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IX JORNADAS INTERNACIONALES ARTE Y CIUDAD

Madrid, 21, 22 y 23 de octubre de 2020

Grupo de Investigación
Arte, Arquitectura y Comunicación en la Ciudad Contemporánea
Universidad Complutense de Madrid

Diciembre 2020

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PRESENTACIÓN

CIUDAD Y REPRESENTACIÓN: IMÁGENES, IMAGINARIOS Y MEMORIA URBANA

THE MEMORY OF HISTORICAL GERMAN CITIES

La memoria de las ciudades históricas alemanas

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Resumen

La memoria de la ciudad europea, como fenómeno construido a lo largo del tiempo, es un patrimonio que se conserva en el trazado de sus trazas, espacios y elementos naturales, en los monumentos y artefactos históricos, pero también en la pequeña estructura de solares y parcelas que conforman bloques urbanos. El redescubrimiento de la arquitectura de la ciudad ha entendido la estructura urbana como un fenómeno complejo, construido en diferentes niveles y estratigrafías temporales, que permanece hasta hoy, a veces de manera fragmentaria, y que puede ser reconstruido de diversas maneras, también con la ayuda de documentos iconológicos e históricos. Para reconstruir la memoria urbana se recurre cada vez más a las técnicas analíticas propias de las disciplinas que estudian las civilizaciones antiguas, cuya memoria cultural debe entenderse no sólo como un instrumento para recordar y preservar, sino como un estímulo para el proyecto contemporáneo. El renacimiento de los centros alemanes muestra cómo la ciudad es observada hoy en día a través de esta perspectiva iconológica, con la intención de recuperar su historicidad perdida dentro de la ciudad contemporánea.

Abstract

The memory of the European city, as a phenomenon built over time, is a heritage that is preserved in the layout of its traces, spaces and natural elements, in monuments and historical artifacts, but also in the small structure of lots and parcels that make up urban blocks. The rediscovery of the architecture of the city has understood the urban structure as a complex phenomenon, built on different levels and temporal stratigraphies, which remain until today, sometimes in a fragmentary way, and which can be reconstructed in various ways, also with the help of iconological and historical documents. In order to reconstruct the urban memory, the use of analytical techniques typical of the disciplines that study ancient civilizations is increasingly used, whose cultural memory is to be understood not only as a tool for remembering and preserving, but as a stimulus for the contemporary project. The rebirth of German centres shows how the city is today observed through this iconological perspective, with the intention of regaining its lost historicity within the contemporary city.

1. Introduction

The art of memory as a tool to regain possession through the recovery of lost time, if applied to the city, can guide interventions of urban correction, aimed at restoring a historical image disappeared and often forgotten (Yates, 1966). If collective memory is the tool that links the present to the past, it must be kept alive and continuously updated with respect to current needs, in order to keep alive in its inhabitants the awareness of its value (Halbwachs, 1950). The collective role of memory, even more than the private one, is the very foundation on which the notion of architecture of the city is built, as a shared and permanent *locus* over time (Rossi, 1966). The rediscovery of the architecture of the city has understood the urban structure as a complex phenomenon, built on different levels and temporal stratigraphies, which remain until today, sometimes in a fragmentary way, and which can be reconstructed in various ways, also with the help of iconological and historical documents.

There is an increasing desire to restore this lost temporal dimension, through processes of not mere reproduction, but of a real reinvention of the very notion of historicity and tradition, where "invented traditions" attempt "to establish continuity with a suitable historic past" (Hobsbawm; Ranger, 1983: 1). In order to reconstruct the urban memory, the use of analytical techniques typical of the disciplines that study ancient civilizations is increasingly used, whose cultural memory is to be understood not only as a tool for remembering and preserving, but as a stimulus for the contemporary project (Assmann, 1992). Through analytical tools of overlapping and comparison of different thresholds, it is possible to compare the different ideas of the city, to understand not only the extent of the lost heritage, but also to develop interventions for its current restitution. The construction of an *Atlas of memory* becomes a mnemonic tool suitable for creating abacuses of references useful for intervening in the consolidated fabric of the historical city (Warburg, 2000).

1.1. The reconstruction of German cities

The memory of the European city, as a phenomenon built over time, is a heritage that is preserved in the layout of its traces, spaces and natural elements, in monuments and urban artefacts, but also in the small structure of lots and parcels that make up historical blocks. The rebirth of German historical centres shows how the city is today observed through this iconological perspective, with the intention of regaining its lost historicity. Where the credibility of this always depends on the quality of the individual project, on the appropriateness of the architectural and technical solutions adopted, such as to put into practice, and not only on stage, its construction over time.

Therefore, these cases are not to be understood as nostalgic attempts to reproduce the city *as it was*, nor as simple urban regeneration projects, but as advanced and mature examples of critical reconstruction, according to the meaning introduced in the European debate since the 1970s (Caja, 2018).

1.1.1. Three phases of reconstruction

These interventions constitute a new phase with respect to the first two phases of reconstruction of historical European centers.

- The first one goes back to the well-known cases of the post-war period, such as Warsaw, Münster or Colmar, where the intention was to rebuild the superficial image of the lost architectural heritage, where historical facades were according to new functional and infrastructural aspects. Among these cases can be also included the Bolognese blocks reconstructed in typological forms (Cervellati et al., 1977) or the Nikolaiviertel in Berlin based on the use of prefabrication.

- The origin of this awareness dates back to the 1950s when, for the first time, the loss of the centre and the need to give a heart back to the city were realised (Rogers, Sert, Tyrwhitt, 1952). The merit of this questioning was to highlight how the Modern, so attentive to the question of functional zoning and the optimisation of housing spaces, had completely forgotten not only the question of historical centres, but also that of newly founded *nuclei*.

- A second phase derives from the awareness of the need not only to revitalise the existing centres but, where necessary, to rebuild them according to the specific settlement principles of the European

city (Delevoy, 1978). From Léon Krier's first ideal projects for the reconstruction of German cities such as Bremen (Krier, 1984) to the *Internationale Bauausstellung Berlin 1984-97*, coordinated by Josef Paul Kleihues, the reconstructive principle will take on a formal definition and critical emphasis, poised between revisionism and experimentation. The critical attitude given to each single building, the plurality of the architectural solutions, the authoriality of the single designers involved (often coming from outside) was the specificity of this international experiment, whose reflection is evident in different other context, like for example the rebirth of Barcelona in the same years.

- This here analysed third phase can be seen as the logic consequence of this attitude, in a more mature and attentive way to historical precedents. The interventions carried out in Berlin in the decades following the reunification of the city (and partly still in progress), under the guidance of Hans Stimmann and a group of architects of the city, constitute an updated example of this reconstructivist line, pursued today also in smaller historical centres, such as those here analysed.

Despite the common reconstructive approach, different positions coexist in these different interventions, ranging from a more philological approach (reconstruction *as it was, where it was*) to others in which the critical and interpretative approach introduced by the IBA-Berlin is developed in a more careful way with respect to its historic image.

1.1.2. Reconstructionism vs. deconstructionism

For the extent of such interventions, recent critics have spoken of *reconstructionism* as a response to *deconstructivism* born in the late 1980s (Fischer, 2011). With respect to the desire to dissect the historical city analytically, as if it were a patient on an operating table, attempting to dismember its individual pieces and subject them to conceptual or diagrammatic processes of abstraction, in the cases here considered the intention is rather to reintegrate the surviving fragments still present as material witnesses of history or as immaterial traces in the urban layout, within a unified architectural body.

The aim is to reconstruct an updated version of the historical image that has been lost, following wrong choices or today no longer considered suitable. Choices mostly born from a desire to erase the compact structure of the inherited city – often still legible in its foundations and building structure, and in any case received by us through the ancient iconography, albeit in fragmentary form – in favor of new ideas of cities, which today have mostly proved to be unsuccessful.

In the cases analyzed here, the theme of reconstruction is proposed as a *correction* operation. For this reason, it is often accompanied by the demolition of previous interventions, today considered unsuitable with respect to the small scaled fabric and the architectural features of the original historical centers. Projects that foresee, therefore, the demolition of previous interventions, which in terms of scale, morphological form, typological layout, linguistic-constructive solutions now appear unsuitable with respect to the original image that is to be restored.

In this sense, the projects presented here are to be considered as a mature phase of a reflection on urban history of important German centers, aimed at re-appropriating the lost identity and memory, in a dialectic relationship between continuity, reconstruction and new architectural design. Within the history of reconstruction, these interventions prove to be paradigmatic for the questions they raise, but also for the concrete solutions they offer, in their dialogic relationship between copy and reinterpretation, which makes them true witnesses of the contemporary condition in which we live (Nerdinger, 2010; Caja, 2019b). On the other hand, their character of "constructed historical images" (Pehnt, 2011) can be good explained in opposition to the often exasperated arbitrariness and extemporaneity of much contemporary architecture.

1.1.3 Demolishing the Modern for reconstructing the Ancient

All the cases here considered have to be intended as critical *corrections* of past interventions of the recent history, especially dating back to the urban strategies taken during the quick reconstruction of the historical centres after World War II. Reconstructive strategies, which were taken without respect to the structure of pre-existent fabric and to the symbolical meaning of the inherited urban image.

A first paradigmatic case in this sense is represented by Hildesheim, the capital of Lower Saxony, in which a post-war building was demolished to allow the reconstruction of the ancient ensemble of medieval origin (Häger, 2011). For the reconstruction of the most representative historical building on Marktplatz – the *Knocherhaueramtshaus* (the butchers' guild house) – built according to the typical wooden frame structure common to many other buildings of the *ensemble* overlooking the square and defined by Georg Dehio as the "the most monumental among the wooden houses in Germany" –, the Hotel Rose, built in the 1960s following the typical forms of the post-war International Style, was demolished (Heinemann, 1994) (*Fig. 1*).

Fig. 1 - Hildesheim: Hotel Rose / reconstructed Knochenhaueramtshaus (Source: Häger, 2011)

Following this experience, the other cases treated here have followed a similar strategy of punctual replacement.

- At the Neumarkt in Dresden, it was necessary to remove an oversized *Moloch* dating back to the 1980s, the extension building of the Police Garrison from the 1980s, to allow the reintegration of the original perimeter of one of the eight pre-existent blocks, the Quartier III, which were rebuilt in the last two decades (SAK 2008).

- At the Friedrichswerder in Berlin, the Foreign Ministry (Aussenministerium, 1964-67), built during the GDR regime on Schinkelplatz, partly occupying the Baukademie area and overlooking the Friedrichswerdersche Kirche – both masterpieces designed by Karl Friedrich Schinkel –, was demolished after the reunification to allow the rebuilding of the pre-existent urban blocks, according to a new typology of townhouses (Stimmann, 2014).

- In Frankfurt, the Technisches Rathaus (1972-74), an out-of-scale building in concrete and steel structure, following the examples of the brutalist architecture of British origin, was destroyed in 2010 to allow the realization of the Dom-Römer Areal, built according to the original layout of small streets and squares. A project which, for its urban density and architectural quality, has won the prestigious MIPIM Award 2019 (Sturm; Cachola Sturm, 2018).

- In Potsdam the large building complex on Friedrich-Ebert Strasse, the Teachers' Training Institute which contained the first seat of the Fachhochschule Potsdam (FHP), was recently removed to make space for the new blocks in construction around the Castle and the reshaped Neumarkt (STP, 2012).

All these out-of-scale functionalist buildings, dating back to the international post-war style, to the following socialist regime in the East (Berlin, Potsdam) or technocratic orientation in the West (Frankfurt), produced, for their volumes and architecture, an alienating effect within the original fabric, without being able to regenerate a real urban life. For these reasons, after long and controversial debates, in which the citizens where involved actively, supported by the political forces and the investors, the final decision to destroy them has given the opportunity to reinvent the lost identity of these centers.

1.1.4. The mixed model: Leitbauten / Neubauten

Compared to Hildesheim, a true *stylistic* reconstruction (at least for the facades) of the original substance, the model adopted in the cases analyzed here is different and more articulated, as it includes

both reconstructions *as they were, where they were* and contemporary reinterpretations of the destroyed houses. The *mixed model* is based on the coexistence of *Leitbauten* and *Neubauten* – pilot buildings reconstructed in the same way as the original ones and new buildings inspired by the existing ones.

It will be the first to be adopted at the beginning of the new millennium in the eight urban blocks rebuilt around Dresden's Neumarkt, in conjunction with the completion of the reconstruction of the Frauen-kirche (*Fig. 2*). Even if criticized at the beginning for the low quality of the constructive elements, but also for the merging of old lots to create larger properties for receptive and commercial use, the overall effect still in the completion phase is able to recreate the original *ensemble* and the spatiality of the original square around the rebuilt church.

Fig. 2 - Dresden, Neumarkt: Police Headquarters (1983) / reconstructed Quartier III (Source: Wikipedia / Dresden.de)

Fig. 3 - Frankfurt am Main, Dom Roemer Areal: Technical Townhall (1972-74) / reconstructed Hühnermarkt (Source: Wikipedia / Caja)

Similarly, the Dom Römer Areal in Frankfurt consists of an ensemble of small townhouses of which about a third copy of the originals and the rest entrusted to a wide range of local and non-local archi-tects. Also here the original small-scaled structure of the historical fabric is redefined according to a careful recreation of the original characters that once defined this significant part of the city, one of the most important examples of stratified centers (from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance and Baroque) in Germany (*Fig. 3*). In this process, the architects, as well as artisans and artists involved, took over only after a public debate, based on collective participation as a tool to investigate the real will of a given community, without populist forcing.

In this case, the permanence of old traces like fragments of ancient sculptures, decorative and con-structive elements, offered the opportunity to reintegrate old parts into the new buildings. These *spolia* have been used as real building stones, with the intention of making the reproduction of the original state more credible and *authentic*. This was possible not only thanks to the large number of carefully preserved ancient remains, classified according to their original location, but also thanks to the great

availability of textual and iconographic documents still available in the city's archives. In this way, these old stones and documents have reactivated the collective memory of the community of elderly citizens still alive, so that they could actively participate in the reconstruction process.

Although the master plan for the reconstruction of Berlin's Altstadt has remained on paper, elaborated under the Department of Town Planning coordinated by Hans Stimmann together with the local architect Bernd Albers, only a few blocks has till now been built around the Schinkelplatz and the Werderscher Markt, two important urban squares of the old city, by a team of local studios (except for Rafael Moneo). In this case, however, the intervention didn't repeat the structure of the old lots, nor the characters of the original houses, but experimented a type of block houses on a passing lot, with terraces facing the inner courtyards. The validity of the mixed model seems to be reconfirmed in two other cases here analyzed. The blocks around the Alter Markt in Potsdam are based on a general plan (*Leitbautenkonzept*) of 2012, according to which different types of intervention are identified. These are ranging from the faithful reconstruction of the original façades of 18th century buildings – imported especially from Italy according to Palladian and other Renaissance models – rebuilt as *copies of copies*, to houses of new design, which however underlie the pre-established volumetric and compositional guidelines set by the general plan. To allow the recreation of the old urban blocks around the old reconstructed Neumarkt the *Teachers' Training Institute*, later first headquarter of the FHP University. This represented also an occasion for completing the spatiality of the old square, framed by the new Castle, Palazzo Barberini and other smaller palaces (*Fig. 3*).

Even in the case of the narrow and elongated urban blocks of the old Gründungsviertel district of Lübeck, a similar philosophy was followed. Here again, reconstructed pilot buildings will coexist next to current reinterpretations of the Gothic-merchant houses typical of Hanseatic cities. On the basis of the *Rahmenplan Gründungsviertel 2015* are defined the basis for a reorganization of the old quarter according to the original street lines, the differentiation of building typologies and the variation of ridge and eaves heights. The original lots structure is adapted to today's functional requirements and at the same time offers a wide range of scale, variety and flexibility in the design of the city center.

1.1.5. Urban Sustainability

These projects are also attentive to current issues related to sustainability and the return to a human scale of urban living. In contrast to the futuristic ideologies advocated by the avant-gardes, mostly based on the myth of technological progress, these interventions on an urban scale start from the proportions of Vitruvian man as a measure to re-found the city and its architecture tailored to the pedestrian, the cyclist and new ecological means of transport (Caja, 2019a).

In a certain sense, these interventions can be understood as a response to the criticisms made by the Modernist towards the compact structure of the historical city, made up of streets, squares, parcelled out blocks and block houses individually configured and built over time. More than in retroactive, or nostalgic terms, they can therefore be explained in two ways:

- On the one hand, as operations of critical revision of previous choices, often taken too quickly and without real participatory sharing by citizens, on the basis of principles imported from other contexts, such as that of the American city, and motivated by functionalist or infrastructural reasons. Ideas of cities fundamentally based on technological, functional, urbanistic aspects, in which the scale of the automobile seemed to have replaced that of man.

- On the other hand, as a conscious reaction of resistance to urban anti-contextualism, architectural objectualism, technocratic infrastructuralism, the pathos of *bigness* and the out-of-scale that still unite much contemporary architecture (Koolhaas, 1995).

- In this sense, they are not to be understood as nostalgic attempts to reproduce the city as it was, nor as simple projects of urban regeneration, but as advanced and mature examples of critical reconstruction, according to the meaning introduced in the European debate since the 1970s.

Fig. 4 - Potsdam: Teachers' Training Institute / Neumarkt today with reconstructed Castle and Palazzo Barberini (Source: Caja)

1.3. Conclusion

From these examples of reconstruction emerges a particular way of looking at the historical heritage, understood as a possible memory to be reintegrated in accordance with its past image.

Where the transition from reconstruction *in situ* to reproduction in other places, however distant from the cultural and geographical point of view, becomes conceptually subtle and difficult to define. In cases of cloning, different motives and interests take over, not only of commercial nature, partly linked to issues of cultural prestige and the establishment of symbolic places in newly formed megalopolises devoid of any historical identity.

In this cases, the principle of imitation and invention of previous precedents, most of which have never existed, in the form of collages or historical quotations taken from stylistic spheres distant in time and often extraneous to the place, becomes the foundation of various interventions in non-European contexts (Engel, 2018). In these operations of reproduction, the typological approach, that had distinguished urban experiences of the 60s and 70s intent on reproducing in abstract and simplified forms pieces of urban history in other contexts is overcome.

Beyond the many doubts and criticisms that such interventions are raising, what is clear is that these are real projects of contemporary architecture, in which the old city acts not only as an evocative reference, but also as a concrete model for new buildings built or under construction. In fact, these examples have already been taken as a reference by other non-European nations, first of all China, in search of their identity following the too rapid processes of urban transformation in recent decades through processes of reinvention of their history and tradition (Bosker, 2013). Abandoning the taboo of the historicity of the original, they reinvent traditional forms in a new architectural way, aware that it is now impossible to find a definitive expression of authenticity (Mager, 2016).

According to the principle of technical reproducibility, consolidated for over a century as an operational tool by the figurative arts, even architecture today seems to increasingly affirm its right not only to reconstruct, but also to reproduce old examples, which seem to be more valid than many contemporary proposals. Though often considered *fakes* on an urban scale with references to the artificial and scenic reality of theme parks, commercial outlets and Disney villages (Eco, 2016) often re-proposed in the form of a *simulacrum* or a *hyperreality* (Baudrillard, 1978), the practice of reproducing parts of cities or individual buildings in other places and contexts is an ancient practice.

In this sense, a monument or a piece of a city can be seen unrelated to the time period in which it arose, but also from the context in which it was established. As a reproducible version, it may arise elsewhere in more or less identical forms, for more complex reasons, motivated according to symbolic, cultural or ideological reasons. This attitude towards inherited heritage, which does not consider it in relation to the *aura* it has conquered over time, favours an idea of it according to the rationality of reproducibility, now more advanced and sophisticated than ever before from the point of view of available technologies.

Considered from this point of view, these cases open disturbing, though inescapable, questions not only about truth and false, original and copy, falsification and authenticity. But especially – for us as architects and inhabitants of the city – they raise following central issue:

Will these processes of reconstruction or re-appropriation of historical heritage be able to reproduce, not only from a formal point of view, the identity of a place?

It is still too early to assess whether their actual role within the city stops at the pure image, or becomes structural to the real life of those who live there. That is, if these reconstructed centers do not actually remain a simple tourist attraction, but become real places to live in, capable of truly reactivating the sense of community lost over time.

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