

Demolition Continuum

12 Acts of Demolition
Theory Masterclass 2015
The Berlage / AMO
Aesthetic Artefact

Jana Culek and Michael Schuurman

"...the first step was to take out the street level floor and clear the basement of partitions, pipes and everything that might interfere with the shovel. Then, holes were cut in the second floor. Interior partitions and walls were torn out and dropped through the openings. As the wreckers worked upward, a floor at a time, they tumble all the debris through the holes underneath, straight down to the basement. Then they tore down the outer walls from the top, dropping the wreckage inside the empty shell of the building."

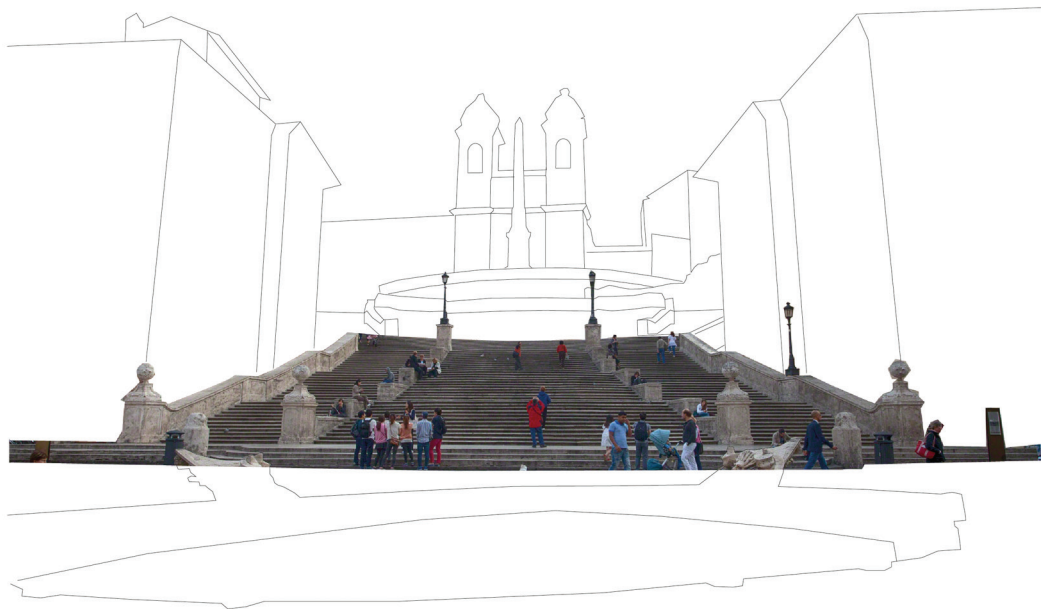
Jesse F. Gelders, "Skyscrapers Torn Down from the Ground Up", Popular Science 128, 1936

When a building reaches the end of its useful life, a cycle of events has gone by. By the events occurring around and within the building the building ages and changes physically. The building is "rooted" in its location. During the process of demolition, the aesthetic value of a building and its parts decreases and increases. The process of demolition reveals an unreferenced beauty, exposed to the public. By viewing the aesthetic effects demolition has on a building and its parts BEFORE, DURING and AFTER its completion, we notice that the scope on which the aesthetic effects are noticed changes in scale from INTERIOR, to BUILDING to CITY. DEMOLITION CONTINUUM is a manifestation of a series of events occurring through the process of DECONSTRUCTION, DEMOLITION and DESTRUCTION of a building.

In order to clearly represent these events an artefact - THE STAIR- is chosen. Through visual representations of the process of demolition, with the focus on this artefact we are able to grasp these stages.

The stair is a remnant of a building that has this presence of perseverance during all the stages of a building's destruction. It is capable of change during demolition and it is able to reveal the true inner self of the buildings use. The stair, usually being the last thing to be demolished, given its continuous use value through the demolition process, is able to visually tell a detailed story of the processes of deconstruction, demolition and destruction of a building and its elements.

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"Architecture has been called the art of building beautifully, a fixation of man's thinking, and record of his activity... Keep in mind that last phrase. It is important."

Ernst Johnson, architect, professor, colleague of Eero Saarinen
<https://bricksandmortarpreservation.wordpress.com/tag/historic-preservation-quote/>

By being used, architecture gains emotional and aesthetic value ascribed to it by the user. Some architectural objects are built to be monuments, some become valuable through time, while some become obsolete. An object's value is connected either to its use value, its commemorative value or its innovational value. As long as it retains one of those values, it remains a part of the built environment.

"Interior demolition is usually the first step in preparing a building for remodeling and represents a significant segment of the demolition industry. This type of work covers everything, from removing a few interior partition walls to total removal of all non-structural building components."

Diven, Richard J Diven, and Mark Shaurette. 2010. Demolition Practices, Technology, and Management. West Lafayette, Ind: Purdue University Press. <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10442007>

With the end of use of a building, the objects that are a part of it lose its aesthetic value (even though they might still keep some emotional value). With the lack of use, the building falls to decay, its parts slowly disintegrate. To put it in good use again, one can turn to the process of deconstruction.



"With its own aesthetic pleasures and an expanded repertoire of form making, subtraction also offers a redoubled territory for design."

Keller Easterling, Nikolaus Hirsch, and Markus Miessen. 2014.
Subtraction. New York: Sternberg Press

"So when architects are given a choice, to destroy or not to destroy, they should rather make commentary on how much destruction is necessary in order to make a construction occur."

Lucia Alias

By stripping away unnecessary parts so that they can later be replaced with new ones, a building is repurposed and thus given new life. Stripped of its embellishments, parts of the building regain use value. The core, belonging to a separate structural system, is of outmost importance during the deconstruction process due to its stability, it enables its own destruction.



"... even at the moment of its death – the architectural equivalent of a coroner's report perhaps; on the other, the exposure of the building's insides during demolition produce revelatory views of architecture – that is, glimpses of the otherwise invisible "soft" interiors."

Paul Dobraszczyk, "Accelerated Ruins: The Aesthetics of Demolition",
<http://ragpickinghistory.co.uk/2013/10/04/accelerated-ruins-the-aesthetics-of-demolition/>

"Home owner Bao Jen , 43, whose two bedroomed flat became a one-room studio apartment said: "The officials said that parts of the buildings that occupied the ground for the new road could be removed by force, so they demolished them but left the parts of the building which are not in the way of the new road. So now our homes have ended up like this."

Lizzie Edmonds, "Rear wall drive: Chinese developers smash the back of an apartment block that was in the way of a road... forcing residents to live in the front of the building", Daily Mail Online, 2014





When we come to the realization that a building has gone too far into the process of decay or that its proportions are not valuable anymore, demolition takes over deconstruction. During this process, short aesthetic moments occur. These aesthetic moments allow us a previously hidden view into the buildings structure and interior. The inner belly of the building becomes visible to the outside allowing for specific insight into its structure.



"A simple cut or series of cuts acts as a powerful drawing device able to redefine spatial situations and structural components."

Gordon Matta-Clark, Bingo, 1974, MOMA Learning,
https://www.moma.org/learn/moma_learning/gordon-matta-clark-bingo-1974

The core, being a structural system of its own, remains last to be demolished. It remains for a moment as an autonomous object. There is no function for it anymore since it leads to nowhere, it connects to nothing. It is visible in a way that was not possible before the process of demolition has started.

"...in the resulting scene of destruction, a powerful new aesthetic of modernity: a vast dark of absence flanked by houses on the brink of destruction, and the shadow lines of staircases, ceilings and floors imprinted, like Whiteread's House, on the remaining walls."

Paul Dobraszczyk, "Accelerated Ruins: The Aesthetics of Demolition",
<http://ragpickinghistory.co.uk/2013/10/04/accelerated-ruins-the-aesthetics-of-demolition/>

After the total removal of a building, a void remains. But it is not really a void, because the building that used to be embedded within a city's fabric has left its trace on the now empty site. The scars of where the building used to be are now visible on the surrounding walls. Lines are left where the stairs, floors and roofs used to be.



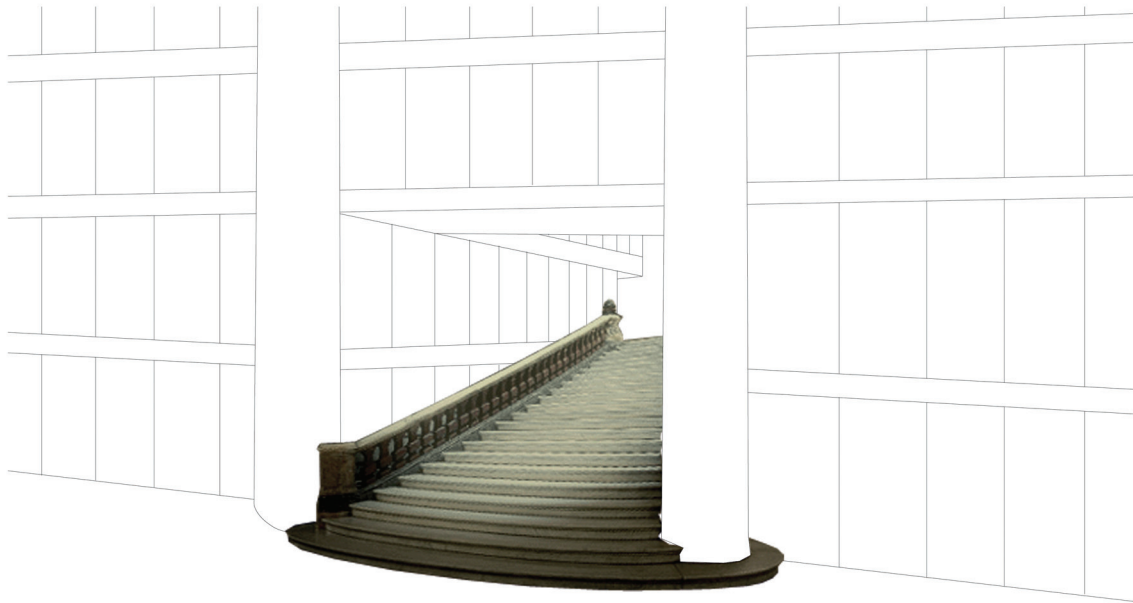
"Eifel Tower stairs up for sale! A part of the Eifel Tower's iron spiral staircase is set to go under the hammer at an auction in Paris. The 4.5m (14.7ft), 20-step section, which once linked the tower's second and third levels, is expected to fetch up to 30,000 euros (\$44,000; £21,000)"

BBC, 19.11.2007, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7102190.stm>





The remaining objects, still physically solid, can be reused. No longer connected to their original site, they can be taken to a different location and given a new purpose.



"It was made, simply by filling a house with liquid concrete and then stripping the mold - that is, the house itself, roof tiles, bricks and mortar, doors and windows and all - away from it."

Rachel Whiteread 'House' 1993, Andrew Graham-Dixon,
The Independent Tuesday 02 november 1993

"The Eiffel Tower stairs have a tall fence surrounding them to discourage anyone from actually climbing them. The stairs are slowing rusting away, but still in good shape for being 111 years old."

Greg Brown, "Center of the World Eiffel Tower Stairs ", 04/14/2001

What happens when an object that is very contextual is reused within a different context, after the demolition of its original building? By the need to reuse an object that still has use value, is structurally solid and can be readapted to fit a different setting. When relocating previously used objects, situations occur that are not always aesthetically coordinated but certainly create visually interesting situations, a spatial spectacle.

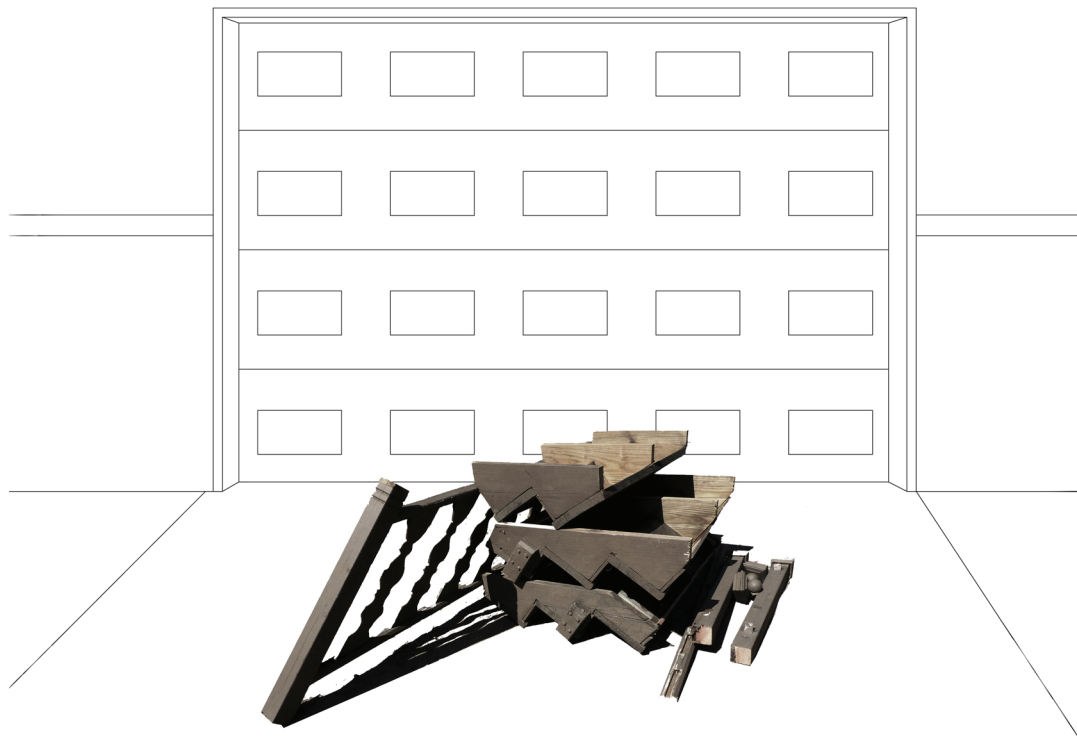


"When urbicide renders buildings as victims, buildings themselves are often instruments of subtraction or aggression."

Keller Easterling, Nikolaus Hirsch, and Markus Miessen. 2014.
Subtraction. New York: Sternberg Press

By placing an architectural object in a situation where it is not being used again, decay occurs, in the same way as it has occurred within the building. At this point we can pose a question whether an object in the process of decay possesses an aesthetic value which a building does not? Destruction of an architectural object occurs because of the lack of use.





"But when a twenty-story office building was to be wrecked, a short while ago, a strange, enclosed stairway was erected on the outside, with unusual speed. It was the newest type of portable fire-escape."

Jesse F. Gelders, "Skyscrapers Torn Down from the Ground Up",
Popular Science 128, 1936

By further deconstruction of the architectural object itself, it again gains the possibility to be "used for its parts". Either for aesthetic reasons or for the reuse in the original way, the artifact can gain use value again.

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