

Constructing the New Urban Environment: Challenging the Idea of Adaptive Reuse

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Adaptive reuse is concerned with how an architectural site creates a direct connection with not only what is present, but also to what was in the past. It is a concept that is integrated in the interior design process and involves revealing the hidden spirit of a place through the existing context (Brooker and Stone 2018). This paper challenges the idea of adaptive reuse by exploring the impact and benefit of new-builds in the urban environment, specifically in the context of Western culture and civilization. Designers are often tasked to practice with existing parameters such as an enclosed room and maintaining building integrity. In working with these set parameters and the involvement of adaptive reuse, it allows for consideration for the site, contextual values, and sustainability. However, new construction is inevitable in the urban environment. Dana Cuff, an architectural theorist, states that there exists a paradox in the city. A city demands design, yet it inherently resists it (Cuff and Sherman 2011). Innovation and resilience are terms that can be derived from Cuff's statement. In order for the urban environment to continue developing, new and innovative constructs are needed. Yet, the city resists change and leans towards holding on to its values, history, and identity. Kim Dovey, an urban and architectural theorist, also introduces the idea of resiliency in the urban context. He defines resiliency as the capacity of something to adapt without changing its inherent identity (Dovey 2012). The role of the interior designer in this time of new-builds in the city should be to ensure that these projects address the demands and issues of the site – to make these design projects meaningful and identifiable. Key topics discussed in this paper are space and place, urban informalities, and obsolescence. To highlight the impact of new-builds, case studies are presented including the city of Los Angeles, the Ara Pacis Museum in Rome, and mixed-use developments in Winnipeg, Canada.

The terms of space and place are essential in the discourse of design. Michel de Certeau well describes the two terms. He states that a place is an instantaneous configuration of positions. It implies a sense of stability. A space is composed of intersections of mobile elements that consider direction, velocities, and time variables. Expanding on this, he says that a space is a practiced place (de Certeau 1984). But what generates a sense of place? David Seamon is a humanistic geographer who looks to phenomenology to describe the idea of place-making. He is interested in the mobility of place. He uses the metaphor of dance to explain the human body relationships and movement in space. People often find themselves in routines and preconscious movements that are performed daily. It is such habitual tasks that generate a sense of place (Cresswell 2015). This highlights the importance of routine and repetition in the process of place-making.

Space and place have an interesting relationship with one another. Distinguishing these terms is important because it provides a better understanding of the role of a user in a particular space or place. In “Strangely Familiar: Design and Everyday Life,” Andrew Blauvelt, investigates the works of theorists such as Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau and applies it to the notions of familiarity and everyday life in design. In discussing the ideas of Henri Lefebvre, Blauvelt says that for Lefebvre, he sees space as a social product that can encourage and discourage practices and behaviours (Blauvelt 2011). As in the title of Lefebvre’s well-known book, *The Production of Space*, he is more concerned with the view of production and how that is informing the spaces people inhabit. Lefebvre states that a social space is produced and reproduced in connection with the forces of production (Lefebvre 1991). This view that spaces are a product through the means of production supports the idea that change in the urban environment is inevitable. These social constructs may guide a design process as it hints at ethical and social relations that govern how people live, work, and play (Vaikla-Paldma 2013). The innovation of today’s technology and infrastructures demand settings that promote the value, efficiency, and sufficiency of everyday tasks. An example of this is the development of road networks to meet the needs of increased traffic flow and population. To accommodate with these demands, the city itself must adapt.

In thinking of how a city must adapt to the changing needs, one way that exhibits this movement is the idea of urban informality. Urban informality is an idea that Kim Dovey investigates in his paper, “Informal Urbanism and Complex Adaptive Assemblage.” Dovey describes an urban informality as a non-planned urban design (Dovey 2012). Urban models of Asian street markets and housing developments were used to discuss his view on the assemblage theory. He highlights how users of the cities have transformed certain spaces into a functional space that differs from the planned function. A case study of this is the Maeklong Market in Bangkok, Thailand. It is a market that is situated literally on train tracks that are still actively being used by the railway network. The tracks are used as the main thoroughfare for pedestrians when the market is fully active. The way the market is set up allows shop owners to withdraw and distant the physical shops from the passing train. Once the train had passed, shops would again take over and encompass the train tracks. These informalities inform adaptive and creative processes to develop. The challenge that Dovey presents is how urban environments respond to this in today’s market-driven culture (Dovey 2012). If a city fully relies on an adaptive, informal system, then the city itself will lose a sense of place. As mentioned earlier in the discussion of place, de Certeau states that a sense of place implies stability and

formality. In exploring ideas of de Certeau and Dovey, they both discuss how places are composed of interconnections and multiple layers of information.

In Dovey's explorations, he introduces the theory of assemblage. It is a theory that is concerned with the idea of place and its formation of identity. The formation of places goes beyond just a collection of things, but how objects and ideas come together and create interconnections. These connections are key to investigate the sense of territorialisation, social and spatial boundaries, and identification (Dovey 2012). De Certeau discusses the idea of stratification in place-making. He uses the analogy of a book and how a place consists of pages, each with its own interpretation of that place. A place is a layering of information. It can be seen as a palimpsest where only the current information is analyzed. Any new information that is added to a place overwrites what was previously there (de Certeau 1984). In understanding that a place is made up of a multitude of ideas, connections, and objects, how can one expect a place to hold true to an instance in time? In other words, how can one expect to constantly reuse what was? As places develop over time, interconnection of ideas and values adapt to what is current and most relevant. As what de Certeau has mentioned with his metaphor of a palimpsest, the sense of place overwrites itself, with the most current iteration being open for analysis.

In today's market-driven culture, obsolescence is important to consider. The act of consumption and production have led to the quick turnover of trends. Louise Schouwenberg, a design theorist, discusses this idea in her paper "For the Love of Things." The lifespans of objects have shortened. An object that still functions properly is more readily disposed of in order to have the latest and greatest consumer good that is out on the market (Schouwenberg 2011). The sensorial needs of consumers are met through physical interaction of objects. This is what allows people to give purpose and meaning to that particular object. However, this satisfaction is only short-lived due to the ephemeral nature of the consumer culture. The lifespan of that object does not necessarily correlate with its significance – even an object with a one-time use can have significant meaning (Schouwenberg 2011). Obsolescence is important to investigate because it brings the ideas mentioned previously about space, place, and urban informalities into something that is tangible and relatable. The urban environments are spaces where innovation and growth happen. People living in these environments are immersed in an ephemeral culture driven by the market. The needs and wants of consumers and producers are pressured to rapidly change in order to keep up with the fast-paced nature of the city. An example of this would be smartphones. There is a reason why cellular carriers in the Canadian market offer 2-year phone contracts, knowing that people will often want a newer device

before their contract expires. This ties back to Schouwenberg's discussion on obsolescence – what defines a functional good as opposed to a consumer good.

From the ideas mentioned above, three case studies are presented to discuss the influence of new construction. These case studies are shown at various project development scales: a city, a mixed-use development, and a public building. These projects do not intend to show what is correct or incorrect, successful or unsuccessful, rather they intend to generate thought of how a new-build can be inserted into a site and the potentials that come from it.

Los Angeles is an industrial county that attracted the migration of domestic and international workers. By 1935, it led the United States in motion picture production, oil refining, and airplane manufacturing. It was an urban model that expanded outwards rather upwards in the early-twentieth century. Between 1940 and 1970, the population of the Los Angeles conurbation tripled. This includes 140 incorporated municipalities, 60 of which were newly incorporated in that 30-year span (Soja 2000). Los Angeles is used as a model because it exhibits modern urban growth, suburban sprawls, cultural revitalization, and experimentation. In a paper written by Aaron Cayer and Dana Cuff, "Unfit: Los Angeles and the Empty Glass Box" discuss the transformation of Los Angeles in the modern period, specifically focusing on the translation of work and leisure in the urban context. Due to the rapid growth of areas outside of downtown Los Angeles in the mid-twentieth century, the city was forced to reimagine the downtown area. This initiated the redevelopment plan of transforming Bunker Hill from a residential neighbourhood to an area filled with commercial office towers. The insertion of these commercial offices did not perform as anticipated, instead most of these high-rises were left empty and vacant. This led to yet another reimagining of downtown Los Angeles. The renewal of the area incorporated a more diverse work force, including lower wage jobs. This promoted new projects to be implemented in the late-twentieth century such as galleries, entertainment, housing, and more creative offices (Cayer and Cuff 2016). Through the experimentation of new forms like Bunker Hill and the outward sprawl of Los Angeles, the city has an embedded stratification that helped contribute to what Los Angeles is today. It may not have followed the conventional urban model of building upwards and increased density, rather the city's ambiguity of its urban development proved to be its greatest strength (Cayer and Cuff 2016).

The model of Los Angeles was used as a case study from the wider lens of urban development. The Ara Pacis Museum in Italy, in contrary to the previous study, portrays the insertion of new construction to an individual building. Designed by Richard Meier in 2006, it was a renovation project that went beyond the existing parameters and inserted new programs to the museum. Initial expectations were to house, display, and protect the Ara Pacis Alter. Meier decided to provide additional functions such as new installation spaces, temporary exhibits, a digital library, a rooftop terrace, and a cafeteria. All of the new additions to the building were constructed using modern materials such as glass, painted white concrete, and travertine stone. This act of inserting new materials and programs received negative attention from the public and critics due to its aesthetics, cost of construction, and the deconstruction of the prior Morpugo Pavilion (Strazzulla 2009). Nicolai Orousoff, a journalist for the New York Times, describes the building as out of scale and does not fit with the texturized city that surrounds the project. It is the result of a contemporary architect's obsession with style and grandeur (Ourosoff 2006). The museum was threatened to be demolished shortly after completion but ultimately remained, as it became the second most popular attraction in Rome next to the Colosseum. It attracted over 330,000 visitors in the year of 2007 (Strazzulla 2009). In combination of the negative attention the project received, and the insertion of new programs validated the project's value to the city of Rome. It transformed the building from a museum that primarily showcased the heritage of the Ara Pacis Alter to a museum that promotes public gathering and historical awareness.

Today, in thinking about an urban development in North America, a typical project type that may come to mind is a mixed-use development in the suburbs. A couple cases for this are the Tuxedo Seasons and Kenaston Commons developments in Winnipeg, Canada. Located along Route 90, a major route in the city, these mixed-use developments hold major box stores, multi-family housing, offices, all of which are designed in a manner that may reflect many other mixed-use developments that sprawl across North America. This includes large parking lots that separate businesses, large rectilinear store frontage, and little space for public gathering. These developed areas intend to revitalize the city through offering goods, services, and activities to the public. However, these places seem formulaic and are implemented based on a generic shopping experience that should be appealing to the masses. These case studies of mixed-use developments show that there is a missed opportunity for new construction. Drawing from the ideas of Lefebvre and de Certeau, the emergence of these spaces leaves a mark in the history and development of Winnipeg. The mark being that of what it is: a typical box store along a highway with large parking lots and little connection with the spirit of the areas of Kenaston or Tuxedo. With that being said, it does not

necessarily mean that these developments are not significant to the development of the city. Look at how Los Angeles was built up. The city went through developmental phases that were considered unsuccessful and highly criticized, yet those experimentations led to the city adapting and growing to what Los Angeles is today and beyond. In thinking how Winnipeg moves forward, how will further mixed-use developments be implemented in the city? With Tuxedo Seasons still in completing its final phases, is Tuxedo successful in revitalizing the area? It is hard to tell, but as Lefebvre discusses, space is a product through the forces of production (Lefebvre 1991). For better or worse, it will contribute to Winnipeg imagining or reimagining its future.

This paper began by providing a framework in better understanding what is space and place, primarily through the ideas of Lefebvre and de Certeau. It is established that what constitutes a place constantly changes. It is through the needs, wants, and advancement of everyday life. This is where space comes into play. Space is where all these variables and interconnections coexist. From this discussion, the paper investigates the idea of urban informalities. Urban informalities help inform creative adaptations and processes. These emerging settings contribute to the values and meaning of a particular place because it is driven by its users and their initiatives. In grasping these ideas of space, place, and urban informalities, it can be applied to an idea that is more tangible and relatable – obsolescence. Obsolescence is concerned with the rapid turnaround of the materialistic. The idea that getting the latest and greatest is a sensorial experience in itself and that it dictates our consumption and production of goods. Key points that were discussed in this paper support the idea that the sense of newness is inevitable and that in the world today, there will be projects where an adaptive reuse approach may not be optimal. Even if the insertion of new objects and ideas into a site are negatively viewed or does not perform as intended, the embedded information of that insertion carries towards the development of the city. This is evident in the case studies of Los Angeles and the Ara Pacis Museum. This is where the opportunities lie; in the design process of implementing these new-builds.

These new projects have the opportunity to start or add a page to the history of a place. Places are a stratification of embedded information (de Certeau 1984). As one would critique another person's current work, one can critique the history of a place. This act of criticism is what drives the growth and development of ideas, the site, and values. Overwriting what was in a place does not necessarily need to be seen as an act against sustainability. Rather, it should be viewed as taking advantage of missed opportunities. If a poor design was implemented onto a site, should future designers keep on latching on to those project values and design strategies? The rapid growth and

planning decisions of the urban environment are often beyond the control of a designer. However, designers play a critical role in this process. It is in their ability to respond to the issues and demands of the context. In the emergence of new-builds, a designer cannot solely rely on adaptive reuse for an approach.

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