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Façadism, Building Renovation and the Boundaries of Authenticity

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Abstract: This paper presents different trends in façadism and provides examples and views of its supporters and adversaries. To better grasp whether the preservation of building façades proves authentic, this paper evaluates three possible explanations for façadism's use in building renovations: 1) Developers aim to practice cultural preservation by preserving a place's authenticity, 2) Free interpretation of internationally accepted cultural-heritage policy documents may lead to façadism practices, or 3) Extant examples help countries and institutions decide whether to conserve architectural heritage or to confront façadism as a negative contribution to the city.

I. INTRODUCTION

Routine changes to one's urban environment influence the way people perceive and interact with space. Population expansions and changes of habits create new needs, requiring the city's structure to be reconsidered, yet, changes in the built environment are regularly criticised for their lack of respect for its users and for lacking in authenticity. In 1517, a few years after the death of the architect Donato Bramante, who demolished the 4th century St. Peter's basilica to erect a larger one, the satirical pamphlet *Simia* published a dialogue where St. Peter confronts the architect for his disrespect. Bramante had wished to renovate Paradise, yet turned to Hell to realise his development

plans there.¹ This is perhaps the first recorded opposition against the destruction of older buildings. Since then, several personalities have influenced our perception of historical preservation by formulating ideas and carrying out building restorations, some of which have met skepticism.²

As a result, guidelines, laws, and documents describing the protection of the built environment have been enacted and appropriate practices have been carried out. These documents articulate related practices, each meant to preserve cultural heritage, yet all involve different degrees of intervention. *Reconstruction* refers to rebuilding a monument in its original location; *anastylosis* uses the fallen parts to return a monument to its initial form; *restoration* employs the addition of new parts; *ripristino* involves the removal of all subsequent phases to return the monument to its original form; *conservation* refers to preservation in its present state, and when additions are employed, these are usually visible and reversible; *renovation* adjusts the building to the new owners' needs; *sanitation* involves additions and alterations to ensure a functional and sanitary use; *integrated conservation and protection* aim to protect both the building and the wholeness of its functions and values; and *façadism* maintains the façade rather than the whole building.

II. FAÇADISM. HISTORY AND PRACTICES

Façadism lies in the grey zone between building conservation and development, and particularly afflicts historical centres of financial value. It is a compromise between two parties of different interests: owners and architects wanting to make the most out of a building, and city councils or ministries of culture wishing to protect cultural heritage. *Façadism* or *façadomy* is a way for urban tradition to conform to development, when historical building preservation contradicts the plans of urban developers. It first arose in the UK and Italy, where legislation was already in place by 1939 to protect buildings of artistic, archaeological or historical interest, later penetrating Belgian cities, only to become the subject of intense debate in the UK, USA, Greece, and beyond. In fact, some use the term 'brusselization' to capture façadism's having spread in the 1970s from Brussels and Paris to Chicago and Barcelona. I next present seven different applications of Façadism.

Façadism is a controversial mode of simulating an intact, historical city. Buildings no longer in line with modern standards are either demolished, while their façades are restored in order to maintain a uniform appearance, or they are renovated by maintaining their façades, yet their interiors are radically altered. Its several aspects cannot be easily defined, and may be summarised as: the preservation of historical façades; the creation of facsimile façades in front of modern buildings; and decorative or structural exercises of Postmodernism. Buildings that have undergone such interventions fit within the prevailing style of their surroundings, yet their façades bear little or no relation at all to the renovated spaces behind them.

First practice: One or more façades left intact. Façadism typically leaves one or more sides of a building of historical or architectural value intact, so its external view is preserved, but its use is fundamentally changed. This practice disregards authenticity, since the building's eventual use is unrelated to its façade, and its interior has undergone significant changes.

Second practice: Building demolition apart from frontal façade. This approach's most brutal expression is *façadectomy*, whereby the building is demolished, leaving only its façade, usually supported by a steel frame. The empty spaces bordered by these walls are often used as parking lots.

Third practice: Listed under the Planning Act of 1990 is a related intervention on another London building, Bracken House. The listing commends its 'creative adaptation, as an early and outstanding example of a bold intervention within a listed building, demonstrating sensitivity to the existing fabric while introducing a distinctive, contemporary language of its own'. Originally designed by the eminent architect Sir Albert Richardson in 1955-1958 as the Financial Times headquarters, architect Michael Hopkins' plan to demolish it sparked a 1987 campaign to make it the first listed postwar building. While converting the building between 1988 and 1992, Hopkins retained the east and south ranges, but replaced its central section, renewed the floors and added a glass and metal façade.³

Fourth practice: Postmodernist constructions attached to the façade. The practices of altering the façade were taken a step further, with Postmodernist constructions next to, overlapping or covering traditional façades. An example of this is the Royal Ontario Museum in Canada, originally built in 1914 by Darling and Pearson in the Italianate Neo-Romanesque style, with a 1933 addition of a new wing by Alfred H. Chapman and James Oxley including an art deco rotunda, to which a new construction was added in 2007 by Daniel Libeskind to act as the main entrance.⁴ The award-winning construction known as the Michael Lee-Chin Crystal, is a huge aluminium and glass crystal-like construction of interlocking prismatic forms providing a 9290 m² space for exhibition and other museum facilities that nearly completely hides the original façade in front of which it is constructed, while partly covering the side façade, exceeding the original building in length and altering its volume.⁵

Fifth practice: Erection of modern constructions behind the original façade. This practice involves erecting modern or futuristic buildings behind the façades, premises that have nothing in common with the historical façade; the latter somehow clinging to a new construction, usually larger in volume. This intervention, apart from the visual changes, modifies the social, economic and spatial data of an urban area. An interesting example is London's Lloyd's building, constructed in 1928 by architect Sir Edwin Cooper. Its imposing triumphal arch and corridor were later connected via a bridge to a 1951-1957 building by architect Terence Heysham.⁶ Excessively remodelled

between 1990 and 1991, the Heysham building was demolished in 2004 and replaced by a 26-storey skyscraper in 2006-2007.⁷ Although Cooper's building had been listed in 1977, Lloyd's still needed more space and wanted to erect new premises. After receiving approval from the City's Court of Common Council, its 1928 building was demolished in 1979-1981, and its only preserved feature was the 1928 main façade and arched portal.⁸ In 1986, a new, futuristic, high-tech 16-storey building was erected on its site, which included the recently restored 1763 Adam Room, the dining room from the 1725 Bowood House in Wiltshire that had been purchased at auction in 1956 and installed in the Heysham building.⁹ The new Lloyd's building was listed in 2011 given its architectural innovation, historical interest, and successful integration of the earlier building's wall fabrics and architectural style, such as the Adam Room and the original 1928 Cooper façade.¹⁰

Sixth practice: Demolition and rebuilding of the whole building. In some countries, a building may be listed even if it is partly or totally destroyed. In cases like this, or in cases where the damage of a full standing protected building is such that conservation costs would be too high for the owner, the building may be totally demolished, providing that the external walls and roof are exact copies of the original in terms of appearance and size. This practice is very common in Greece, where a building may be listed individually, or as part of a protected built area, i.e. historical centres, traditional streets, historically important blocks etc.

Seventh practice: Demolition of original façades and construction of copies. This variance involves the demolition of original façades that don't meet modern standards, which are then replaced with facsimiles of façades positioned in front of modern buildings. Entirely rebuilt from new materials, such façades are mere copies of some original, now forever lost.

Eighth practice: Alteration of the proportions of the façade. In some cases, demolished façades are not only rebuilt using contemporary materials, but their original proportions are altered. Their newly exaggerated dimensions have been stretched to meet current floor-to-floor height requirements, an ultimate absurdity that has become a status in the City of London.

III. FAÇADISM, GENIUS LOCI, AND AUTHENTICITY

Façadism's supporters argue that its practice enables urban tradition to conform to development, as buildings cannot remain 'frozen' in the past, while being called to serve contemporary needs, including their role as investment vehicles. Since people feel familiar with, or somewhat possessive over old buildings, and local authorities support their preservation, property rights tend to become intensely disputed when it comes to façadism. Some claim that façades 'belong' to the community, while buildings' interiors belong to their actual owners. With this in mind, maintenance is a matter of appearance, with façadism representing a compromise between two 'owners'.

Furthermore, maintaining the integrity of a building and permitting changes behind its unchanged façade allow for an alternative to total destruction that reintegrates the building back into contemporary life by allowing for future development.

Façadism though, raises several issues regarding authenticity, as old façades are preserved like urban wallpaper, theatre props, or historical-looking masks that merely conceal the truth that modern construction is downgrading the urban environment and separating building exteriors from their interiors, as entire blocks of modern apartments stretch behind façades of various architectural orders. Façadism has been accused of being superficial and pointless, and even promoting an epidermal preservation. Yet buildings are far more than their façades, just as cities are far more than collections of buildings and the preservation of history is hardly an epidermal matter. Façadism's critics use strong and imaginative expressions such as 'monstrous changes', 'urban taxidermy', 'Halloween preservation' and 'unacceptable bastardisation of historic buildings'. Furthermore, they accuse it of destroying architectural innovation. They rightly worry that contemporary architects will not have an opportunity to produce buildings worthy of historical architecture.

According to Robert Bargery, façadism opposes rationality since all parts of a building are expected to cohere with one another.¹¹ During the design process, a building's form follows its function. This enables its exterior to be a logical expression and extension of its interior, thus engendering indivisible totalities, with spaces behind the façade belonging to the façade. Moreover, façade openings like doors and windows serve interior spaces, and doors are connected to halls, staircases and circulation arteries. Therefore the exterior is the 'outward expression of the anatomy and organisation of the building'.¹² Façadism disrupts the building's totality, dividing its spaces from the façade to which they belong, and opposes authenticity, as internal architectural and decorative features, staircases, marble fire-places, wall-paintings, ornate ceilings, and other decorative elements are sacrificed in order to create more floors, more space, and more profit. The parts of the building that could otherwise narrate its history, the way of living, and the quality of life of its previous owners are destroyed, raising open and unanswered questions regarding the perceived value of the building and its role as a *monument*.

The sense, spirit, character, or atmosphere of a place, also known as *genius loci*, is the most important determinant of any culture, reflecting the culture that created a built environment, as well as the people and life of the culture currently occupying this place.¹³ Cities are living organisms, in which communities, values, and ways of living change constantly. According to Jivén and Larkham, a city's *genius loci* should also be expected to change.¹⁴ Cities comprise buildings of various architectural orders and epochs, ultimately forming 'a palimpsest, a layering where subsequent layers do not erase all traces of their predecessors'.¹⁵ If we've already accepted the presence of a medieval building standing astride an 18th century one, why should we oppose the

erection of a 21st century skyscraper adjacent a 19th century house? In this sense, façadism is a misinforming rather than truthful representation of a building, an illusion rather than true preservation. It deceives visitors and citizens, giving an epidermal impression of the integrity of a building in an attempt to contribute to the sense of the historical centre or city.

The ongoing transition of buildings to their modern usages as exemplary of façadomy risks obfuscating and confusing one's sense of place, which ordinarily lends every urban environment its particular character, authenticity, and cultural import. Some areas may *feel* authentic, but are they really? Is this 'feeling' of authenticity sufficient? Or does façadism rather reflect the spirit of our 'mixed-up' contemporary culture, not the spirit of a place's actual historical context? According to Jakle, the best judge of a place and its character are its visitors, not its residents, as they are the ones who deliberately seek out places for some anticipated experience.¹⁶ Does façadism assist visitors' perceptions of a city's personality?

Cultural organisations and legislation have yet to reach solid or internationally-accepted answers to these questions, yet façadism continues unabated. Façadism counts as neither conservation nor preservation, since it preserves façades, while irreversibly changing buildings' interiors. A building and its character should be preserved in a manner that conveys its role as one of the city's historical monuments. It thus seems that conservation and historical preservation are actually opposed to any notion of authenticity or *genius loci* afforded contemporary cities. Façadism interventions rather strip historical centres of their dynamic character, restricting both the natural flow of cultural change and the city's evolution, transforming cities into static areas or open air museums with the buildings themselves serving as exhibitions.

Finally, it is still not clear which parts *should* be preserved, or what ought to be considered 'authentic'. According to the Nara Document of Authenticity (1994), authenticity is the 'essential qualifying factor concerning values' and its understanding is fundamental to the scientific study of cultural heritage, conservation, and restoration planning and the inscription procedures. Moreover, the 'requisite basis for assessing all aspects of authenticity' requires the knowledge and understanding of information sources regarding heritage-attributed values, 'in relation to original and subsequent characteristics of the cultural heritage, and their meaning'. Since heritage values differ from culture to culture, it is impossible to establish international criteria that facilitate judgements of value and authenticity. Additionally, each culture must be free to underwrite its own values, so that judgements of authenticity reflect 'the nature of the cultural heritage, its cultural context, and its evolution through time', based upon information including 'form and design, materials and substance, use and function, traditions and techniques, location and setting, and spirit and feeling, and other internal and external factors'. This encourages the 'elaboration of the specific artistic, historic, social, and scientific dimensions of the cultural heritage being examined'.

IV. FAÇADISM VS CULTURAL HERITAGE DOCUMENTS

Answers on how building renovation and façadism should be treated may be found in charters, recommendations and cultural heritage documents that have been composed since the 19th century, each of which has a unique history and context. Jokilehto, in his PhD thesis describes the historical and cultural conditions under which the idea of the preservation of architectural heritage evolved from the Renaissance until the Venice charter.¹⁷ As early as the 19th Century, William Morris and other founding members of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings penned a Manifesto in response to conservation issues. In 1931 and 1933, the Charter of Athens or Carta del Restauro, and Athens Charter for the Restoration of Historic Monuments respectively, were originated to provide a systematic international collaboration in conservation.¹⁸ The destruction of architectural heritage during WW2 and the establishment of UNESCO in 1945 also led to a series of documents and guidelines. The Venice Charter, born from the need to thoroughly study the principles involved in conservation and restoration of ‘ancient buildings’, was approved in the II International Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments in 1964, and adopted by ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) in 1965.¹⁹

The founding of the European Union in 1993 also spawned guidelines that each member state must follow. The Nara Document on Authenticity [1994] stresses that the ‘cultural heritage of each is the cultural heritage of all’. The cultures that created or those who care for it should adhere ‘to international charters and conventions developed for conservation of cultural heritage’ and consider ‘the principles and responsibilities flowing from them’. It is thus a matter of political will whether we want to preserve the character of buildings, the character of the city, or to profit in an easy way.

A careful study of the relevant charters and guidelines on building protection leads to the following points:

1. It is important to stress the need for architectural preservation, as buildings are ‘an expression of history’, ‘an essential part of the memory of the human race’, ‘a capital of irreplaceable spiritual, cultural, social and economic value’, and an important part in education.²⁰
2. Heritage documents provide some indications as to what should be protected, yet leave freedom to each state to adopt whatever criteria it deems most suitable.²¹ Recommendation No.R(98)4 of the Council of Europe takes protection a step further, to include moveable property situated inside or outside a building.²²
3. The community has certain rights in regard to private ownership.²³
4. Inventories of protected buildings should be compiled.²⁴
5. Limitations of building restoration have been set and should be followed.²⁵
6. Damage to historic buildings entails administrative or criminal prosecutions.²⁶
7. Erection of new buildings is preferable to demolition.²⁷

8. Planning programs and zoning is to be considered to safeguard monuments from urban development.²⁸
9. New constructions should respect the genius loci, authenticity and materials of buildings.²⁹
10. International cooperation is a means for safeguarding the architectural heritage.³⁰
11. Specialised institutions should be established for the preservation of architectural heritage and their advice should be asked upon matters of architectural heritage preservation.³¹
12. Official bodies with distinct roles for the protection of historic buildings and their interior should be established.³²
13. Architectural heritage should be protected by legislation.³³
14. Provisions should be made for expropriation, compensation and funding of private restoration works.³⁴
15. State intervention in cases of emergency is advised.³⁵
16. Building occupation is a means of protection, provided that this will not externally or internally affect their structure and character as complete entities.³⁶
17. Public awareness rising, education, communication and public involvement are an absolute necessity for the preservation of architectural heritage and authenticity.³⁷

V. CONCLUSION

When new buildings are erected in historical areas, there's always the worry that the site's authenticity will be compromised. There is thus an urgent need to: promote high standards in contemporary architecture in historic districts, eliminate conflicts between new designs and historic preservation, and define which are the important old buildings or architectural blocks or areas in need of preservation based on their architectural, historical or other values. Since façadism typically proves inauthentic, I prefer good planning in protected areas to short cuts that only serve short-sighted developers and indecisive authorities. My analysis of façadism highlights the importance of choice: what should be preserved and to what degree should the original building be preserved unaltered? Historical city centres should be kept alive, yet many historical buildings prove unsustainable unless their structures undergo alterations that enable them to keep up with modern usage and life trends. Interventions can allow for creative use, while respecting the site's cultural heritage and authenticity. Façadism falsely pretends that buildings' interiors need not be authentic, let alone cohere with its historic significance.

Moreover, architects, engineers and urban developers should be trained in traditional architecture and building preservation, they must be taught to recognise the values of buildings' exteriors, as well as their interiors, master in the study of cultural heritage documents and relevant legislation in order

to protect the natural environment, as well as the cultural landscape from uncontrolled urbanisation.

Since guidelines, charters, documents and legislation on the preservation and protection of cultural heritage are often vague, there is still place for more dialogue, clarifications and establishment protective laws to preserve the authenticity of historic urban environments.

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NOTES

1. Gombrich 1991, 77-79.
2. Such personalities include Eugène Viollet-le-Duc (1814-1879), John Ruskin (1819-1900), John Lubbock (1834-1913), William Morris (1834-1896), Camillo Boito (1836-1914), George Curzon (1859-1925), William Sumner Appleton (1874-1947), Charles E. Peterson (1906-2004), James Marston Fitch (1909-2000), and others.
3. Historic England 1987.
4. Gough 2012.
5. Awards: 2007, Ontario Steel Design Awards, Canada Institute of Steel Construction and 2009, XVII Concorso Internazionale, 'Sistema d'autore Metra'. See Studio Libeskind 2019.
6. Historic England 2011; Engineering Timelines 2017.
7. Historic England 2011.
8. Historic England 2011.
9. Engineering Timelines 2017.
10. Historic England 2011.
11. Bargery 2005.
12. Bargery 2005.
13. Durrell 1969, 156.
14. Jivén and Larkham 2003, 75.
15. Jivén and Larkham 2003, 72.
16. Jakle 1987, 8.
17. Jokilehto 1986.
18. Iamandi 1997.
19. 2nd International Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments 1964a.
20. Council of Europe 1975.
21. Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) 1877; Congrès internationaux d'architecture moderne (CIAM) 1933; UNESCO 1962; UNESCO 1964; 2nd International Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments 1964b; Council of Europe 1975.
22. Council of Europe 1998.
23. First International Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments 1931; Congrès internationaux d'architecture moderne (CIAM) 1933.
24. First International Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments 1931; UNESCO 1964; Council of Europe 1998.
25. Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) 1877; 6th International Congress of Architects 1904; First International Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments 1931; 2nd International Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments 1964b; Council of Europe 1998.
26. UNESCO 1962; Council of Europe 1998.
27. Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) 1877.
28. Congrès internationaux d'architecture moderne (CIAM) 1933; UNESCO 1962.
29. First International Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments 1931; UNESCO 1962; ICOMOS 1972; Council of Europe 1975.
30. Council of Europe 1954; ICOMOS 1967; Council of Europe 1975.
31. 6th International Congress of Architects 1904; First International Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments 1931; UNESCO 1962.
32. UNESCO 1962; UNESCO 1964; Council of Europe 1998.
33. Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) 1877; 6th International

- Congress of Architects 1904; First International Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments 1931; UNESCO 1962; Council of Europe 1975; Council of Europe 1998.
34. 6th International Congress of Architects 1904; UNESCO 1962; UNESCO 1964; Council of Europe 1975.
35. First International Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments 1931; UNESCO 1962.
36. First International Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments 1931; ICOMOS 1972.
37. First International Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments 1931; ICOMOS 1994; UNESCO 1962; UNESCO 1964; Council of Europe 1998; ICOMOS 2008.

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