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Inaugural lecture

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*weiterbauen* as a plot  
caught between two scientific cultures

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“Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretative one in search of meaning. It is explication I am after...”

Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 1973

“I tried and tried all my life to make the wall thinner and thinner. It wasn’t until I went to Rome that I realised the strength of the wall, the power of the chiaroscuro, the interest in light, and all of what architecture eventually holds for me. I finally felt at home with architecture.”

Louis Kahn, *Writings, Lectures, Interviews*, 1996

“Het Bouwen - ik noem het liever fabriceren - gebeurt in mijn hoofd. Architectuur beperkt zich niet alleen tot het zichtbare proces (...) Een gedicht, literatuur, muziek, zelfs de geneeskunst inspireren me bij het bouwen. Het is een misverstand te denken dat je werktekening altijd moet leiden tot een pasklaar bouwwerk.”

John Hejduk, *Volkskrant*, 11 November 1993

“...ähnlich verhalten wir uns zum Vorhandenen. Je mehr wir davon begreifen, desto weniger müssen wir uns in Gegensatz dazu bringen, desto leichter können wir unsere Entscheidungen als Fortsetzung eines Kontinuums verstehen. Ein Umbau ist interessanter als ein Neubau - weil im Grunde alles Umbau ist. (...) Wir wollen noch immer den zwingenden Typus, sehen aber, dass er ebensoviel Nachahmung wie Erfindung verlangt.”

Hermann Czech, *Zur Abwechslung. Ausgewählte Schriften zur Architektur*, 1978

“In times of illegality, an agent comes into the house of a man ‘who has learned to say no’. The agent installs himself comfortably in the man’s apartment and says casually before falling asleep in his bed: “Would you like to be my servant?” The man covered him with a blanket, kept flies away, watched over his sleep and... obeyed... seven years long. But whatever he did for him, he ‘carefully avoided saying a certain word’. After seven years the agent died. The man wrapped him in the dirty blanket, dragged him out of the house, painted the walls, sighed with relief, and answered: - No.”

Franz Kafka, *Geschichten vom Herrn Keuner*

Translated from: Hannah Arendt, Walter Benjamin, Berthold Brecht, 1971

“Creature comforts can sometimes sharpen the mind, and behind the closed curtains of a hidebound middle class room, resolution can sometimes be born of a strength that those throwing Molotov cocktails at tanks have never dreamed of.”

Witold Gombrowicz, *Diary*

From: Jef Cornelis’ documentary ‘The Music Box’, 1993

# Introduction

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## **Rector Magnificus, ladies and gentlemen,**

When I was preparing this lecture I was formulating a text for delivery in the future.

Presently we shall be experiencing what I prepared in the past; but you will be able to read the printed text only later and its implications may only become clear even later. In this delay of reception, a change might take place in the meaning of the message. In that sense, this text is like a message in a bottle.

This metaphor describes a condition of delay in delivery. Relevant for the particular situation of exiles who went overseas under Nazi occupation, it is also related to concepts of downfall (Untergang) and rescue (Rettung) in the philosophic historical situation of the 'Dialectic of Enlightenment', and to Walter Benjamin's historic theoretical model of readability (Lesbarkeit) that says that images always belong to a certain period and that they will become readable only in a certain period. In other words; cultural values are not fixed; they vary over time.

Architecture is like that. Architects design buildings whose meaning appears to those witnesses in the future who are willing to recognise it. In the same way as we, in our present, can experience buildings as a legacy from the past and, by deciphering their message or not, determine whether it lands or strands. Buildings, like messages in bottles, link past, present, and future, periods in which a restructuring or a rewriting of their meaning takes place. The questions are: How can we read this message and what will be our answer? How can we build nowadays in the historic context that surrounds us? What conversions of meaning do new buildings provoke in that context?

In this lecture I would like to show that this linking and rewriting of meaning happens at many levels interacting with each other: at the level of theory, understood as a scene of images that have to be read (*theoria* comes from *theoros*: the one who sees images), at the level of architecture understood as a continuing transposition of these read images in

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buildings. If sensitivity to a cultural approach and methodology is developed during the process of education, this attitude can be carried over into the profession of architecture, a profession that currently appears to be broken down into conflicting domains - star architecture, building technology, and restoration - that compete for social recognition and financial support from commercial interests. It is my conviction that architects have to fight to take back responsibilities that they have allowed to be taken away from them; in this case involving the skills needed to research, document, and communicate not only history but also cultural history as a basis for making decisions relating to buildings to be extended and existing situations to be transformed.

In the first part of this lecture I shall outline the problem of *weiterbauen* in a historical context, taking three unrealised projects for Venice, where conservation priorities were governed by the safeguarding of the postcard appearance, though the failure of new projects was due more to vested interests than to this over-production of Venetianness.

In the second part I shall discuss cultural science as a method (soft science) from the perspective of reading that involves a cyclic and interactive relationship between analysis and project.

In the third part I shall show what I call a 'plot' for *weiterbauen* in the sense of possible story lines for a continuation of what already exists, and illustrate the implied extended notion of heritage where new and existing are not seen as opposing entities with some examples. I shall also address the uncomfortable position of architecture in education, given the current predominance of the hard science approach.

# The tale of Venice

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Like Amsterdam, Venice is a world cultural heritage city. But the tale that holds it together is much stronger than that of Amsterdam. For the first-time visitor coming by train, Venice has the fascination of a mirage, and every time is a first time. Dense volumes of buildings are surrounded by rippling reflections, outlined against nothing but sky that creates a particular quality of light. This was the condition in which the architecture of Venice developed and evolved as it did.

Seen from within, it is the simultaneity of ingenious solutions to technical building problems arising from the 'amphibious' condition of a swampy island, combined with artistic achievements at the highest level. Here the whole city forms a tight organism combining architectural monuments and so-called 'typical' buildings of each age, and the latter are, by definition, ordinary or anonymous. Because of the intensity of the cultural heritage, but also because of the economic dependence on tourism, the city turned to the old, and the new became the enemy. This became apparent after the Campanile collapsed on a summer day in 1902 and immediately provoked the discussion of whether to rebuild it exactly as it was or in a modern form.

The rubble was still on the piazza when Otto Wagner's unsolicited intervention on building a modern Campanile in a slightly better position resulted in a caricature in the Viennese satirical weekly *Der Floh*. This shows San Marco dolled up as a secessionist building with gold-leaf domes and peacock tails, and the Campanile as a giant candelabra. And in the end the same was done as when the opera house La Fenice burned down in 1996 - it was rebuilt just as it was, where it was (*dov'era, com'era*).

Considering this background, it is not surprising that, in a period of 15 years, projects for Venice by the three top architects Frank Lloyd Wright, Louis Kahn, and Le Corbusier were caused to founder. At the same time, of necessity, the administration of Venice altered hundreds of existing buildings and built hundreds of new ones.

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A. Zaghis, the fall of the Campanile of San Marco, Venice, 9.52 a.m., 14 July, 1902.

Source: Margeret Plant, Venice Fragile City 1797-1997, New Haven and London, 2002, p. 235 and p. 237.



F. Graetz, satirical depiction of the Campanile in the style of Otto Wagner, as published in Der Floh, 1911.

Source: Margeret Plant, Venice Fragile City 1797-1997, New Haven and London, 2002, p. 235 and p. 237.



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figure 1

It is difficult to imagine building anything there today. Visiting Venice to form a jury, Nicolas Grimshaw, Boris Podrecca, Francesco Venezia, Jos Bosman, and Peter Zumthor were looking at Venice from a boat, when Grimshaw exclaimed: “Could you imagine a modern building anywhere there?” He met nothing but silence. If Le Corbusier had been in that boat he wouldn’t have been too embarrassed to say something like: “Venice is

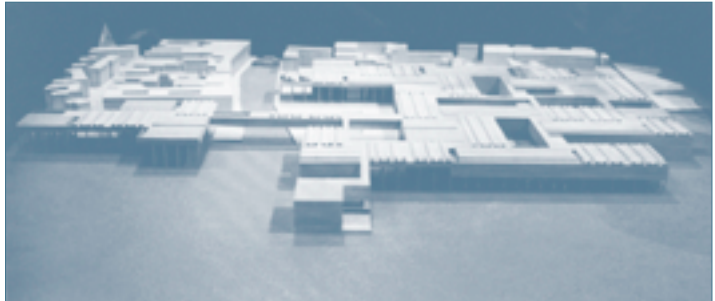
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a perfect mechanism: wisely and soberly constructed, a precise product of true human dimensions. Venice, functional city, extraordinarily functional, a model for the town planners of today, a witness to the rigor demanded of the urban phenomenon.”

The urban phenomenon that he would have been referring to is, of course, the separation of functions, in this case the separation of traffic between pedestrians and gondolas. In Venice this separation is determined by nature and is therefore the most economical infrastructure. This fits perfectly with Le Corbusier’s idea of

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Le Corbusier, model of the Venice Hospital, 1962.  
Source: Michael Raeburn and Victoria Wilson (ed.), *Le Corbusier Architect of the Century*, London, 1987, p. 185.



Model of a Neolithic village on poles near a river ('cité lacustre').  
Source: Adolf Max Vogt, *Le Corbusier, der edle Wilde*, Wiesbaden, 1996, p. 243.



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figure 2

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the importance of harmony between man and nature to bring 'joy and peace of mind' to the inhabitants. In his book 'Urbanisme', he underlines the dual characteristics of cities such as Venice - chaos in the whole and uniformity in the detail.

When Le Corbusier first visited Venice in his youth he can hardly have imagined that years later he would be working there on his last commission. When, fifty six years later, the Mayor of Venice invited him to a congress, Le Corbusier declined but admitted to being interested in solving a 'concrete problem'. After this hint, Le Corbusier did get the opportunity to build a hospital. In the light of his doctrine, and given his obsession with nature and the sea, and his enduring love affair with the *ville sacrée*, Le Corbusier interpreted this concrete problem as an urban one. In other words, he designed the hospital as an element of the city's pattern, made up of typical anonymous buildings.

And, by analogy with a *cit  lacustre* (originally a Neolithic village on poles near a lake or a river), he created a hospital in which the different care units are divided by *calli* (streets in Venetian dialect) and organised around a *campiello* (courtyard), and in which the roof lighting of the rooms is derived from his museum scheme. The project was supported by the authorities even after Le Corbusier's death, but was blocked by the community of doctors and engineers.

Angelo Masieri, a young architect from near Venice, was killed while on a pilgrimage to Wright's most famous building, 'Fallingwater' in Pennsylvania. His family asked the master to build a hostel for architecture students in his memory. Wright made a design in which he interpreted the Venetian window and balcony in an abstract composition of horizontals and verticals. The owners of the palazzo adjacent to the proposed site objected to it. Their attitude has been interpreted as abuse of power, but is understandable if we consider that Wright's facade had a sort of mask - an approach that is used here and there in Venice *on monuments*. Wright took an approach that in Venice is appropriate to monuments and applied it to the design of an ordinary building, thus breaking an unwritten law. The authorities rejected the scheme and decided to keep the existing facade, which promptly collapsed during construction work. What was built is an identical reconstruction of that facade which is lower than Wright's facade. A hurried observer might see



an exterior without character or distinction and thus overlook the fact that in Venice the monumental and the anonymous, the tall and the low, merge as it were into one organism, allowing views of the city's more distant monuments.

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F.L Wright, perspective drawing of his design for the Masieri memorial, Venice, 1953 (ink, pencil, pastel on paper).  
Source: Margeret Plant, Venice Fragile City 1797-1997, New Haven and London, 2002, p. 350.



Venice, along the Grand Canal: location of the Masieri Foundation (house at the left, next to palazzo Balbi by Alessandro Vittoria, begun 1582).  
Source: Deborah Howard, The Architectural History of Venice, New Haven and London, 2002, p. 210.



figure 3

At the end of the sixties, Louis Kahn was approached by the local authorities to design the *Palazzo dei Congressi*. The models show the first proposed location at the *Giardini Pubblici*, and the second at the *Arsenale*. August E. Komendant, Kahns engineer for 18 years, recalls how Kahn

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Sitemodel of Louis Kahn's 2<sup>nd</sup> Proposal for the palazzo dei Congressi, 1974.  
Source: Kent Larson, Louis I Kahn: unbuilt masterworks, New York, 2000, p. 221.



figure 4

showed him several charcoal sketches and asked him to study the structural possibilities and economy of his ideas. At first sight, it seemed to him that 'two of his ideas had validity, the rest lacked rationality'. However, he added that Kahn was right – 'to obtain economy, the foundations had to be the minimum'. Komendant suggests that Kahn sensed the cheapest solution *intuitively* and that his way of designing was iterative.

Khan *read* the situation and *translated* the problem into simple and powerful metaphors: the structure as a bridge; and the interior space as an agora, through which the meeting of ideas and attitudes is expressed, and out of which a new institution arises. With this image he also represented the Venetian situation, where land and water are in constant contact. Kahn who didn't want to be paid, didn't even receive his expenses; and after his death the project was abandoned.

A book has been produced showing virtual images of Kahn's unrealised projects, so that we can grasp what the interior space of this building would really have looked like: a public building, treated like a sculptural monument in concrete.

# Practice of reading

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Both Kahn and Le Corbusier, and, to some extent, Wright, worked with historical references which abound in modern architecture. They grasped the essence of the scene that they found, translated its meaning into the architectural language of their time, and integrated it into a historical context. Traces of previous actions become visible as a result of their projects. They focused on the historical context including the network of actors that inhabit the scene, hidden past happenings, and the techniques that are used to make the scene work.

The view of historical context as a network, a structure of ideas and forms, of images, stored in layers or interwoven with each other and in a state of continuous transformation, is not new. This cultural historic approach is built on a widely acknowledged tradition in literature, anthropology, and sociology. Cultural science arises out of the reading of scarcely perceptible details at the boundaries between disciplines: medicine, art history, philosophy, architecture. This particular way of reading as a precondition for the practice of cultural science is exemplified in works of Giedion, Warburg, Freud, and Benjamin. For them, 'detail' did not mean the details of historical events, but the traces and clues within a work of art that lead the interpreter beyond its framework.

The fact that nowadays this cultural historic approach is extending into various disciplines such as 'cultural engineering' or 'cultural marketing' doesn't make it into a trend, even though the cultural turning point causes excitement, and the term cultural sciences has become an emotive word. In order to recognize these transformations in and of the detail - a key element of analysis, we need to construct a method of reading. The anthropologist Clifford Geertz compared this search with the attempt to read (in the sense of 'construct a reading of') an old manuscript - "foreign, faded, full of missing words, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventionalized graphs of sound but in transient examples of shaped behaviour." [1]

This reading of meaning is connected with an approach that Geertz names ‘thick description’ by contrast with ‘thin description’, which is merely a registration of data. The skill of ‘thick description’ relies on experience in dealing with symbolic languages. In other words the method depends on access to symbolic languages through the observation of ‘the informal logic of actual life’, and ‘by inspecting events, not by arranging abstracted entities into unified patterns’. What makes these descriptions so powerful? Claude Lévi-Strauss, probably the most creative researcher in anthropology, is the ultimate example of how credibility and power of persuasion are determined by specific literary strategies.

Cultural history applied to analysis in architecture and restoration means that there is no objective description that can provide the basis for a normative intervention; there are only more-or-less thick descriptions of the ‘other’ - in the psychoanalytical sense, the ‘other’ refers to those parts of identity that have been unconsciously repressed. In this way, the analysed building is the ‘other’ (strange or neighbouring) culture, observed with an ‘anthropological’ eye. As a consequence I propose

Scheme of architecture  
analysis and its fields of  
concern.  
Source: author.

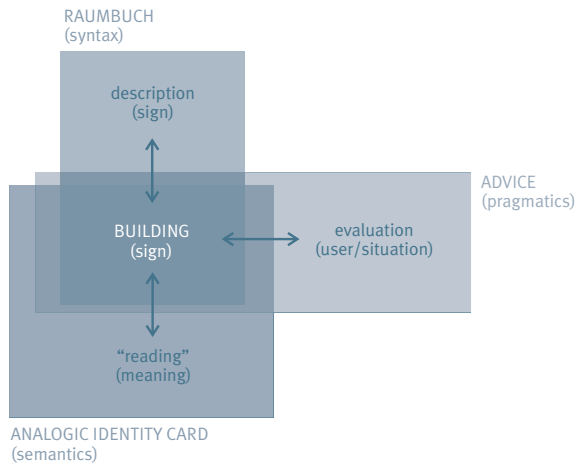


figure 5

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a transformation of what are currently seen as the three parts of the analysis, namely description, interpretation, and evaluation, by analogy with the classical scheme of semiotics in which the analysed architectural element is considered to be an analogy for a sign. By referring to semiotic analysis, we isolate meanings of buildings and building parts within a culture for the purposes of transfer or conversion in a new context.

In the analysis method that I teach, I have introduced what I call ‘analogical identity cards’, between the documentation of the material, formal, spatial, and structural condition of a building, and the evaluation of the information. A collection of such cards is inserted *in the place of* an interpretation. Such cards do not contain an interpretation of the kind that a monument curator or an art historian would make. An ‘analogical identity card’ contains a description of analogies related to a building or a building element, based on ‘read’ images (that have to be differentiated from images used in a metaphorical sense), and that are assembled in visual clusters. One of its inspirations is the idea of Aby Warburg’s image atlas ‘Mnemosyne’, those boards on which representations of different periods and genres are ordered. They are not ordered according to visual similarity, in the sense of an iconographic history of style, but rather through hidden relationships caused by an ‘affinity for one another’ and the principle of ‘good company’, which can be made visible through the study of other documents (such as contract conditions or biological associations). The approach using analogical identity cards assimilates the approach of the Mnemosyne boards: the subject of study, the actual building, is associated with the search for the presence of further cultural historical layers.

Research is thus more than just objective and empirical exploration that is legitimized in itself by its unforeseen discoveries. Research has to trace the social meaning of cultural and natural phenomena and contribute to a ‘Second Enlightenment’ as Warburg called it.

For the renovation of the Rijksmuseum, the *Atelier Rijksbouwmeester* of the Dutch governmental building agency is, for the first time, implementing an approach orientated on the interaction between cultural history, design and technical aspects of restoration. However, it is retaining the classical interpretation and iconographic approach.

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Such an ‘open approach’ strikes me as potentially much more productive than normative approaches that are still being referred to and even developed for dealing with transformations on the basis of *constant* technical criteria such as expected lifetime of buildings and materials. Widely used programs that consider properties of materials without taking account of variable boundary conditions are becoming outdated for use in a practical situation. At a conceptual level, an effective approach should integrate the different knowledge domains that are involved when making design decisions. The *Atelier Rijksbouwmeester* has developed a tool, in the form of a website, which supports such an approach ([www.waardestelling.nl](http://www.waardestelling.nl)).

The internet is probably the best medium that can be used to support and communicate existing qualities and to show how the reading of these qualities is related to the design process; and this in turn influences the perception and the ordering of ‘intertextual’ processes (processes that connect reformulation, quotation, imitation, and appropriation of existing material and forms are, what we call today, intertextual). It will be revealing to evaluate its practical impact when the implementation is fully developed. But again there is a delay in delivery between theory and practice, especially when larger organisations such as the *Atelier Rijksbouwmeester* are working with many other players in a project team on an endeavour such as the renovation of the Rijksmuseum. The importance of developing an understanding for this approach becomes apparent when we learn that some crucial members of the team, in particular the architect, were unable to play along.

The relation between analysis and the design process is iterative. Relations between sources, description, interpretation, evaluation, and design cannot be seen as being linear or one-way. A description is never perfectly objective, always being influenced by skills and cultural knowledge, and the sources one uses may be influenced by the development of the design process. Therefore, a tool that can connect different aspects of analysis and design is very useful.

There is not a simple linear relationship between analysis and the design process. Design is a cyclical activity that may be influenced by first impressions, one’s view of local history, impressions from source material, working on drawings of the existing situation, and describing

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the building in various ways. However, many believe that a strong design solution can be achieved only after the analysis of the situation has been completed. Many students are taught that the relation between analysis and design is a linear one. As a consequence, in their minds the analysis is still segregated from the design process, which makes it difficult for them to evaluate its results and use it in the design process.

The common opinion on preservation is still that there are buildings with a high monumental value, certain of whose characteristics are, for a variety of reasons (historic, aesthetic, social, and other layers of meaning), considered of such value that they should be retained at all costs. Other characteristics or elements may be of lesser importance, leaving the decision on how to deal with them to the designer. In those buildings there might not be any pivotal monumental qualities present, but still spatial or historical qualities that would not exist in any new construction. Today an extension of the notion of cultural heritage, and a relaxation of the strong segregation between the historic and the non historic that has developed over several centuries, are increasingly coming to the forefront; and architectural transformations in the sense of extensions or partial destructions are in great demand. In the majority of publications, *weiterbauen* is used merely to describe any transformation activities on which both investors and restoration authorities agree. The requirements of historical truth on the one hand and aesthetic truth on the other must, however, be negotiated, no matter how hard this may be.

## Weiterbauen as a plot ...

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*Weiterbauen* was used in 1934 by the Swiss faction of the modern movement (the former ABC group within CIAM) to mark a move away from its strategy of cultural *tabula rasa*.

In the June 2003 issue of *werk, bauen + wohnen*, the term was reformulated as an operative concept related to an attitude towards the existing and its transformation and as a leitmotiv for architects who reject the approach of separating extensions in modern style from historic buildings that are to be restored according to the norms of the discipline of restoration. In my article in this issue, I have related the conversion of the Vertigo building to a metamorphosis in which a fact or a thought is transformed into something else as is the case with linguistic or psychic translation.

The problem with a linguistic translation is not so much that you make a wrong translation, because that can be detected, but that you make a completely literal translation in which the original meaning is lost. The latter is the case when the necessary transfer of meaning in a translation between two systems is lost in a total linguistic conversion. The sentence is then reduced to its sign value and the transfer of meaning is interrupted. We encounter the same case in psychoanalysis where a misjudgement of the translation process amounts to a 'refusal of translation'.<sup>[2]</sup> What Freud calls translation, is the necessary rewriting and rearranging that occurs to the material of the memory traces between two phases of life. In this conception of memory - scene in a script - layered reports in the psychic apparatus are continuously rewritten and thus translated.

*Weiterbauen* is just such a multilayered conversion process, in which historical and daily traces are projected on one another by analogy with a psychic or linguistic translation process. This implies the continuity of the essence of the existing by retaining it in the new and a discursive rather than a normative approach in dealing with monuments.





*Weiterbauen* and *Umbau* have a similar background. That is, a sense of continuation of what already exists, without conflict and contrast; and, with a bit of give-and-take, it can become the basis of a common direction for architects and monument curators.

The fundamental question here is: modernity or unity? This is the source of the division between architecture and conservation as exemplified in the Venice charter that demands differentiation between old and new. The notions on which *Weiterbauen* relies to reach this unity have been known at least since the Renaissance - *concinitas, conformita, convenienza*.

A plot, according to Aristotle in his *Poetics*, is 'the arrangement of incidents' that (ideally) each follow plausibly from the other. It is the tight construction of a story-line that creates an emotional impact. Aristotle notes that a string of unconnected speeches, no matter how well-executed, will not have as much emotional impact as a series of tightly connected speeches delivered by imperfect speakers. The plot is the scenario that holds a story together. For the architect it is the 9H outline plot on which the design, and later the actual building, is going to be based.

The illustrations of the principle behind these terms are many and the solutions are varied. A famous example concerns the Ca' Venier dei Leoni, known as the Peggy Guggenheim museum, which remained unfinished, reaching only one of the planned three levels. Its classical façade is in white Istrian stone and was to have a triple arch on the ground floor, which is suggested now in the ivy covered pillars.

In 1986, one year after the museum had been chosen as a project theme for the architecture biennale, Joost Meuwissen and Wiel Arets published a perspective drawing on the theme in the second issue of the architecture journal *Wiederhall*, which embodied the theory of *weiterbauen* before the term was used in *this sense*. Their proposal is also quite different from the designs for the same location submitted a year earlier at the biennale. They declared that they wanted to follow Viollet-le-Duc's theory by creating a building 'that has never actually existed' but which only *tends* toward a unity, and continues the unfinished state as suggested by the two different heights of the towers. For me they have a family resemblance with Loos' sketch from 1917 for the Kaiser forum in Vienna.

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Model of the Ca' Venier dei Leoni, Venice (of which only the base is build, today hosts the Peggy Guggenheim Museum).

Source: Lorenzo Boschetti, scale model of Palazzo Venier dei Leoni, 1749, Museo Correr, Venice, published at: [www.guggenheim-venice.it](http://www.guggenheim-venice.it)



J. Meuwissen and W. Arets, perspective drawing of their proposal for the enlargement of the Peggy Guggenheim Museum, Venice, 1986. Source: Wiederhall, nr. 2, 1986.



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figure 6

In practice the 'arrangement of incidents' is a matter of sensibility and attitude. Gion Caminada's boarding home in Disentis (Grisons) shows how he solved a way of relating old and new and the challenge of a function being both ordinary and public of: By placing the building a little further away from the street and thus creating some public space – a sort of parvis – in front of it.

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G. Caminada, Boarding  
home in Disentis.  
Photo: Lucia Degonda



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figure 7

## ... in the field of the two cultures

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'Two cultures' is a reference to C.P. Snow's renowned thesis on the dichotomy between scientific and literary intelligence, written as a reaction to the desperate situation of non-communication in Cambridge in the late fifties, in spite of Cambridge having the highest rate of Nobel price scientific winners. And 'caught between', marks the position of architecture and restoration in the field of tension between the two cultures.

The question is: Do you have to be an intellectual to be scientific?

For Hannah Arendt, you can recognise the real intellectual from his or her attitude towards the insidious manifestation of power. After she had contrasted the attitudes of Brecht and Benjamin under a totalitarian regime by telling a story of *Herr Keuner* whose stories tell what measures one should take against violence, she remarks: Didn't Brecht forget *Herr Keuner's* wisdom — to do what one is forced to, but not to say: 'Yes'?

Less than a year ago, in his farewell lecture, a colleague addressed the position of architecture in a technological environment. After having deplored the present inability to work with history, he suggested that architecture was a badly treated guest of technical sciences and that it should act as an enemy to powers that want to deny it.

My position is somewhat different from his, since I say: Why not try to be friendly but more direct: architecture is caught between two forces that limit its possibilities and oblige it to do things it doesn't want to say 'yes' to. It is dominated on the one hand by a purely technological, functional, and commercial type of building activity, and on the other hand by a technical and normative handling of restoration. This makes it impossible (as described earlier for Le Corbusier and others in Venice) for architects to take up the heritage of the past in a creative and responsible way.

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Architects are handled as 'stars' with total freedom to say and do what they like, while the 'real building business' is carried on by building technicians in a parallel world and in a purely technical way. In relation to the historical environment, *weiterbauen* ceases to be something to strive for. We are witness to an ecological turning point in many fields, and the restoration and re-use of buildings are no exception to that, but we have to realize that ecological problems cannot be solved by technology alone, but mainly through our lifestyle.

There is a peculiar agreement, a sort of 'wheeling and dealing', between the conservation of authenticity in restoration, and the claim that the dynamic building of the world of the future will be achieved by technology alone - that is by a hard science, a discipline that operates with quantifiable and (mostly) verifiable or falsifiable methods. The key sciences of an epoch and a society are those through which insight and progress are expected to be achieved. In our time, the key sciences are hard sciences. [3]

This forced emphasis on science overlooks the fact that Architecture was initially a humanist discipline. The emblematic figure of Leonardo da Vinci stands for its spirit of invention, and poetic culture of knowledge (poetische Wissenskultur). Therefore it is relevant and necessary, particularly at a technical university, to take a position on the boundary between disciplines - a place where 'Leonardo effects' can be observed - and practised. This position enables a historical-scientific change of perspective beyond the separation of the hemispheres of knowledge towards cross-fertilisation between disciplines. [4]

Leonardo was a poet-artist-engineer-scientist-intellectual. An intellectual is someone who continuously witnesses to the present, to *his* present. It is someone who witnesses against power, or 'networks of power'. It is someone who is in the present, who has an insistent presence in the world, but who in the end is excluded. His vocation involves a certain amount of dissidence and this even becomes his real role.

By contrast with Brecht's attitude - which is 'in', a figure like Leonardo poet-architect-engineer is 'out' as a model, and the end result is that architecture is treated as the poor relation in teaching and research at a technical university, unless it is sponsored by industry.

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Thus in order to maintain its right to existence within the body of academic knowledge, architecture has to adopt a hard-sciences way of thinking; and so it seems that C.P. Snow's thesis has become confirmed in reality. Instead of their usual activity of thinking and talking about their research, professors have to judge, to convince, to promote, and to subject themselves to being stretched between the economic and technocratic demands on a future elite university versus the hobby club attitude of rank and file. For between the walls of (academic) disciplines, most of the inhabitants spend (if not to say waste) their time with the never ending illusion that they are guard-dogs of their threatened kingdom.

Walter Benjamin was among the few who understood the implications of Sigfried Giedion's 'Mechanization takes command' for our life. In 'Space, time and architecture' Giedion deplores the barriers between disciplines and the fact that education was confining people in specialised fields, and he sees the precondition to culture in the unity of intellect and emotion. Nevertheless, Benjamin is the first in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to give discursive concepts a theoretical status. He sees the precondition for this in a new way of writing history: backwards, in a non linear way and in the light of actual experience. This concept was rooted in his technical approach to art and in a broad aesthetic approach to technology, seen not as a discipline but as a mode of perception. It is similar to Marshall McLuhan's later research on the 'interplay of senses' in the technical environment that has been applied since 1963 at the centre of culture and technology in Toronto. Both understand the necessity of tactility to interconnect the human senses in spite of technical specialisation of perception induced by technical evolution. In his theory of perception Benjamin sees a weapon against the fatal 'localized character of the arts and sciences'.

For 'technical people' Benjamin is interesting because he was looking for new models to accommodate a fragmented past that is therefore perceived as 'invalid' and not useful. (This could provide ideas on how to deal with historical architecture and landscapes, how 'technical' disciplines such as building have to approach the real world.) Also the way in which Benjamin 'modifies' the tension between art and technique (by finding the technical/mechanical in art and the poetic in the machine) is more modern than Leonardo's way (for whom there

seemed to be no contradiction). One doesn't have to go 'back' to Leonardo to deal in a meaningful-dialectical way with that tension between architecture/meaning/design and 'science/technical rationality'.

Book cover



figure 8

# Education in architecture

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John Hejduk, another intellectual, who like Leonardo and Benjamin was mediating between disciplines and using a narrative embedded in a poetic aura, is respected as one of the most inspiring teachers of architectural design. His student assignments are legendary. For instance, the one that he presented 10 years ago in a lecture at the NAI, in which he addressed what could be referred to as the problem of life span by observing the process of decay, thus enabling the students to recreate from memory, something that no longer exists.

*"I showed them a Cezanne still life painting of fruit, a drawing a student had done of fruit and a bowl of artificial fruit. And I had made a similar bowl of actual fruit exactly like the artificial fruit. So when you saw the two bowls of fruit from a distance, you didn't know which was the real and which was the unreal. And then I brought the students in and I said: "Now, here are the two bowls of fruit and here is a Cezanne painting of fruit. Which do you think tastes the best?" And 95% of the students said, the actual fruit tastes the best. And I knew I had a problem. And I said: "Let's do a year's work on fruit." Which they did - and we had a marvellous, we had a wonderful year. Because what they did is, they brought fruit into The Cooper Union building. And they cut it and they kept it, and they kept it and it dried, and all of a sudden for the first time in 30 years there was a different smell in the building. The whole school was filled with rotting fruit, the idea of rotting fruit, and then after the fruit the fruit-flies came. And then the school was filled with fruit-flies. And after the fruit-flies, mice. The superintendent of the building said: "We can't take it anymore. There are too many mice." But it was an incredible year we had, dissecting fruit, seeing how it lived, and died, and dried. It was glorious. And the students began to make fruit, to cut fruit, make fruit out of wood. I asked them to make a fruit out of wood that tasted like the fruit. I didn't think it could be done but they did it."*

Hejduk did not ask: 'Which do you think is in the best taste?', because then the whole exercise would have ended there. But he was interested in the imaginary and narrative force of a physical phenomenon.



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Instead of giving the students a classification of lifespan of materials which they would have had to use as a design basis, Hejduk considered it more relevant to make them experience the process of decay of the materials - the fruit - first hand and to make them recreate the essence of a material from memory, integrating the memory of the process of decay into the fabrication of the new.

In the following I would like to comment on some of my past diploma students' atelier projects and relate them to what preceded. One of the advantages of a diploma atelier is that it favours research in a team, on the assumption that at a technological university the students have the mentality and capacity for research (*onderzoek door onderwijs*) and the discipline of putting away the individuality that blocks a collective result. One theme for a diploma atelier was the Petri Complex, a former Philips office building and a depot, built in the time when architect Rosenberg was working for Philips. The office building shows some of his influence in the plasticity of forms and details. Adjacent to this complex is a regional monument - a building that has been transformed several times, from a cigar factory into a hotel and later into commercial apartments.

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Greke Klein Brinke,  
perspective of diploma  
project: reinterpretation  
of a former industrial  
building complex next to  
the stadion of  
Eindhoven, to be used  
for housing and artist  
studios, 2005.  
Source: atelier prof.  
H. Cisar, TU Eindhoven,  
2005.



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figure 9

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The present façade, which covers the factory façade, was designed by Van der Mey, co-founder of the 'Amsterdam school'. This project shows in an exemplary way a spatial translation that works at the level of scale and typology, by closing the actual passage between the two buildings and transforming a passage into a court, in the tradition of the big courts of the housing estates of Brinkman and Van der Vlugt. It integrates the monument building into the new configuration of an enfilade of courts with varying formal openness and public accessibility. The atmosphere generated relies on industrial elements (such as the chimneystack) that have been retained, partly transformed, and integrated into the project. It extends both groups of existing buildings and merges them into a new configuration. A new unity is created between the parts that have been partly destroyed and the new parts, while the original character is retained. This may suggest that the project contains many important characteristics to be dismissed as contextual or even bourgeois.

The next project is an interior architecture: it remains invisible from the outside. The building that is transformed is a former engine shed with a sawtooth roof from the beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> century, situated between Venlo and Blerick. It was recently classified as a protected building because of the rarity of the combination of function and construction. The difficulty of such a project is its scale. How can you fill the huge space inside of a shell? After several cycles of analysis and design, the student realised that he should be regarding this as just a huge empty brick shell. The transformation of the engine shed would be carried out by inserting a core into that shell, recalling the transitions between 'envelope' and 'core', and this led to the idea of taking as theme 'the architecture school that I would dream of' to paraphrase 'the Museum that I would dream of' by Thomas Ruff. The core contains the classrooms that form the shell of the sunken auditorium and library. The space between the core and the shell accommodates the ateliers-cum-exhibition-space.

This project refers to Palladio's transformation of the Pallazzo della Ragione, (subsequently known as Basilica Palladiana), a former trade hall in Vicenza. By introducing a double order of loggias, Palladio absorbed the irregularities of what was at that time considered an ugly building, and thus created what can be called 'an elastic structure'. He made use of an existing stylistic form - the 'serliana' - between the pillars of the existing loggias to disguise an aesthetic weakness of the Pallazzo della

Ragione. The 'serliana' was already a classic translation of a gothic form which Giulio Romano had applied in 1540 - a few years before Palladio - for the restructuring of the interior of the church of the San Benedetto monastery in Polirone. The existing structure remains visible, and is thus readable together with the serliana, as a new figure.

Ewald Rabitsch, façade and section of diploma project: reinterpretation of a former engine shed at the railway complex of Blerick, to be used as a school of architecture, 2005.  
Source: atelier prof. H. Cisar, TU Eindhoven, 2005



Groundplan

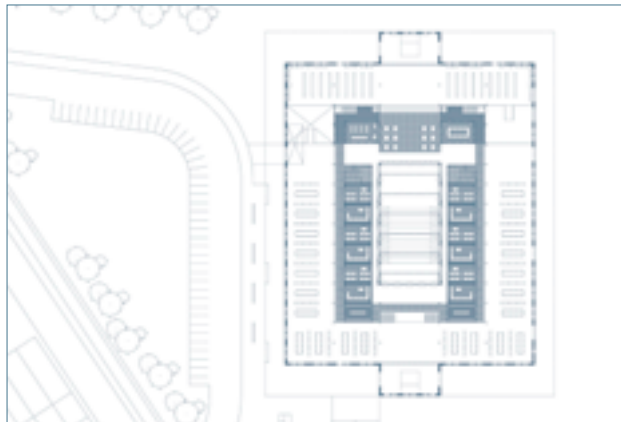


figure 10

# Conclusion

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Summarizing, it can be said that there are ways of renewing design that are based on existing forms and the observation of cultural details from a new perspective that sees more in them than just the detail.

The *weiterbauen* attitude - exemplified by Palladio - of continuously added and interwoven strata, is a concept that is well suited to a discursive approach in dealing with today's building issues, and counteracts the fragmentation of architecture. Geertz, Giedion, Hejduk, Benjamin, and Warburg each developed an approach that operated at the boundaries of disciplines. They are models for the approach to the research of the chair of architecture and urban cultures. The intellectual ambition of the chair lies in developing approaches that transcend the original methods of architecture and building.

# Acknowledgements

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For the impulses that were essential for developing the position that is outlined in this lecture I would like to thank the authors involved in the thematic issue of *werk, bauen + wohnen*, June 2003, dedicated to Weiterbauen, in particular to Thomas Will and Not Caviezel.

Many of the people I would like to thank are present in the audience: thank you for the many discussions and for your support and help. In particular I wish to thank the following people for inspiring discussions. Hermann Czech on dealing with someone else's architecture, Karl Heinz Schmitz on the interaction of flowing and contained space, Bart Verschaffel on the ethic of teaching architecture, and Gijs Wallis de Vries on the meaning of architecture at the intersection of history and theory. The exchange with Jos Bosman brought me continuous challenge to look more precisely at details and reformulate my argumentation. Without the assistance of Richard and Annette Morgan, who have helped with the English, the text could not have been achieved on time.

Some colleagues have inspired me to have a dream. So I would like to address the institution that gave me this chair and the 'right', even the duty, to speak, and share my dream with you.

'I have a dream' of:

a Faculty of Architecture where the academic rights and teaching load of the teachers are granted as much attention as the interests of the students;

a Faculty of Architecture whose claim for an elite education is matched by an equally distinguished organisation;

a Faculty of Architecture where quiet study and concentrated work do not mean silent approval and repressed disagreement;



a Faculty of Architecture where one's point of view can be expressed without a fear of being fired and, on the contrary, is valued as appropriate and indispensable;

a Faculty of Architecture where an understanding of when to intervene and when to keep out of the way creates a background that stimulates thought and creativity.

# References

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- 1 Clifford Geertz, *The interpretation of cultures*, New York, 1973, 10.
- 2 “Die Versagung der Übersetzung, das ist das, was klinisch Verdrängung heißt. Motiv derselben ist stets eine Unlust-Entbindung, die durch Übersetzung entstehen würde, als ob diese Unlust eine Denkstörung hervorriefe, die die Übersetzungsarbeit nicht gestattet. (*The failure of translation corresponds to what is clinically called repression. Repression is always motivated by the release of reluctance that would arise through translation, as if this reluctance would cause a thought-disturbance, which doesn't permit the translation.*) Sigmund Freud: Letter from 6.12. 1896 to Wilhem Fliess 1887-1994, Frankfurt am Main, 1986, 219. In Andrew Benjamin: *Ursprünge übersetzen. Psychoanalyse und Philosophie*. In: Alfred Hirsch (ed.), *Übersetzen und Dekonstruktion*, Frankfurt am Main 1997, 232.
- 3 On implications of the order of knowledge on social patterns, see: Christina von Braun, Inge Stephan (Ed), *Gender @Wissen*, Köln, Weimar, Wien, 2005: Considering the symbolic correlations within the order of knowledge from the point of view of attribution of a discipline to the key science role, we can observe that a complete reversal has taken place since their original attribution. Up until the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century the role of key science was assigned to Theology, but thereafter it moved to first to philosophy during the Enlightenment, and then to history. When the question comes up today of which faculties and disciplines are to be considered as key sciences, the answer is a natural science subject such as biology or medicine. The reasons are paradoxical. They became key sciences because the old project of immortality that was once assigned to theology passed to philosophy as phantasm of the ‘world spirit’ (Weltgeist) or to history as the “immortal nation” (unsterbliche Nation) - in the same way as it now relies on the predilection for medical scientific insights. Especially in genetics, metaphors and paradigms demonstrate a remarkable analogy to Christian tradition of thought.
- 4 LEONARDO-EFFEKTE. Exemplarische Konstellationen aus der Trennungsgeschichte von Natur- und Geisteswissenschaften: 1800 - 1900 - 2000 Karlheinz Barck; Christina Brandt, Marie Guthmüller, Sandra Mühlenberend, Erik Porath, Mai Wegener, Caroline Welsh, München, 2006. In: Zentrum für Literaturforschung, Berlin, <http://www.zfl.gwz-berlin.de/forschung/laufende-projekte/leonardo-effekte>

# Curriculum Vitae

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**Prof. Hana Cisar has been appointed part-time professor at Technische Universiteit Eindhoven (TU/e) for Architecture and Urban Cultures in the department of Architecture, Building and Planning as of 1 April 2003.**

Hana Cisar, a Swiss architect with Czech roots obtained her architectural diploma from the ETH Zurich in 1988. Her practical experience started with Arnold Amsler in Winterthur and further included work with Santiago Calatrava, Arthur Rüegg, Trix and Robert Haussmann and Aurelio Galfetti. As a teacher she has explored the fields of research and design at the EPF Lausanne, the South Californian Institute of Architecture in Vico Morcote, and the Architectural Schools of Vaduz and Chur, focussing on the transformation of buildings and the interpretation of their cultural value. She values a philological approach to architecture. At the Centre for Restoration Johannesberg in Germany, Prof. Cisar acquired specialized knowledge of making inventories and planning maintenance of buildings. In Eindhoven she incorporated these methods in the education of bachelor's and master's students at the chair of architecture and urban cultures. Her present main area of interest is the interrelation between architecture, city renewal and restoration.

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