

A GROWING CENTRAAL

Narratives in three steps.

The Materialization of Continuity and Change.

For Javiera and Bautista

Introduction

This is a theory led research, driven by an obsession with the social character of Heritage Architecture and the way it relates with change. In an ever changing economy and culture, buildings will certainly mutate over time. Why try to impose any fix solution in a new stage of intervention?

Some structuralist qualities of Centraal Beheer of Herman Hertzberger give me hints on how to intervene on it. Adaptability, personalization and change become key to face a new life stage.

For this research I proposed the "Narratives on three steps" method as a creative-reflexive tool that seeks to foreseen possible situations that should be considered in the intervention, through three different stages: Urban connection, Social Encounter (in-between space) and Networking (inside use).

This method also aimed to generate in me a state of mind where different options were open to consideration, resulting in the design of an intervention that could react properly to further economical and cultural changes and engage with the context in these three essential stages.

This method could give me a response to my main research question: **How the reuse of the building could engage with the changes of the city and its demands over time?**

A profound fascination with Heritage Architecture was my primary motivation to join the master program at TU Delft. The dominant presence of ruins and a certain sense of experience gained through the years give old and neglected structures a particular weight challenging to describe, certainly mayor to most of the grandiloquent demonstrations of newly built architectures. Interventions on these existing buildings present us as the arduous task of meet different realities into a single image. A chance to bring structures to a new life connected with the past.

Nevertheless, how to position myself and research when facing the global question of how to intervene in existing buildings? The broad scope of this issue touch almost every city in the world and force me to think first about how I interpret cities in general, and how much value I give to Economy and Culture in its conformation.

My graduation project is the expansion of the ideas developed originally in my theory thesis, *Constant Change*, wherein I took two important urban treatises of the second half of the twentieth century as representatives of cities from *Economy and Culture: Collage City (Colin Rowe, 1978)* and *L'Architettura della Città (Aldo Rossi, 1966)*. This with the aim of understanding the contemporary City and use that knowledge in Heritage interventions. Here I gave special value to the process of transformation of a work of architecture, as well to the possibility of its adaptability and personalization through a "weak architecture". (Solà-Morales, 1996).ⁱ

The Future of Structuralism HA Graduation Studio.

With these ideas in mind I joined the heritage and architecture Graduation Studio "the Future of Structuralism", focused in a 1960s movement where architects criticized the narrowness of the functional principle "Form Follows Function". In historic cities, they found solutions for a new form principle: an interpretable, adaptable and expandable architecture.ⁱⁱ

The goal of my graduation project was to find and apply relevant values of the Dutch Structuralist movement present in one of its icons, *Centraal Beheer* by Herman Hertzberger, and use them to propose a solution to the problems that have lead the building to its current state of abandonment.

During the first part of the Studio the analysis of some Icons of the movement were key to dig in the values of structuralism and to perceive the potential of its theories by reading authors such as Aldo Van Eyck, Piet Blom, John Habraken and Herman Hertzberger. Nevertheless, at the same time visiting the site of their projects arise in me some doubts on why some projects succeed while others failed dramatically in their attempts to create open and social environments.

During these analyses, the idea of Time passing by was for me one of the main ingredients in the generation of its particular architectonic notion. In *Centraal Beheer*, user participation and personalisation gave meaning to the original structure, and is only through the scope of Time when we can acknowledge it, and maybe is something we should use for the future interventions.

How? "Narratives in three steps"

(based in Lacaton & Vassal's "Time Machine" strategy)

The narratives are supposed scenarios that could be integrated in three phases to the current intervention.

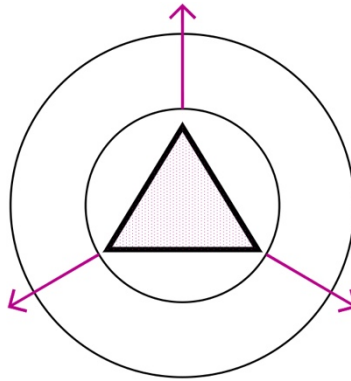
Three scales in which the project could regain its life and be assimilated by people. [Image 1](#) These scenarios were tested with particular functions in mind, but the intervention as a whole should be open to further manifestations of any character. To be adaptable is the main concern.

In every stage, the images that come out after taking the necessary distance from the building and observing its different layers of time, contain the story of what is the real purpose and character of the project, and from that understanding I could plan possible relations to its evolution. From that understanding I could design the new intervention(s) where these scenarios could be integrated having the possibility of been developed over time.

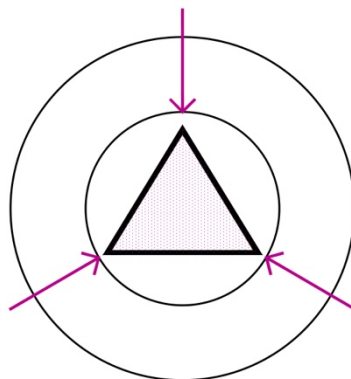
Is possible to see several examples of "supposed scenarios" and "phasing" on the practice of different architecture studios and could give more substance to my proposed method. In Lacaton & Vassal's work, for instance, the "new" is not a declared goal as it is for the avant-garde that indeed defined itself through the quality of the new. While this modernist newness requires first of all that the existing be eliminated, in the case of Lacaton & Vassal *the new frequently emerges from the old.*ⁱⁱⁱ [Image 2](#)

In their Time Machine method, they ask themselves: If something would be required in ten years' time and the solution will be acceptable then, why not also now?

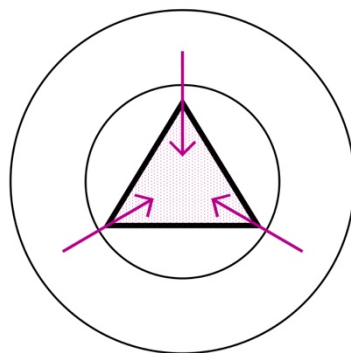
We could embark on this time travel journey as a strategy for problem-solving and to learn from the past how the future changes the present. This anticipation of change demands a form of time in which once separate entities such as the Past, Present, and Future connect to form a continuous span of time within we can move, as on a tape cassette: *you can fast-forward or rewind, in order to get from tomorrow or yesterday what you need for today*".



1. Urban Connection



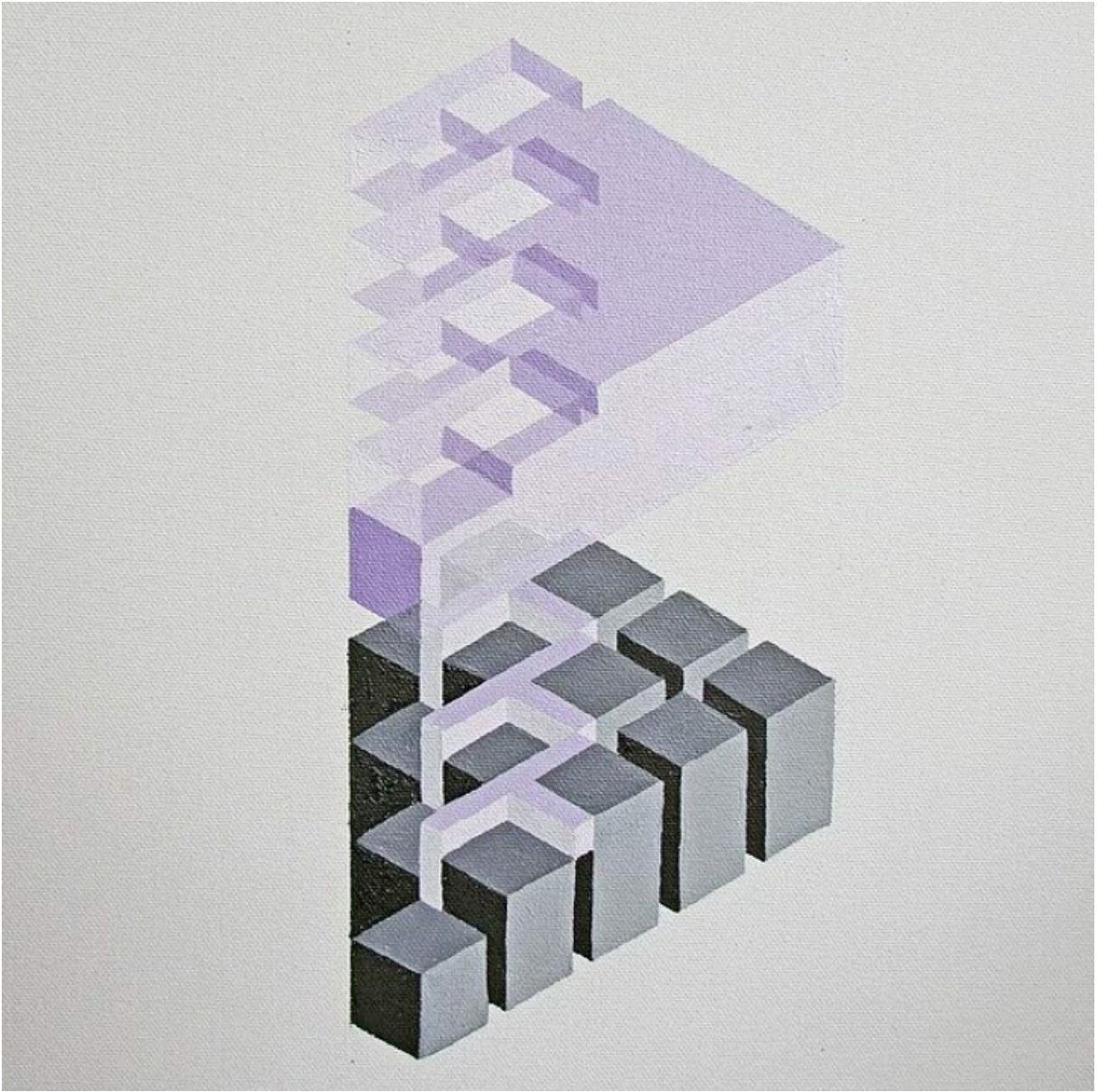
2. Social Encounter



3. Networking

Narratives in three steps

Scheme by Giulio Di Giuseppe



Structure: Culture (Rossi) + Economy (Rowe); Event: Heritage (Solà-Morales);

Painting by Giulio Di Giuseppe

The method I am proposing is how I face the task of intervene in the existing building, it is my personal positioning translated into a tool to generate a design solution for specific situations.

There are some starting points when applying the "Narratives of potential" method in any particular case:

-First. It is necessary to adopt an open *mind-set* and to understand that everything changes. The functions we proposed will mutate in new ways of doing and the architectures we design will probably need to be updated faster than we think.

-Second. Understand the importance of *economy* and the feasibility of the project in the evolution process. Design by phases in order to allow those changes to be slowly assimilated by the people and the building itself.

-Third. Design always listening to the *originals rules*. To its culture, which will allow the integration of the different layers of time in one single image. There is no point in trying to create a new image in the pursuit of dialogue with the existing, instead we should try to integrate the intervention as part of the natural evolution of the original.

The reuse of Centraal Beheer will be planned as a strategy of "colonization" in three different phases, mainly focusing in the structuralist concepts of "the aesthetic of number" (Van Eyck) and "structure and infill" (Habraken). This strategy aims to generate a project which is both economically feasible in time, and culturally congruent.

Everything changes over time, therefore the project must be adaptable. Everything we do respond to the market demands, therefore the project must be feasible and profitable. Every intervention on an existing building is part of its storyline, therefore must be aligned with its original intentions somehow.

Why?

I could argue that nowadays in architecture the main "Spirit of the time" comes from the natural perpetual motion in contemporary cities, with a fascination for movement, time and fragmentation, which is clearly visible in most of the ground-breaking projects around the world. Nevertheless, there are also strong lines of experimentation, both in practice and in the academy, linked with the value of identity, culture and the postmodern utopias from the structuralist period, which I find profoundly interesting and worth discussing them.

What I am trying to put forward with my graduation project and with the "Narratives on three steps" method, is a reflection on the current relevance of change and anticipation in contemporary Heritage architecture, and to discuss it from three different perspectives:

-Utopia and Reality. It is important to walk the line that integrates the ideals and theories, with the feasibility of a project in a world drive mostly by the market demands.

-Experimentation and Academy. Understand Academy as a space to be focused in generate products with a strong sense of experimentation, which opens possibilities for further practice.

-Doubts and Debate. If it is possible to anticipate the user demands is a fair question nowadays in our field, but not an easy one to answer. It is certainly a possibility that needs to be explored further.

According to the capability of Heritage Architecture to be now and become something different later by means of an intervention, I believe is essential the value of architectural experimentation to find a system of continuously adaptable solution that gives space for economic and cultural change, allowing the growth of a body of work in constant evolution.

Anticipation in Heritage Architecture becomes a relevant issue due to the necessity of extrude the qualities of some important urban artefacts within the growth of our cities.

Did the approach work?

The classic product of Heritage & Architecture is summarized in three variables: Design, Technology and Cultural value. For this project those concepts translate into Constant Change, Economy and Culture.

While a real project unfolds in a real environment, an academic project must add the propositive variable and question the established. Within this framework, the project seeks to be an adaptable strategy of occupation. An original proposal but based on its feasibility. [Image 3](#)

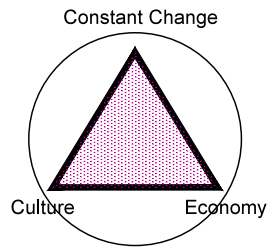
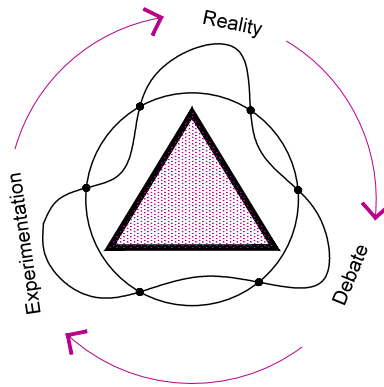
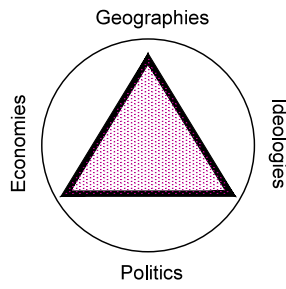
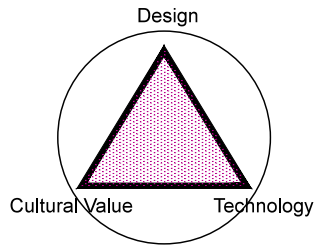
The applied theory in this case intended to merge utopia and reality when dealing with Heritage buildings, by creating a product that emerges from complex concepts but is feasible economically. It consists in a developing strategy and could be applied to newly design architectures as well.

Structuralism was utilized as a strategy for feasible development in time. Not just for the design of a final project but also related with the process of become one. Here, the understanding of architecture as an open ended process at the service of economy and culture allow me to experiment with flexible design solutions where the essential goal is to welcome different ways of doing.

The project is embedded in reality, and in the notion of how the definition of a final integral product takes time, and respond in great measure to economical pressure in different scales. At the same time, it proposes a utopic system of growing structures that are avid for meaning.

The approach allows me to experiment and bring to the table interesting hypothesis, nevertheless to be open to everything does not ensure the success of the project, and because that it was necessary to work with supposed scenarios: with narratives of what could happen in the future, and how the intervention could respond to it.

The narratives must be translated accurately to drawings and images in order to see the integration between welcoming structure and function, which is an arduous and inexact task, certainly difficult to translate into measurable results.



From Reality to Academy

Scheme by Giulio Di Giuseppe

ⁱ Ignasi de Solà-Morales, "*Terrain Vague*" in *Territorios 71* "While for Aldo Rossi the term Monument signifies permanence, for Ignasi de Solà-Morales in contrast, the notion of monument *is bound up with the lingering resonance of poetry after it has been heard, with the recollection of architecture after it has been seen. By the strength of weakness. That strength which art and architecture are capable of producing when they adopt a posture that is not aggressive and dominating, but tangential and weak*"

ⁱⁱ Wim J. van Heuvel, *Structuralism in Dutch architecture (Uitgeverij 010 publishers, Rotterdam, 1992)*. "In the magazine Forum, they developed ideas such as "Structure and Coincidence", "Historic cities and Reciprocity of form", "Polyvalent form and Individual interpretations", "Structure and Infill", and "User Participation". Concepts such as coherence, growth, and change are present on all levels of the urban structure, together with the idea of a Sense of place and Tokens of identification (identifying devices). In this context, the use of "Polyvalent form" and the possibility of individual interpretations allows user participation in housing, and the Integration of "high" and "low" culture in architecture (fine architecture combined with everyday forms of building), generating a more pluralistic architecture"

ⁱⁱⁱ Ilka Ruby and Andreas Ruby, *Naïve Architecture: Notes on the work of Lacaton & Vassal*. *International Architecture Review* 2G, 21 (Barcelona: Editorial Gustavo Gili, 2001), 10.