scarpa, and the reason is because "The 'adoration of the joint,' in Scarpa's architecture, is a perfect realization of Alberti's concinnity. Each detail tells us the story of its making, of its placing, and of its dimensioning. ... The details of Scarpa's architecture solve not only practical functions, but also historical, social, and individual functions (p. 329)."

Especially when dealing with existing old buildings, such as *Fondazione Querini Stampalia* and *Castelvechio*, Carlo Scarpa respects his contexts, but he never repeats or mimics the vocabularies of the old. He responds, juxtaposes, and engages with the old in intense poetic conversations that no one can freeze into one narrative. Each time one visits, his buildings tell a different story. The new is like a completely different musical tone, syncopated and falling on the wrong counts, but still complementarily beautiful, yet difficult to understand how those come about. However, he thoroughly understands his context down to every detail. He respects the context and never attempts to conceal or overpower the old with his new design. Before designing anything new, he spends a considerable amount of time meticulously documenting the old building. His design essentially emerges from his interpretation and dialogue with the old building, which becomes the context for his new design. Like a poem, Carlo Scarpa's work cannot be fully captured in photography. Carlo Scarpa resurrects history, making it a part of the present.

Frascari further suggests that details transcend mere subordinate elements; they represent the smallest units of significance in architectural meaning-making, contributing to the broader narrative of the building. Therefore, "God lies in the detail" implies that details convey the entirety of the story, rather than just minimal units. Within the Bob-Carr Theater, significance is found not only in the technical detailing of wall sections but also in elements such as the "Non-Smoking" sign (Image-11), the signatures of artists adorning the walls, and unintentionally captured moments of beauty (Images 9-11). These features carry artistic and cultural significance beyond their technical functionality. Furthermore, the approach to documentation, particularly through hand sketches, note-taking, and point-cloud images (Image-12), presents opportunities to perceive the building from alternative perspectives, potentially inspiring conceptual design in architectural endeavors.

7. Conclusion

The emphasis on the importance of going beyond conventional sustainability metrics has been discussed many times by various academics and practitioners in the field of architecture, but most approaches have been nebulous, prudent, or uninteresting. The notion of history rewriting and storytelling is also widely accepted, but the question remains: how can this be done in innovative and interesting ways, and communicative between the building and the people who visit or occupy?



Image-12; Source: Sujin Kim

Alberto Perez-Gomez (2008) explains that buildings are often seen as serving the personal needs of individuals in a democratic society: providing shelter and protection from the weather, creating a home, and offering a workplace where people can live their lives as comfortably as possible. Commonly, "... buildings [are expected to] fulfill the wishes of individuals in a democratic society: a desire for shelter and protection from the elements, for a home and a place to work where humans may live their lives in as pleasurable away as possible." Adaptive reuse within the scope of sustainability has been linked to "a sense of responsibility for the environment and the well-being of humanity at large." Perez-Gomez insists that in fact it needs to do "more than preserving life." He points out that human desire has historically shaped the built environment, questioning why today we deem these influences unsuitable for the common good (p.3).

While generally assumed, the prevailing attitude toward old buildings often favors demolition, citing the economic feasibility of adaptive reuse versus erecting new structures, leaving us in a state of unceasing detachment from our memorable places. Not to exaggerate, everyday life becomes lacking in depth, and we experience constant historical disorientation and collective amnesia. There's a pivotal moment, especially in America, where we must pause the habitual erasure of our past, paving the way to craft and construct a narrative within our history for future generations to enjoy. In many American towns and cities, buildings stand with formally unremarkable but historical significance. However, no matter how mundane a building may appear, if it holds historical significance, it has the potential to inspire refined adaptive reuse designs. It then becomes up to architects and industry experts to reveal it in a beautiful way. Thus, the balance between its poetic essence and physical remnants could initiate innovative and meaningful design decisions.

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Conflict of Interests

The Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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