Armando Rabaça
Department of Architecture
of the University of Coimbra

Bruno Gil
Department of Architecture
of the University of Coimbra

The Return of Analogy and Other Issues

Editors' Note

DOI
– 10.14195/1647-8681_13_0

In the new time consciousness of modernity, Jürgen Habermas tells us, historical memory gave place to an ahistorical use of the past, as reflected in the abstract language of avant-garde aesthetics.[1] Suffice to think of Picasso and Le Corbusier's early modernist work. In their *collections particulières,* memorabilia ranged from vernacular to primitive and classical artefacts, the operative value of which rested in their aesthetic qualities, independently of their place in the continuum of history. The past thus became a source of raw material, providing referents to be explored ahistorically, opening new conceptual paths in subversive processes of creation.[2] With the impulse of modernity and the post-modernist collage of historical iconography exhausted, how did the operative role of memory, memorabilia, and the past in general, change in architectural creation? The first set of contributions to this issue share a similar point of view about this change, suggesting the shift from the conceptual explorations of memory referents of avant-garde modernism to analogical processes, where the notions of essentials, fundamentals and the archaic seem to be central.

The thread is opened up by the philosopher Luís António Umbelino, who makes an argument on the nature of memory. Invoking Merleau-Ponty and Bruce Bégout, Umbelino discusses the concepts of

1 Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity – An Incomplete Project," in Hal Foster, ed., *The Anti-Aesthetic. Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Port Townsend, Washington: Bay Press, 1983), 3–15.

2 On the affinities between Le Corbusier and Picasso's "collections particulières" see Arthur Rüegg, "Living with Objects – Learning from Objects: Le Corbusier's 'collection particulière,'" in Armando Rabaça, ed., *Le Corbusier, History and Tradition* (Coimbra: Coimbra University Press, 2017), 60–89.

ambience and atmosphere in order to argue that memory is activated not by the strict physical attributes of space and form, but by immersive experiences of *ambiences* or atmospheres. This is in keeping with Hermann Schmitz's view of atmosphere as a space of emotions, associated — though not forcibly — with locational space.[3] What also surfaces from Umbelino's essay is that, beyond the emotional dimension, an *ambience* or atmosphere entails a visual dimension, even if it is "a kind of latent presence," "not fully graspable." If, according to Ludwig Klages, the images generated by the atmosphere of a place are a vehicle of knowledge of its *genius loci*, it may be argued that both the world of emotions and the idea of images capturing and translating the essence or the spirit of a place suggest a link between the notion of atmosphere and Carl Jung's notion of archetype, which he first termed as *Urbild* (primordial image).[4] Umbelino's essay thus works as a reminder for the articles that follow that memory concerns the immersive experiences of *ambiences* or atmospheres, and that, as such, it is inevitably ingrained in the realm of the unconscious, and hence, of the archaic (as primordial image).

While noting that Jung considered analogical thinking archaic, Paulo Providência shows how the return to an analogical use of historical references was initiated by the same avant-garde figures who had promoted its conceptual exploration.[5] He does so by discussing the complex web of memory references involved in the design of Le Corbusier's Ronchamp chapel. The analogical connections in Le Corbusier's design are manifold. They implicate the memorabilia of Le Corbusier's *collection particulière — objects à reaction poetique* provided by nature — formal and experiential *rapports* of landscapes and buildings once grafted onto his memory, and even memories of previous "autobiographical experiences," to use Rossi's words.[6] Thus, memory fragments from the visits to Delphi and to Villa Adriana to crab shells, from primitive structures such as dolmens to plastic experiences with sand mouldings, from the archetypal notion of the "cave" to those of "mother" and "sea," act in complex processes of analogical associations in the creative act. If this return to analogy — which, as Aldo Rossi has argued, extends back to antiquity — was, in fact, never entirely abandoned, it was its rekindling in the post-war that seems to have re-activated its links with the archaic. Following Jung's view of the associations-by-analogy as pre-logical, Paulo Providência demonstrates a twofold involvement of the archaic in Ronchamp. On the one hand there is the archaic nature of the analogical processes of the design method. On the other, there is the dominant presence of the archaic in the learned referents implicated in these analogical processes, varying from pre-historic elementary constructions to *immersive experiences* of the natural and the manmade of antiquity. In Jungian terms, these referents provide visual symbols of feelings that are not consciously differentiated in our minds, of timeless psychological needs arising from the collective unconscious. This double quality of the archaic to be found in Ronchamp,

3 Hermann Schmitz, "Atmosphärische Räume" (2012), translated into English as "Atmospheric Spaces," *Ambiances* (2016): 1–11.

4 See Robert Josef Kozljanič, "*Genius loci* and the numen of a place: A mytho-phenomenological approach to the archaic," in Paul Bishop, ed., *The Archaic. The Past in the Present* (London; New York: Routledge, 2012), 69–92.

5 For the conceptual exploration of historical references in Le Corbusier the seminal essay remains Alan Colquhoun, "Displacement of Concepts in Le Corbusier," *Architectural Design* 43 (April 1972): 220–43. See also Rabaça, "Architecture as a Work of Art and the Sense of the Historical Whole. An Introduction to Le Corbusier, History and Tradition," in *Le Corbusier, History and Tradition,* 1–25.

6 Aldo Rossi, "The Meaning of Analogy in My Last Projects," in John Ashbery, ed., *Solitary Travelers* (New York: The Cooper Union School of Architecture, 1979), 89–96.

Paulo Providência concludes, reaches contemporary architecture, as shown by the work of authors such as Álvaro Siza and Eduardo Souto de Moura.

Another protagonist of the return to analogy is Alvar Aalto. Discussing Aalto's designs for civic centres, Aino Niskanen shows how the short anti-historical phase of Aalto's modernism in the 1920s and early 1930s gave place to a focus on the search for meaning in classical civilizations, first apprehended through school lessons and then through study trips. The Finnish architect, Niskanen argues, attempted to endow his architecture with meaning through a *cultural memory* based on the identification of Western culture with the ideal of a classicist civic life taking place in urban spaces and public buildings. Needless to say, this idealist image of ancient civilization, widely spread through the Romantic imagery of ancient Greece, was implicated in Aalto's architecture through a return to analogy as a design strategy. This is reflected in his classicist view of the city as an organism dominated by the representational character of public and cultural buildings, as well as in the formal analogies with the architectural archetypes of ancient Greece in his civic centres. In this process, formal analogy acted in Aalto's designs as a means towards the creation of an *ambience* or atmosphere, to retake Umbelino's argument, one capable of fostering a given collective cultural attitude. In pre-philosophical (i.e., mythical) terms, one may speak of an attempt to recover the *genius loci* of the civic centres of antiquity, their *ambiences*. And if it is true that the *genius* is a mythological representation of the archaic (as fundamentals), then, there is in Aalto's intent a search for essentials that places it within the realm of the archaic, as happens with Le Corbusier's Ronchamp chapel.[7] But whereas the search for the transhistorical and the transcultural places Ronchamp within the realm of Jung's collective unconscious, the analogical process in Aalto's *cultural memory* is framed by the Western collective conscious, or a Western *cultural memory* of collective life.

Both Le Corbusier and Aalto illustrate how the shift from historiographical to visual culture that took place with the avant-garde conceptual exploration of the past remained a trait of this return of analogy. This is explicit in Vincent Scully's involvement in the post-war debate on the role of history in art and architecture, as discussed by Eeva-Liisa Pelkonen. It was precisely the idea of unconscious that emerged from the psychoanalytical turn in art history, Pelkonen argues, that allowed architectural historians to face history in terms of its operative role for the present. Following the formalism of art historian Henri Focillon, Scully approached architectural history through visual analogies. History provided him with an archive of learned references operating through their transhistorical formal values, rather than through their context in the linear time of history. These visual analogies reflected two different types of formal reuse, a conscious and an unconscious one. They resulted from the persistence of given (*ur-*) forms across history which reflected the persistence of patterns of thinking expressing both (conscious)

7 For the "genius" and the archaic see Kozljanič, "*Genius loci.*"

transhistorical collective memories (as with Aalto) and archetypal existential needs of the collective unconscious (as in Ronchamp).

After these approaches to what one might call "an analogy of essentials," the second set of essays explores diverse issues related to memory and method. Federica Goffi raises the problem of the integration of memory of building processes in the design process. Again, the relation between memory and ambiences/atmospheres is central to the argument. The original meaning of the word "memory" supports Umbelino's arguments. Memory, as Goffi points — quoting Giambattista Vico — was originally used to refer to the faculty that stores sense perceptions. It is with this understanding of memory in mind that Goffi writes on the design process of Carlo Scarpa at the Castelvecchio, in Verona. Scarpa's permanence on-site during the renovation works and the slow and concurrent development of the design made it possible to develop real-time responses to the discoveries made in situ. This privileged opportunity entails a relation between design process — the process of *imaginare* — and memory that is completely different from the one involved in the temporal sequence in which the design precedes the intervention. Building processes open the opportunity to apprehend, test, and integrate memory ambiences, of incorporating the memory of building processes in the design, of opening the design to shared memories in collaborative authorship. This challenges the modus operandi brought about by modernity.

In the following essay, Ana Luísa de Sá looks at Álvaro Siza, in whom the operative role of the past in contemporary architectural design finds one of its most interesting cases. The author returns to the well-known discussion on the early influence that Aalto exerted on the Portuguese architect, this time not to explore analogical stimuli, but to expose the complexity and multitude of means through which memory is shaped. The influence of Aalto in Álvaro Siza took place, first, at the visual level, via architectural journals. The fact that, at a later stage, the experience of Álvaro Siza's visits to Aalto's works did not imply a "clear fracture" in his work seems to indicate that the interpretative exercise of mental construct and simulation involved in visual culture goes beyond mere form, implicating sense perception—memory, in the Latin sense. Memory intervenes unconsciously in the making through an instinctual procedure of drawing, and this takes place when the reference has been interiorized either through the effective experience of the place or through interpretative constructs of form and atmospheres.

Wouter Van Acker closes the issue by questioning the relational model of architectural history to practice in the nine-square grid exercise. The author investigates the reuse and reinterpretation of the exercise, proposing a reading of the survival and return of this diagrammatic figure in studio pedagogy and villa architecture in the late twentieth century. This historical process is a reflection of history itself, with its cyclical processes of breaking with the past only to rediscover it from a more

distant point. What stands out in the various approaches to the exercise is that, in order to endow the self-referentiality of the nine-square grid with content, it seems necessary to establish a conversation with history, one that goes beyond the history of the grid itself. This is because its self-reflexive nature is bereft of *ambience*, of atmosphere; and hence, bereft of *memory* in the deeper sense of the word's root. This necessity of going beyond the self-referentiality of the grid in order to reach the realm of architecture comes without surprise. As Van Acker remarks, the nine-square grid exercise is a deferred action of the modernist grid, and as such, its abstraction not only denounces a modern "will to silence," to recall Rosalind Krauss's words, but also incorporates the modernist "capacity to serve as a paradigm or model for the antidevelopmental, the antinarrative, the antihistorical."[8] Silence means here the absence of memory, of atmospheres, running counter to the return to analogy and its attempt to re-symbolise architecture.

8 Rosalind Krauss, "Grids," *October*, vol. 9 (Summer 1979): 50–64.