

Thursday 13 March 2014 - Session Two - Paper Five

### 'The Role of Documentation in the Conservation of the Post-War University Campus'

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*This paper was prepared as part of a wider international study of modern movement documentation, with special emphasis on case-study material from America.*

#### USING DOCUMENTATION TO INFORM DECISIONS

When using documentation to inform the decisions taken in a conservation project regarding post-war modern heritage, we must first ask what we are intending the documentation to support and often whether our aim is to conserve the original conceptual authenticity or the material authenticity. Perhaps neither can be conserved in their entirety if the building is to suit an unintended use or the incongruent requirements of the client, but regardless, our personal interpretation of the documents at hand must be acknowledged as an outside influence that would never have played into the original design.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, the differing personal interpretation of a building by professionals and the public should not under-valued.

Modern architecture has challenged us to question whether material authenticity truly offers a direct connection to the past, and whether this is an aim we should continue to embrace. It is no wonder that the writings of Viollet-le-Duc and the 'conservative surgery' methods of Patrick Geddes have once again risen to the fore in conservation theory.

With exceedingly acute pressure for university buildings to suit current study programmes and the image of 'newness' to impress the students and their guardians, is it enough to rely on conservation through documentation, as was the leading agenda for Docomomo at its founding, or is it possible to use documentation to support the often unpopular proposal for extensive material conservation, if such a thing is possible? Is it commendable to preserve just fragments of a building, and if so, is it acceptable to restore elements of the design no longer there if solid evidence for such exists in the documentation?<sup>2</sup>

1 France Vanlaethem and Celine Poisson, "Questioning Material/Conceptual Authenticity," in *The Challenge of Change : Dealing with the Legacy of the Modern Movement*, ed. Dirk van den Heuvel (Amsterdam: IOS Press., 2008).

2 Jukka Jokilehto, *A History of Architectural Conservation*, Butterworth-Heinemann Series in Conservation and Museology (Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1999). P 335-338.

#### RECENT DOCUMENTATION PROGRAMMES IN THE UNITED STATES

Architect Jon Buono, a senior associate in historic preservation and design at Einhorn Yaffee Prescott in New York, has said that the evolution of modern architecture in American universities has led the growing appreciation of the campus as an assemblage of well-designed architecture representative of the passage of time. In the campus setting, Buono explains that historic preservation is 'more broadly understood as an act of institutional stewardship, a successful tool for strengthening diverse stakeholder relations, and a companion to sustainable development goals.'<sup>3</sup> By the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, though a framework for campus preservation planning had been suggested by a number of state and federal management organisations, none had successfully demonstrated the benefits of building and landscape conservation over the increased facility demands and other influences on the campus planning process. Since 1976, it has been required by Congress that all properties meeting the eligibility requirements for designation on the National Register for Historic Places must be considered with a greater sensitivity. Despite this federal edict, academic interests have often been at conflict with building conservation, which was addressed by the Getty Foundation Campus Heritage Initiative that ran from 2002 through 2007 to assist colleges and universities with the identification, management and conservation of architectural heritage.

Under this initiative, the Campus Heritage Preservation Conference<sup>4</sup>, held in May 2002, set out to address four questions that would frame the goals of the 5-year initiative:

1. *How do we define campus heritage resources from the recent past?*
2. *What is the relationship between heritage resources from the recent past and campus planning?*
3. *What are the challenges of community relations, especially as they impact heritage resources from*

3 Jon Buono, "Modern Architecture and the U.S. Campus Heritage Movement," *Planning for Higher Education* 39, no. 3 (2011). P 88.

4 Papers from this conference have since been published in the April-June 2011 edition of *Planning for Higher Education*, published by the Society for College and University Planning (SCUP).

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*the recent past?*

4. *What are the challenges of institutional leadership, alumni relations, and funding regarding sites from the recent past?*

Barbara Christen has described the post-war building era as a 'freight train coming down the track' and asked how documentation could be used to establish the value and significance of a place, in relation to original design intent, materials and relation to the surround campus landscape and buildings.<sup>5</sup> She argues that architecture of the recent past exists in a category of "otherness" with respect to the canonical value system of the U.S. National Register of Historic Places. Thus, this unapproachable nature does not readily render it as 'national heritage' in the minds of those whom are unfamiliar with the aesthetics of post-war modernism. Documentation through the personal experiences and memories of alumni, staff and faculty denote how the architecture of the post-war building programmes have less (or a different type) of 'psychological potency' as the University Gothic or Richardsonian styles of the late 19<sup>th</sup>- early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>6</sup> Of the vast number of university campus building and expansion programmes of the 1960s, Christen points out that little documentation exists outside of works by the master architects like Gropius, Kahn and Rudolph. The high-style bias of the research and attention paid to the modern movement is beginning to widen to include the lesser-known actors, some as a direct result of the Getty Foundation Campus Initiative.

The Council of Independent Colleges Historic Campus Architecture Project (CIC HCAP) project was funded by two generous grants from The Getty Foundation Campus Heritage Initiative – one to fund survey data collection and the second to fund the development of the website database. Over the six-year course of the initiative, The Getty Foundation supported 86 campus preservation projects across America with the total grant aid exceeding \$13.5 million. The project culminated in November 2011 with a national symposium on campus conservation, organised by the Society for College and University Planning (SCUP), where numerous campus conservation plans funded by the Campus Heritage Initiative were presented. Many of these campus conservation plans are now available

<sup>5</sup> Barbara S. Christen, "The Historian's and the Preservationist's Dilemma," *Planning for Higher Education* 39, no. 3 (2011).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. P 106.

online through the Society for College and University Planning.<sup>7</sup> Richard Ekman, the Council of Independent Colleges (CIC) president, outlined the ongoing development of the Council of Independent Colleges Historic Campus Architecture Project (CIC HCAP), the first nationwide architecture and landscape database of independent college and university campuses.<sup>8</sup> From 2002-2004, the CIC collected survey data of university buildings and landscapes with significant historical interest (in relation to design, educational reform, history, religion, engineering, or culture) to 'help various constituencies gain an awareness of and appreciation for campus history and also to learn from the architecture and landscape preservation efforts made by institutions.'<sup>9</sup> While the survey covers 724 independent, four-year, B.A.-granting institutions with less than 5,000 students, it by no means accounts for all architectural heritage to be found in universities across the US, leaving out the larger universities that often commissioned larger projects by eminent architects in the post-war period.

#### NEW YORK UNIVERSITY CAMPUS PRESERVATION PLAN

In 2006, New York University (NYU) in lower Manhattan was granted \$180,000 through The Getty Campus Heritage Initiative to fund a campus conservation programme to survey 96 buildings, two of which are already designated as historic landmarks, and 65 of which are set within locally designated historic districts.<sup>10</sup> The study aimed to not only evaluate and document the architectural heritage within NYU's possession, but also to develop management guidelines and to 'develop a rational strategy and schedule for performing necessary preservation work on all of NYU's buildings'.<sup>11</sup>

The project was subdivided into four phases: Phase I: Building Assessment; Phase II: Treatment Guidelines; Phase III: Implementation Strategy; and Phase IV:

<sup>7</sup> "Getty Higher Education Historic Preservation Plans", Society for College and University Planning <http://getty.scup.org/> (accessed 28 March 2014).

<sup>8</sup> "Council of Independent Colleges Historic Campus Architecture Project", Council of Independent Colleges <http://hcap.artstor.org/cgi-bin/library> (accessed 28 March 2014).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. Project Background.

<sup>10</sup> LLC Murphy Burnham & Buttrick Architects with Higgins Quasebarth & Partners, *New York University Campus Preservation Plan* (New York: New York University, 2007).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. P 2.

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Education and Training. Phase I was completed over 6 months, beginning in the autumn of 2006, by Murphy Burnham & Buttrick and Higgins Quasebarth & Partners, wherein the historical significance and visual conditions of each campus building were evaluated. The Phase II Treatment Guidelines were categorised by building type - determined by building function, age and construction materials – and was adapted to work with the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitating, Restoring, and Reconstructing Historic Buildings*. In the preservation report, the Treatment Guidelines are divided into categories of architectural features, wherein the recommendations for *preservation/maintenance* or *restoration/rehabilitation* are outlined for each subsequent type of feature, i.e. concrete canopies or exposed-steel canopies. The division by architectural feature rather than construction material or time period is done to emphasise those features that define the character of a building, and to emphasise the need for thoughtful preservation or rehabilitation works.

The Phase III Implementation Strategy prioritizes the necessary maintenance and preservation work for the buildings of historical or architectural significance. Approximately half of the NYU campus buildings are designated as New York City Landmarks or fall within the boundaries of historic districts, so any work to these buildings will require a permit from the Landmarks Preservation Commission before work can begin. The Implementation Strategy priorities are as follows:<sup>12</sup>

1. *Adopt a program of preservation and preventative maintenance for buildings under six stories.*
2. *Expand the scope of the five-year cycle Local Law 11 work to preserve NYU's buildings six stories or higher.*<sup>13</sup>
3. *Restore a select group of NYU's buildings that have outstanding architectural qualities or a strong presence in the immediate neighbourhood.*

12 Ibid. P 3.

13 New York City's Local Law 11 jurisdiction requires façade inspections and resulting repairs in five-year cycles. The Local Law 11 was implemented to ensure the safety of buildings and the public areas around them, it does not require proper conservation practice and therefore does not ensure the integrity of repairs in relation to the aesthetics or original materials of the building.

Of interest to this to this paper, the NYU Campus Preservation Plan evaluated both post-war apartment buildings (building type R4) and late-20<sup>th</sup> century commercial buildings (type C2). The report briefly outlines the history of the significant buildings, such as I.M. Pei's 1961 University Village (now Silver Towers), and other apartment buildings that were constructed as part of Robert Moses' slum clearance measures implicated under the Title I redevelopment plan for the South Village. In 1964, NYU commissioned Philip Johnson and Richard Foster to design a master plan which would create a cohesive architectural identity for the University, incorporating both new and acquired buildings. Three new institutional buildings were constructed as part of the master plan - Tisch Hall (1970-72), Bobst Library (1972) and Meyer Hall (1971) – but since that time, construction has proceeded without coherence to a master plan.

The campus-wide building assessment survey found inappropriate material repairs to the 20<sup>th</sup> century institutional, commercial and residential buildings and that the alteration of uniform interior lighting throughout the buildings has had a noticeably detrimental effect on the intended aesthetic quality. The report insists that where modernist buildings are concerned, 'the unity of the façade is critical to maintaining the buildings' integrity' and that any necessary upgrades or rehabilitation works 'should always avoid any efforts that compromise the character and defining features of these buildings.'<sup>14</sup>

This section of the report lists the common features, materials and construction methods used in 20<sup>th</sup> century buildings, followed by the typical maintenance and technical issues and their associated solutions. The section is not technical but is meant to be an overview of typical issues and solutions for each period of building types. For late 20<sup>th</sup> century commercial buildings, NYU has three, including the commercial development on LaGuardia Place, to accompany the Washington Square Village apartment buildings. The development was never fully realised, but what was built was well designed, faced in blue stone veneer and colour-glazed brick to match the Village apartment buildings. The survey found that the buildings were not in good condition overall, and that inappropriate signage, awnings, light fixtures and storefront infill has compromised the architectural integrity. It is not surprising that, with the exception of the University

14 Ibid. P 1-32.

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Village, the report found that all buildings from the 1940s through the 1960s were suffering from poor maintenance. Given that ornamentation is limited in these structures, the greatest on-going threat is the use of improper materials in ad-hoc replacement and renovation works.<sup>15</sup>

The conclusions drawn regarding NYU's current maintenance and repair efforts were that smaller buildings not covered by Local Law 11<sup>16</sup> have been neglected, but as a result of the survey, the recently implemented expansion of annual building inspections to all campus buildings has been found to be a positive step toward addressing the growing backlog of repair and conservation needs of these buildings.<sup>17</sup> Local Law 11 work has been effective in identifying and addressing deterioration of the larger campus buildings, however, the review proposed extending the scope of these annual checks to insure that work is appropriate to the historic integrity of buildings.

At the time the report was published, an implementation plan had been developed for buildings which warranted special consideration for their architectural value. These *Initial Restoration and Rehabilitation Projects* outlined the scope of work to be done on a select number of buildings. It is worth noting that no buildings after 1945 were included in the initial implementation plan.

## CONCLUSION

In the post-war period, the newly developed notion of a university as a 'microcosm of society', with planning emphasis on knowledge, politics, values and socialisation, informed new concepts of environments that encouraged a certain 'experience', and thus, the university became an equally influential setting for developing the students' personality as well as their mind.<sup>18</sup> It was here that architects were able to implement their grand plans for urban environments on a smaller scale. Complexities of urban planning,

including industrialised building methods, separation of automobile and pedestrian traffic, and new architectural forms for the expanding variation of building uses all came into practice in the universities where these new problems could be grappled with at a graspable scale. General urban planning concepts like compactness in layout to encourage social mixing, visual coherence and interest were experimented with around newly developed pedestrian precincts and motorcar byways. By the 1960s, the functionalist theory of modern architecture had fallen out of fashion, and though architects were foremost assigned to serve the programmatic needs of the building in an economical manner, they strove to accomplish something more in terms of the aesthetics. The political, social and moral values of a building could be elevated through the artistic treatment of the buildings and campus as a whole.

Unfortunately, the idealist and moral aims of this architecture has been lost in translation over the years. In Britain, The Twentieth Century Society has recently published the eleventh journal in their *Twentieth Century Architecture* series, entitled *Oxford and Cambridge*.<sup>19</sup> Inviting contributions from a number of notable professionals, the journal presents the design ideas behind some of the most loathed modern buildings that have since been viewed as disruptions to the picturesque cityscapes of Oxford and Cambridge. Alan Berman writes in 'Modernising Oxford's C20 Listed Buildings' about the difficulties of saving these buildings when some college fellows and faculty are viscerally opposed to their continued presence in any form.

*When it comes to buildings and architecture some are wonderfully open, enlightened and realistic while others, notwithstanding their enormous collective brainpower, are deeply conservative and suspicious of anything modern: knowledgeable of course, but occasionally narrowly opinionated, unworldly and impractical.*<sup>20</sup>

Over 25 years, the architectural firm Berman Geddes

15 Murphy Burnham & Buttrick Architects with Higgins Quasebarth & Partners. P 1-18.

16 New York City Local Law 11 requires that the exteriors of buildings over 6 storeys in height must be examined for safety at least once every five years.

17 Ibid. P 3-2.

18 Stefan Muthesius, *The Postwar University: Utopianist Campus and College / Stefan Muthesius* (New Haven, Conn.; London: Yale University Press, 2001., 2001). P 4.

19 Alan Powers Elain Harwood, Otto Saumarez Smith, ed. *Oxford and Cambridge*, ed. The Twentieth Century Society, Twentieth Century Architecture, vol. 11 (London: The Twentieth Century Society, 2013).

20 Alan Berman, "Modernising Some of Oxford's Listed Twentieth-Century Buildings," in *Oxford and Cambridge*, ed. Alan Powers Elain Harwood, Otto Saumarez Smith (London: The Twentieth Century Society, 2013). P 181.

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Stretton has been commissioned to work on listed buildings of all eras at fourteen of the Oxford colleges and one Cambridge college. He has found that though only the best young architects of the post-war period built at Oxford and Cambridge, these buildings remain largely, but by no means universally, unloved. In the environments dense with significant historic buildings, funds are found for the repair, restoration and retention of the traditional buildings, while the College Fellows question whether to allocate funds for work on the 1960s 'monsters'.<sup>21</sup> In one particular meeting to discuss potential changes to a listed Killick, Partridge & Amis building, one Fellow vehemently remarked, 'Now get my position on this building clear. Semtex is the only solution.'<sup>22</sup>

It is important to document the difficulties faced when arguing for the conservation or sensitive refurbishment of these buildings for the prosperity of other professionals in the field. Berman found the foremost challenge to be the construction of a convincing case for the expenditure of funds necessary to ensure proper renovation. In regards to post-war buildings, the 'patch and repair' attitudes continue to dominate discussions in many college financial committees, and in his experience, Berman says 'it sometimes seems they have a positive mission to use inadequate maintenance to ensure a building's demise.'<sup>23</sup>

Though the fate of many modern post-war buildings still remains uncertain and advocacy for sensitive renovations remain an uphill battle, the awareness of modern architecture as national heritage has risen in recent years in the US and the UK. The major restoration and rehabilitation projects underway at the Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT), Boston University and Yale University are evidence that institutions of higher education are coming to believe that their modern buildings and campuses are not only valuable, but also continue to effectively serve contemporary educational needs. In August 2001, Mies van der Rohe's Crown Hall at IIT was listed as a National Historic Landmark, the country's highest award for national heritage. Despite this progress, most of the country's modern university heritage remains under threat, both from hasty determinations of obsolescence and insensitive

or uninformed surveys and condition assessments.<sup>24</sup> Subjective opinions in opposition to modern movement architecture exist in academic professionals, administrators, users, planning professionals and architects. Competition for the brightest minds and the constant pressure to possess the newest technology and state-of-the-art facilities often paint the post-war modern buildings as outdated dinosaurs. Over the next decade, thorough and informed documentation of these buildings will be necessary to save the best representatives from this era against the detriments of deferred maintenance, prejudice, thoughtless renovations and demolition. Let us hope that more campus administrations begin to see the campus as a collective of architectural history and theory over time, valuing each age for its unique contribution regardless of style and personal taste.

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21 Ibid. P 182.

22 Semtex is a general-purpose plastic explosive often used in commercial blasting and demolition.

23 Berman. P 182.

24 Buono, "Modern Architecture and the U.S. Campus Heritage Movement." P 101.

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