The Persistence of Buildings and the Context Problem

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Introduction

In this essay I will deal with the persistence question about buildings, taken as a central member of the category of architectural entities. Generally speaking, the persistence question is a question about what is necessary and sufficient for a numerical identity among entities existing at different times to hold. Raising the persistence question about buildings amounts to asking what is necessary and sufficient for a past (or future) building to exist now.

Of course this question is fundamental to our practices concerning the conservation, restoration and rehabilitation of buildings, which are often dedicated to letting a specific individual building continue to exist in time. Apart from important issues such as who should establish what is historically significant, what role heritage conservation should have in a society, and whether it stands in the way of progress, a more basic question is how we can determine whether a building from the past exists now (since, contrary to appearance, it might not have survived the changes it has undergone) and what conditions must hold for a building existing in the future to count as *this* building existing in the future (since, contrary to appearances and despite – or even because of – our efforts to preserve it, it may cease to exist in the meantime).[1] In other words, heritage conservation is simply impracticable if the persistence question about buildings is not raised. Again, the persistence question seems an inescapable question, also in order for the UNESCO World Heritage Committee to verify whether a particular building meets the conditions of *authenticity* and *integrity* which in turn are necessary requirements for it to be included in the World Heritage List.[2]

Indeed raising the persistence question results in revealing what our concept of a building is. In fact, by exploring the persistence question about buildings, we may discover that, according to our best intuitions and judgements, a building can survive some kinds of change or transformation and cannot survive others. This discloses what properties are constitutive of a building, and what properties are merely contingent. Further investigating why this is so is important for understanding the way we think of buildings, as well as for serving our goals (e.g. heritage preservation and conservation) in a more efficient and consistent way. It may also help architects to be more self-conscious of what they do when they design and bring into existence new buildings, make choices that affect their life cycle, or modify some of their features (such as their functions).

In this article I focus on one specific kind of property change and its effects on the persistence of buildings: spatial relocation. If we engage in the thought experiment of imagining a situation (that might soon become a technically practicable option) in which a specific building like Notre Dame Cathedral is transferred stone-by-stone from Paris to a very different location, we will normally have a strong intuition that the relocated cathedral is no longer Notre Dame. But why?

I will argue that this happens because buildings are constitutively located in a certain place. But again, why? And why – unlike buildings – do ordinary objects and the vast majority of works of art not turn out to be similarly constitutively characterised by a certain location? I will explore different answers, rejecting them one by one; and I will finally get to what I consider the correct one.

Indeed my answer will have some interesting consequences with regard to further issues concerning the ontological and aesthetic status of architecture. In particular, architectural entities like buildings turn out to have much in common with a specific class of works of art, namely site-specific works of art. I will not commit to the thesis that architecture is art, either always or only in some specific circumstances (and I will signal my neutrality by employing here and there in the essay the dubitative expression 'architectural work (of art)'). Nevertheless I will conclude that, *if* architectural entities like buildings are to be considered works of art, they should be considered *site-specific* works of art. The main reason is that site-specific works of art, too, cannot survive relocation (at least, as we will see, this has been true until an intense mobilisation of site-specific works of art has become customary in the art world since the late 1980s); and, the explanation of their incapacity to survive relocation is the same as for buildings.[3]

A clarification is due regarding the use of the expressions 'context' and 'outer context' that I will make in this essay. By using these terms, I will refer to the material external environment of a building, as constituted by material entities (such as trees, rivers, streets, bell towers, other buildings, sunlight) and the properties instantiated by them. I am aware that the 'context' of a building can legitimately be thought, in the wider sense, to include social practices, cultural habits, political institutions, as well as the experience of the building by human and perhaps even non-human beings; it could also include the conception of the building in certain ways and the attribution to it of certain functions, significance, aesthetic value, and so on. It would of course be interesting to investigate how, if ever, a change in the broad context that is not also part of the narrow context affects the persistence question about buildings. Just to mention one possibility, it seems only reasonable for the social and cultural geographers inspired by actor network theory, who in the last decades have taken even an object's status as a 'building' to be not given but produced by social and cultural work of various kinds, to claim that if certain relevant social and cultural processes fail, the building's identity is destroyed.[4]

I find it equally admissible, however, to raise the persistence question about buildings with regard to the narrow context, provided that we make one indispensable assumption. It must be assumed (as I do) that when the persistence of a building is affected by a context change (such as relocation) that involves some change both in the narrow context and in that part of the broad context that is not also part of the narrow context, the change in the narrow context *alone* would have been *sufficient* to produce the same effect.[5]

The persistence question about buildings

Raising the persistence question about buildings consists in asking what is necessary and sufficient for a past or future architectural entity, like a building, to exist now. As usually happens with regard to other items, the persistence question about buildings is twisted together with some other questions, such as the buildinghood question (what is necessary and sufficient for something to be a building, or equivalently, what distinguishes a building from a non-building) and the ontological question – what a building exactly consists in: a material object rather than an event, a type rather than a token, and so on.[6]

Consider, for instance, Dominic Lopes's claim that while according to standard western ontology a building is a material object individuated as common sense individuates objects like chairs and tables, according to traditional Japanese ontology, buildings are token events, which may also include one or more round of reconstruction.[7] It is easy to see how important consequences for the persistence question follow from Lopes's specific answer to the ontological question. If an adherent of the standard western ontology visits the *goshoden* (i.e. the main sanctified structure) of Ise Jingū – one of Japan's most visited Shinto shrines – today, she is necessarily visiting a building that is no more than twenty years old. In fact the goshoden has been rebuilt about every twenty years in the latest twelve centuries, alternatively in one of two adjacent lots, introducing numerous changes in material and spatial specifications from one rebuilding to the next. From the point of view of standard western ontology, about one hundred different buildings have been built up and destroyed in that couple of adjacent lots since Ise Jingū was founded in around the sixth century. Quite differently, when an adherent of the traditional Japanese ontology visits the goshoden today, what she visits is the very same building that was built in the sixth century. In other words, if we take buildings to be token events, then the goshoden of Ise Jingū today is the same building as the goshoden of Ise Jingū in the sixth or the tenth century, since each is part of the same individual event – just like the first part of your birthday party yesterday at 8.00 pm, and the final part of your birthday party today at 4.00 am, are both with full rights temporal parts of the same party, so that Jenny can truly assert she attended the *same* party Jack did, provided that Jack showed up at the party yesterday at 8.00 pm and left at 9.00 pm while Jenny only popped in today at 4.00 am.

Indeed, a range of recent works by social and cultural geographers seems to conceptualise buildings less as material objects than as events, that is, performances where various materials are held together in specific assemblages by everyday social practices.[8] Many architects aware of this kind of literature have explicitly embraced the idea of working on complex spatial projects prioritising social and economic objectives rather than simply creating new material objects.[9]

No matter whether we consider a building to consist in a material object or an event, we may take it to consist in a type rather than a token. Here we must take into account Nelson Goodman's distinction between one-stage and two-stage arts.[10] While painting and literature are one-stage arts, since the resulting work of art can be fully experienced after the artist has painted or written it, classical music (but not jazz improvisation) is two-stage, since a performance must follow the act of composition in order for the work of art to be enjoyed. Now, it seems that architecture is a two-stage activity (we do not need to concede here that architecture is art): first a plan is produced and later one or more edifices are built following the plan. Although the architectural plan is dissimilar from a musical score in that it does not count as instructions to produce *performances* that are instances of the work, it is still similar to the musical score in that it counts as instructions to produce *something* that is an instance of the work – material constructions rather than performances.[11]

In this scenario, a first question is whether the architectural work (of art) is to be identified with the type expressed by the architectural plan or with one of its instances. A second question, however, is whether *the building* (as an architectural entity) should be identified with the type or with each of its instances. Perhaps the answer to this second question depends on the answer to the first – since, for example, the building is to be identified with whatever the architectural work (of art) is; and perhaps the two questions are independent.

In the remaining sections of the article I will assume buildings to be (i) architectural works (of art), (ii) material objects, and (iii) material instances of a type expressed by an architectural plan, in accordance with the commonly accepted view. However, I think that these issues should be considered as open; and I take each of them as an illustration of the interdependence of the persistence and ontological questions.

Relocation

An interesting problem worth investigating is how the persistence question about buildings is affected by their spatial relocation. It is thought-provoking if for no other reason than because we cannot find any corresponding problem affecting the persistence question about ordinary objects or works of art. We unproblematically consider statements of this kind as true:

> (1) the painting called '*Impression, soleil levant* by Monet' which was in Paris last year is the same painting as the painting called '*Impression, soleil levant* by Monet' which is in Las Vegas now (provided that the painting has been carefully moved from Paris to Las Vegas).

On the contrary, we may doubt whether a specific building would still be the same if we moved it to another location; and we would consider at least some statements of this kind as false: [Fig. 1]

> (2) the building called 'Notre Dame' that was in Paris last year is the same building as the building called 'Notre Dame' that is in Las Vegas now (after meticulous stone-by-stone transfer).[12]

It seems that to change the position of Notre Dame is to alter one of its essential properties, while no essential property of an ordinary object or work of art is ever altered by moving it. But why? We are in search of an explanation for the following proposition:

> (3) Differently from ordinary objects and works of art such as paintings, sculptures, songs, symphonies, tragedies, movies and novels, (the majority of) buildings are such that changing their position alters one of their essential properties.

One possible explanation of (3) is that buildings, differently from ordinary objects and works of art, are originally conceived by their planners as permanently located in a certain position. An advantage of this answer is that it correctly predicts that we would more easily accept statements like (2) with respect to buildings that were *not* originally conceived by their planners as permanently located in a certain position – like for example modular buildings. Still it should be noted that we would probably continue *rejecting* (2) even if an ancient, undisputedly authentic manuscript were discovered where Bishop Maurice de Sully reported that his first vision of Notre Dame was compatible with it being transferred in the future to 'a far land beyond the sea' – and I imagine nothing would change if analogous discoveries proved that the same authorial intent were attributable to any architect-like figure who contributed to the edification of the cathedral, such as to Jean de Chelles and Pierre de Montreuil.

We may also note that works of art *are not constitutively* located in a certain position even in cases where their authors originally conceived them so. Indeed, they *are not* generally *constitutively* located in a certain position *tout court*. But a few considerations are in order here.

First, Sherri Irvin has recently argued that the artist's sanction is decisive in fixing the boundaries of a work of art and to determine whether a certain feature of the work of art (even a future one) is to be considered as constitutive or accidental.[13] A corollary of her claim seems to be that, when an artist sanctions that a work of art cannot (or can) be moved, this results in the work's being (or being not) constitutively located in a certain position. But

Fig. 1: Notre Dame Cathedral, Île de la Cité, Paris, France. Photographer: David Monniaux.

isn't Irvin attributing too much power to the artist's sanction? Suppose for example that Vincent van Gogh had publicly declared in 1890 at relevant points during the production of *Wheatfield Under Thunderclouds* that it was to be conceived as an unconventional work of art among whose essential features had to be included new physical features at different moments in the future – that is, all the new physical features caused by a series of hard hammer blows to be delivered by the curators to the work in 1990, 2090, 2190 and so on. I am not convinced that we would agree with Irvin that the curators should obey Van Gogh, and above all that such an artist's sanction would have had an impact on what are the constitutive properties of the work. Irvin acknowledges that the artist's sanction functions in concert with a set of conventions, but the point here is precisely that these well-established common stances, when they exist – together with how the public *de facto* (most of the times conservatively) solves problems of metaphysical indeterminacy about works of art, such as those consisting in determining whether a specific property is constitutive or contingent – appear often normatively more relevant than the artist's sanction itself. To come to an actual case, the Czech-born writer Milan Kundera seems to have repeatedly sanctioned as a constitutive property of his literary works of art that they are published as a traditional book printed on paper rather than in digital form.[14] I doubt, however, also in this circumstance whether the artist's sanction has proved sufficient to make that property constitutive. This is why I am assuming that historical discoveries about Maurice de Sully, Jean de Chelles and Pierre de Montreuil's originally conceiving Notre Dame as movable would not be sufficient for us to stop rejecting (2).[15] And of course we would still be in need of an explanation of (3).

A second consideration: some special works of art exist that, differently from paintings, sculptures, songs, symphonies, tragedies, movies and novels, are constitutively located in a certain position. It is the case of all site-specific art, such as for example street art. Site-specific art is an artistic genre born in the 1960s and 1970s 'which incorporated the physical conditions of a particular location as integral to the production, presentation, and reception of art' and 'gave itself up to its environmental context,[16] being formally determined or directed by it'.[17] Street art is a subgenre of site-specific art that makes 'material use of the street that is internal to its meaning',[18] so that pulling it from the street would 'destroy […] its meaning and status as street art'.[19] I will come back to site-specific art and street art later in the essay. However it remains true that ordinary works of art *do not* normally turn out to be *constitutively* located in a certain position *tout court*, as previously noted.

To return to our main argument, we would still need an explanation of (3). One may say that what makes the difference is that buildings are particularly difficult to move, so that they are ordinarily never moved. Somehow, such immobility makes their being located in the particular position they occupy a *constitutive* property. A first difficulty is that we are not explaining why an *accidental* property – 'being durably located in a certain position *P*' – turns out to be a constitutive property. A second, related difficulty is that 'being difficult to move' and 'being durably located in a certain position *P*' are also properties of some ordinary objects. Consider the Ahnighito meteorite, which weighs 31 tons and can surely be classified as no less difficult to move than the average building – if for no other reason than because it cannot be dismantled and rebuilt. Its long-lasting immobility has once been violated when it was laboriously moved from Cape York, Greenland to the American Museum of Natural History in New York; and still its persistence has not been affected at all by this relocation. Then clearly it is not true that accidental immobility or difficulty to move *per se* can explain (3).

Another dead end is pointing at the fact that buildings – differently from ordinary objects and the aforementioned works of art – do have foundations that make them firmly implanted and deeply rooted in the ground, hence constitutively bound up with their location. In fact, on the one hand there are some buildings with respect to which statements of type (2) hold, and which at the same time do not have any foundations (such as the Doric Temple in the Triangular Forum in Pompeii) or are visually perceived as if their foundations are not a proper part of them (such as Shigeru Ban's Paper House in Yamanakako, which stands on an elevated, square platform). On the other hand, trees can survive relocation in spite of their being rooted deeply in the ground – so that even the General Sherman tree – the world's largest giant sequoia located in Sequoia National Park, California – is commonly conceived as a material object that would persist even if (carefully) moved to another park.

More complex imaginary scenarios

We can take a step forward by trying to further specify (3). When we say that '(the majority of) buildings are such that changing their position would alter one of their essential properties', we are not specific enough about *what exactly the essential property is* that is altered by a position change. One possibility is this:

> (4) Unlike ordinary objects and works of art, (the majority of) buildings are such that changing their position would alter one of their essential properties, that is, the property of being located in the particular part of the earth's surface they occupy.

Another, quite different possibility is this:

> (5) Unlike ordinary objects and works of art, (the majority of) buildings are such that changing their position would alter one of their essential properties, that is, the property of being surrounded by their specific external context.

Which is a correct specification of (3)? Consider again Notre Dame and its capacity to survive different kinds of change. Both (4) and (5) predict that we would reject (2) in case of a meticulous stone-by-stone transfer of Notre Dame from Paris to Las Vegas. Their predictions, however, would significantly differ with respect to more complex imaginary scenarios. Suppose that we transfer the entire city of Paris – Notre Dame included – to Clark County, Nevada. Like in the previous scenario, Notre Dame has been transferred to Las Vegas. But now – in spite of its occupying a lot which is very far away from its original location – it is still surrounded by the things that we used to call 'Quai de Montebello', 'the Préfecture de Police', 'the Pont de l'Archevêché', and so on, which have been scrupulously relocated as well. 'The Seine', too is flowing as usual along one side of the cathedral and between 'Île Saint-Louis' and 'Île de la Cité' (although its waters are now running from a source located somewhere in the US rather than in Burgundy). Would we judge that Notre Dame has survived the relocation? It seems to me that we would be inclined to accept (2) under these circumstances (in spite of the changes in climate, the quality of the sunlight, and so on). After all, Notre Dame would be surrounded by the same Parisian things it is usually surrounded by in Paris, as always, and this seems quite important for accepting (2).

Of course there should be an analogous hesitation in considering the relocated 'Préfecture de Police' as the same architectural entity as the Préfecture de Police, the relocated 'Pont de l'Archevêché' as the same architectural entity as the Pont de l'Archevêché, and so on. This in turn may cast doubt on whether to accept the previous scenario as one in which the outer context of Notre Dame has remained the same (and, only its absolute position on the earth's surface has changed, along with the ensuing astronomic and climatic consequences). Two answers are in order. The first answer is the holistic claim that the relocated Notre Dame would

be the same as the Notre Dame in Paris by virtue of the relocated Quai de Montebello, Préfecture de Police and Pont de l'Archevêché being the same as the Quai de Montebello, Préfecture de Police and Pont de l'Archevêché in Paris, and vice versa – the relocated Quai de Montebello would be the same as the Quai de Montebello in Paris by virtue of the relocated Notre Dame, Préfecture de Police and Pont de l'Archevêché being the same as the Notre Dame, Préfecture de Police and Pont de l'Archevêché in Paris. To say it in French, *tout se tient* with respect to buildings' persistence after relocation. The second answer is that the requirements for an outer context at t_1 to be the same as another outer context at t_2 are weaker than the requirements for a building at t_1 to be the same as another building at t_2. Specifically, for context *X* at t_1 to be the same as context *Y* at t_2 it is not necessary that every building that is part of *X* at t_1 be the same as one (and only one) building that is part of *Y* at t_2. In particular, either physical identity or physical continuity seems perfectly sufficient to guarantee context identity over time, although neither seems sufficient to guarantee building identity over time. Since the scenario we have imagined is a scenario in which physical identity is preserved, it can be considered a scenario in which the outer context is the same in spite of the fact that we may hesitate to consider each component architectural entity – such as the relocated Préfecture de Police and Pont de l'Archevêché – as being the same as the Préfecture de Police and Pont de l'Archevêché that were in Paris. Incidentally, the latter answer also explains why we may accept (2) by virtue of the outer context being the same as in Paris, while at the same time being uncertain as to whether the relocated town is identical with Paris. We may add that the problem whether the relocated town is the same as Paris may depend in turn on whether the relocated town is surrounded by the same specific outer context Paris was originally surrounded by (and so on).

Now consider the opposite situation, in which we change the building's outer context by preserving its original position on a specific part of the earth's surface. Suppose that we leave Notre Dame where it has always been, but we substitute the whole town of Paris around the cathedral for the town of Las Vegas (with the exception of the Plaza Hotel and Casino), say, which we eliminate in order to create an empty space in which to nestle Notre Dame, at the very beginning of the Freemont Street Experience. [Fig. 2]

The Hôtel-Dieu, the Préfecture de Police, the Conciergerie and the Pont Saint-Michel are not around the building anymore. Along its spiral 387-step-climb it is obviously still possible to have a closer look at its famous gargoyles and chimeras, but there is no breath-taking panorama of Paris; rather you can enjoy a spectacular view of downtown Las Vegas with its glowing neon signs. I assume that in this case we might decide to reject (2).

Our mental experiments reveal that (5) rather than (4) is an adequate specification of (3) – what may in turn prove valuable for explaining it. The main question now is: why is the property of being surrounded by their specific outer context an *essential* property of buildings, but not of ordinary objects and works of art?

The answer

Consider a musical work of art like Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. Although it was premiered on 22 December 1808 at the Theater an der Wien in Vienna conducted by Beethoven himself, we usually do not consider it *essential* for a musical performance to count as an execution of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony that it be performed on 22 December 1808 or be conducted by Beethoven (that would imply that it is no longer possible to perform it). Why? Because we have a decisive and clear criterion for

Fig. 2: The Fremont Street Experience by The Jerde Partnership (1995), Las Vegas, Nevada, USA. Photographer: Jean-Christophe Benoist

distinguishing contingent from constitutive properties in the case of classical music. The criterion – as Goodman pointed out – is that the constitutive properties are only those prescribed by the score; and the score is in a definite notation. Therefore any performance that complies with the score *is* a performance of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, regardless of the circumstances under which it is played.[20] The same – mutatis mutandis – holds for works of art like songs, comedies, tragedies and novels. For paintings and sculptures things are different: there is no notation. This means that we lack any criterion for telling contingent from constitutive properties. As Goodman explains, 'in painting, with no such alphabet of characters, none of the pictorial properties – none of the properties the picture has as such – is distinguished as constitutive; no such feature can be dismissed as contingent, and no deviation is insignificant'.[21] Still – it must be observed – we generally *do not* consider that contextual properties are among the constitutive properties of paintings. For example, we do not think that paintings cease to be the particular works of art they are if they are moved away from the painter's atelier or from the location where the painter has chosen to exhibit them. The reason seems to be that our aesthetic judgements about paintings only concern, and are grounded on, intrinsic properties of the painting. No property of any entity forming part of the outer context – and no relational properties of the painting among whose relata are entities forming part of its outer context (like 'being illuminated in a particular way by *L*') – can ever found an aesthetic judgement about a painting. Without a doubt, things might have been different: it might have been the case that our most serious aesthetic evaluation of paintings could also take the form of judgements like: 'Guernica has such a dramatic quality thanks to the giant white-haired museum attendant standing guard at the door next to it'. But usually, nothing of the like happens. And – when we deal with a kind of work of art for which a notational language is absent or in any case insufficient to specify all the constitutive properties – those features, and only those features, that are eligible to be aesthetically relevant in the aesthetic judgements about the works of art of that kind are also not dismissible as contingent with regards to the individual works of art of that kind. In other words, when a notational language exists, it identifies constitutive properties; when a notational language either does not exist or is incapable of specifying all the constitutive properties, the source of differentiation among constitutive and non-constitutive properties lies in a property's being eligible or not eligible to be aesthetically relevant in the aesthetic judgements about those works. Since such eligibility depends in turn on historical, social, cultural and ideological factors, the very distinction among constitutive and non-constitutive properties for each family of works characterised by missing or 'weak' notation is finally contingent on such factors. This amounts to saying that, whenever it has not been culturally solved by precipitating a notational language which in turn provides 'a theoretically decisive test for compliance', the problem of determining what the constitutive properties of a specific kind of work of art are is still fluid and at the mercy of socio-culturally accepted aesthetic judgemental practises.

This story can be useful to shed light on the peculiar case of buildings, at least if – as I am assuming – buildings are or can be equated with works of art after all. First, we do have in architecture a kind of notational language in plans; but it is manifest that we usually allow among the constitutive properties of edifices much more intrinsic properties than just those indicated in plans (for example, materials, interaction with sunlight, shadows).[22] Thus, as in painting, in architecture no intrinsic feature can usually be dismissed as contingent.

Secondly, differently than for paintings, symphonies and novels, our aesthetic judgements about buildings often concern, and are grounded on, extrinsic properties too: relational properties of

the building among whose relata are entities that form part of its outer context, and even non-relational properties directly instantiated by entities belonging to that context. To give some examples, it is not uncommon for aesthetic judgements about Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater to rely on its integration with the striking natural surroundings and even on the beauty of the waterfall itself; for aesthetic judgements about Palazzo Sansedoni in Siena to mention some properties of the other buildings lining the shell-shaped Piazza del Campo; for aesthetic judgements about Alila Villas Uluwatu by WOHA Architects to stress the importance of the sea view and the shadows cast inside by the sunlight; [Fig. 3] and for aesthetic judgements about Under Pohutukawa Residence by Herbst Architects to depend on properties relating to the amazing mature Pohutukawa trees around the house. [Fig. 4] Indeed there is no extrinsic contextual feature of an architectural entity that cannot be crucially used in an aesthetic judgement about it. Therefore, regarding architectural works in general, the set of features that cannot be dismissed as contingent includes all contextual features. This explains why usually buildings cannot survive relocation: because usually there is no basis for ruling out any extrinsic contextual feature of the work as inessential. The same is clearly not true of ordinary objects and works of art, whose essential features are generally considered to be a subset of their intrinsic features, no matter what view we take of their specific nature.[23] This gives us an explanation of (5).

A further difficulty

There is another curious aspect of the problem that deserves analysis. We would usually expect that the higher the number of the contextual properties of a building that are altered by a particular relocation, the more threatening that relocation would be to the persistence of the building. (Remember that contextual properties are not just constitutive properties, and rather are properties that can neither be dismissed as contingent nor distinguished as constitutive. Thus, while altering the majority or the totality of contextual properties certainly prevents the persistence of the building, altering just one or a handful of them can hardly be considered to do so). And indeed, if asked to compare Notre Dame's meticulous stone-by-stone transfer to Las Vegas with Notre Dame's meticulous stone-by-stone transfer to the Île Saint-Louis (where many 'Parisian properties' are preserved, such as for example 'being near the Pont de l'Archevêché'), we would very probably value the latter relocation as less menacing to Notre Dame's persistence than the former.

We would also expect very minute context changes to be negligible as to the persistence of a building. Indeed some minor alteration of the outer context, like the appearance of M. Dupont walking down the Rue de la Cité does not alter Notre Dame's identity and is entirely innocuous as to its persistence. We are tempted to say that there is something like a maximum partial change in the outer context that a building can survive, and that it is perhaps possible to determine it.

But a difficulty arises here. Whatever the maximum context change that is not detrimental to Notre Dame's persistence – and independently of whether we can ever determine it – it is indisputable that there is an even greater context change that is nevertheless revealed *not* to be lethal to Notre Dame's persistence, namely the change from thirteenth-century Paris to contemporary Paris. Indeed Paris has changed dramatically around Notre Dame since its construction, to the point that we can agree that contemporary Paris is more similar to – say – contemporary Lyon than to thirteenth-century Paris. Yet we would value Notre Dame's stone-by-stone transfer to contemporary Lyon as more threatening to its persistence than its outer context change from thirteenth-century Paris to contemporary Paris, which indeed proved

Fig. 3: Alila Villas Uluwatu by WOHA Architects (2009), Bali, Indonesia. Photographer: Patrick Bingham-Hall

Fig. 4: Under Pohutukawa Residence by Herbst Architects (2011), Piha North, New Zealand. Photographer: Patrick Reynolds. Contractor: John Armstrong

inoffensive. In any case, it seems that the context change from thirteenth-century Paris to contemporary Paris is both greater and less threatening that any conjectural maximum context change that is not detrimental to Notre Dame's persistence – such as, for example, Notre Dame's 180-degree rotation so that it faces east instead of west, or its transfer to the Square de la Tour Saint-Jacques in the fourth arrondissement in Paris.

One possible answer is that the slower a context change, the less menacing its magnitude. According to this hypothesis, replacing the whole city of Paris around Notre Dame with the city of Las Vegas would not affect Notre Dame's persistence, provided that the replacement is gradual enough (imagine substituting no more than one Parisian brick around Notre Dame with one Las Vegas brick per day). Therefore, while we cannot accept that:

> (6) the building called 'Notre Dame' that was surrounded by Paris *last year* is the same building as the building called 'Notre Dame' that is surrounded by a scrupulously relocated Las Vegas now,

we may accept that:

> (7) the building called 'Notre Dame' that was surrounded by Paris *800 years ago* is the same building as the building called 'Notre Dame' that is surrounded by a scrupulously relocated Las Vegas now,

provided that the replacement of Paris with Las Vegas occurs gradually along all the 800-year period. Once again, it must be noted that contemporary Paris can be judged as more similar to contemporary Las Vegas than to the thirteenth-century Paris; and if the context change from thirteenth-century Paris to contemporary Paris proved inoffensive as to Notre Dame's persistence, the context change from contemporary Paris to Las Vegas as it is now – if it occurred gradually over the course of 800 years – would reasonably prove innocuous too. On the contrary, the quick and immediate relocation of Notre Dame to Las Vegas, however meticulous, is not gradual; and any *gradual* transfer of Notre Dame from Paris to Las Vegas seems to affect Notre Dame's persistence for independent reasons (namely the cathedral would cease to exist – or it would be in no place, or it would be in two very different places – for too long a time).

A weakness affecting this position is that it is not clear why a building can survive a significant alteration to its contextual properties when the alteration is slow and gradual. After all, altering a constitutive property of an entity *slowly and gradually* is nonetheless an alteration. Perhaps it is simply true that, for all properties of an architectural entity that can be neither dismissed as contingent nor distinguished as constitutive, there are some alterations that are so slow and gradual that the entity can survive them. Or, perhaps contextual properties can (only) be temporarily (although necessarily for a very long time) constitutive of an architectural entity.

Another interesting answer is this: the change from thirteenth-century Paris to contemporary Paris around Notre Dame proved to be inoffensive as to Notre Dame's persistence because *it is not a context change*, although it certainly is a change of many (if not all) of its contextual properties. The idea is that contexts – just like persons, cities and Theseus's ships – can persist in spite of ongoing changes to their properties. We may try to specify the relation that would constitute a sufficient condition for the persistence of contexts by analogy with the psychological relation that is thought to be the necessary and sufficient condition for the persistence of people. For example:

> *X* at t_1 is the same context as *Y* at t_2 if *X* is persistentially continuous with *Y*, where persistential continuity is defined as the relation realised by overlapping chains of strong persistential connectedness; in turn,

> persistential connectedness is the holding of particular connections realised by unproblematic instantiations of the relationship of identity over time of architectural entities and other macroentities like trees and rivers (such as the relationships among a war memorial yesterday and the same war memorial persisting today, or among a coffee house on Monday and the same coffee house persisting on Tuesday), and *strong* persistential connectedness is the holding of very many such connections.[24]

However intriguing, this path appears doomed to circularity. In fact – one may say – we would be explaining Notre Dame's persistence by appealing to the persistence of its context, while explaining the persistence of the context by appealing to the persistence of many architectural entities like Notre Dame. We can escape circularity by offering a very different account of context persistence, since either physical identity, or physical continuity, or in certain cases even perceptual indistinguibility or perceptual similarity seem perfectly sufficient to guarantee context identity over time.[25] Or we may argue that there is no circularity here, since we are just saying that persistence questions about certain architectural entities located in the same region of space are intertwined among each other as well as with those about other non-architectural macroentities like trees and hills, and when we are uncertain about the persistence of architectural entity *P* over time period *T*, we should look at the rate of persistence of the other things around *P* over *T* of which we are reasonably certain. Looking at the overlapping chains of strong persistential connectedness is nothing but a specific elaborate way of doing it. Talking about contexts, and identity of contexts over time, is only introducing shorter and more convenient language to do the same, in a similarly specific elaborate way.

Of course, if we want to hold that the change from thirteenth-century Paris to contemporary Paris around Notre Dame proved to be inoffensive as to Notre Dame's persistence because it is not a context change, a clarification is needed as to how Notre Dame's contextual features are identified. We have claimed that the set of Notre Dame's features that cannot be dismissed as contingent includes all its contextual features. What we need is for Notre Dame's contextual features to be identified so as not to change as far as the context persists. For example, they must rather include 'being illuminated in whatever particular way it happens to be illuminated in context *X*' than 'being illuminated in particular way *W*'.

A third, perhaps more obvious answer is to concede that the change from thirteenth-century Paris to contemporary Paris was a change of the context around Notre Dame, and to remark that nonetheless it was *not a city change*. It is possible for architectural entities to persist over a very large context change, provided that this change is not also a city change. Again, we need to identify contextual properties so as not to vary as far as the city persists (for example: 'being illuminated by *the light of Paris*'). And – above all – we need to account for the persistence of cities without relying on the persistence of the architectural entities that are part of them. One of the problems of this answer, however, is that while every architectural entity is surrounded by a context, not every architectural entity is surrounded by a city. Working on contexts rather than cities has the advantage that our conclusions will account not only for Notre Dame, but also for Under Pohutukawa Residence, among whose constitutive properties seem to be properties relating to the wonderful mature Pohutukawa trees currently standing in its remarkable context.

Conclusions

I have focused on the problem of how the persistence question about buildings is affected by their spatial relocation, and why in particular (the majority of) buildings are such that to change their position is to alter one of their essential properties – while

nothing similar happens to ordinary objects and traditional works of art .

I have argued that the solution to the mystery relies on how the distinction among constitutive and non-constitutive properties is drawn in the case of architecture. In the absence of a strong notational language, this distinction is unstable and contingent upon what properties are admissible to relevantly appear in aesthetic judgements about architectural entities such as buildings at a given time and place. Since currently in Western culture, aesthetic judgements about architectural entities can *de facto* relevantly mention extrinsic contextual properties, no extrinsic contextual property can ever be dismissed as inessential to any architectural entity possessing it.

Once we have an explanation of why buildings can usually not survive relocation, we are in a better position to explore the relation among architecture and site-specific art. It seems to me that if we consider architecture to be art, we should classify it as a particular kind of site-specific art. Again, even if we do not think of architecture as art, whenever we equate architectural entities with works of art, we should equate them with site-specific works of art. In fact site-specific works of art as such appear to be incapable of surviving relocation for the same reasons that architectural entities are incapable of surviving relocation; like for architectural entities, the essential property of the site-specific works of art affected by their relocation is that of being surrounded by their specific outer context rather than that of being located in the particular part of earth's surface they occupy; and the paradox of the harmlessness of the change of surrounding context also afflicts site-specific art. It could even be argued that the many points in common among architectural entities and site-specific works of art are a sufficient reason for considering architecture to be (site-specific) art after all.

One may argue that, in particular, inasmuch as urban buildings are to be considered as art, they are to be considered as *street art*. Consider the definition of street art offered by Nicholas A. Riggle: a work of art is street art if, and only if, (i) it uses the street as an artistic resource, and (ii) the artistic use of the street is internal to its significance, that is, it contributes essentially to its meaning.[26] It is difficult to see how any urban building which we accept to qualify as art can fail to satisfy (i) and (ii). (It must be remarked, however, that condition (ii) requires outer contextual properties to be necessarily essential rather than barely not dismissable as inessential.) In fact Riggle assumes his definition to imply that the work's meaning is severely compromised when it is removed from the street.[27] This is no different from saying that some street-related extrinsic contextual properties are constitutive to the work of street art (apparently because they are constitutive to their meaning, which in turn is constitutive to its identity). Similarly, as said, we cannot remove an urban building from the street without threatening its identity, precisely because no street-related extrinsic contextual properties can be dismissed as non-constitutive. Although there is no logical necessity, I take this to be convincing evidence for considering urban buildings as street art (provided that we want to consider them as art in the first place). Note that, if it is correct to qualify urban buildings as street art, then Riggle is wrong in claiming that street art is very likely to be 'illegal, anonymous, ephemeral, highly creative, and attractive' as well as 'cheap to make, free to experience,[28] and owned and overseen by no one', since urban buildings – which easily turn out to constitute the largest part of street art in a city – will barely possess these features.[29]

It is interesting to note that site-specific works of art realised in the 1960s and 1970s have been somehow 'mobilised' by pressures of the museum culture and art market of the late 1980s. Many site-specific works of art have been relocated for important exhibitions (and, in some cases, new

refabrications have been created *ad hoc*). As Susan Hapgood puts it, 'the once-popular term "site-specific" has come to mean "movable under the right circumstances'.[30] In other words, being located in a particular position has ceased to be an essential property of these works of art, while 'site specificity is redescribed as the personal aesthetic choice of an artist's *stylistic* preference rather than a structural reorganisation of the aesthetic experience'.[31] This phenomenon seems consistent with the view that I proposed, according to which when a notational language is either missing or incapable of specifying all the constitutive properties (which is certainly the case for the works of art under consideration), the differentiation among constitutive and non-constitutive properties is unstable and depends in the first instance on what properties are admissible to relevantly appear in aesthetic judgements about the works of art, which in turn is contingent on socio-cultural and material changes such as for example the 'domestication of vanguardist works by the dominant culture', as Kwon reads this specific transformation.[32]

Kwon remarks that the increasing institutional interest in current site-oriented art has produced the figure of an itinerant artist who re-presents the same site-responsive work of art in many different locations around the world. Again, I think we may interpret this phenomenon as a change in the metaphysical status of the extrinsic contextual features of the work, which are now accidental to the work, while previously were not dismissable as inessential. The 'new' site-oriented work of art is now constituted just by its intrinsic properties – perhaps with a special attention to those affording the development of unpredictable relations with the modifiable outer context.

We can speculate on what would happen to architecture if the spatial relocation of buildings progressively became technically practicable as well as financially appealing. It is possible that, if the culture industry and the political economy in the future started to make the relocation of buildings happen, we would in turn change our ways of aesthetically judging buildings in the first place. This would produce a transformation in the metaphysical status of the extrinsic contextual features of buildings, which would lose their qualification of 'not dismissable as inessential'. We might take our current intuition that *these* would be the effects of introducing the practise of relocating buildings as further evidence for the thesis according to which architecture is one kind of site-specific art. What would happen to architecture if transferability becomes reality is apparently no different from what has happened to once site-specific (non-architectural) art under the same circumstances.

I assume that it is possible to offer alternative readings of the recent mobilisation of site-oriented works of art. For instance, we may want to say that the outer contextual properties have never ceased to be not dismissable as inessential, and in consequence there is one numerically different site-specific work of art at each location at which the artist re-represents her original project. But again, it seems that one who holds this view will have no reason for discarding the very same view with regard to the mobilisation of buildings. It is important that – whatever one thinks of the consequences of relocation for site-responsive art – the effects on architecture are taken to be the same.

To understand why architectural entities are not *currently* thought to survive spatial relocation is not a trivial issue. I have tried not only to offer an explanation of this fact, but also to show how casting light on this question has interesting consequences for our knowledge of the ontology and aesthetics of architecture in general.

Notes

1. See Max Page and Randall Mason, 'Rethinking the

Roots', in *Historic Preservation: An Introduction to Its History, Principles, and Practises*, ed. Norman Tyler, Ted J. Ligibel and Ilene R. Tyler (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2009).

2. UNESCO, *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* (Paris: World Heritage Centre, 2016). Relevant to the present topic, 'Nominations of immovable heritage which are likely to become movable will not be considered' (par. 48).
3. Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another. Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2002), Chapter 2.
4. See Bruno Latour and Albena Yaneva, 'Give Me a Gun and I Will Make All Buildings Move: An ANT's View of Architecture', *Explorations in Architecture: Teaching, Design, Research* (2008): 80–89; Jane M. Jacobs, 'A Geography of Big Things', *Cultural Geographies* 13, no. 1 (2006): 1–27; Gillian Rose, Monica Degen and Begun Basdas, 'More on "Big Things": Buildings Events and Feelings', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 35, no. 3 (2010): 334–349.
5. Without this assumption, it would be possible that the effects of relocation on the persistence of buildings be systematically causally produced *only* by the changes in that part of the broad context that is not also part of the narrow context – e.g. *only* by the changes in the cultural traits of the people living around the building or relating to it, for example. It is clear that, in this case, restricting one's attention to the covariation between the narrow context and the persistence of the building would be misleading.
6. See Saul Fisher, 'Philosophy of Architecture', in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2015 Editio n), ed. Edward N. Zalta, http://plato.stanford.edu.
7. Dominic McIver Lopes, 'Shikinen Sengu and the Ontology of Architecture in Japan', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 65, no.1 (2007): 77–84.
8. See Loretta Lees, 'Towards a Critical Geography of Architecture: The Case of an Ersatz Colosseum', *Ecumene* 8, no. 1 (2001): 51–86; Jacobs, 'Geography of Big Things'; Rose, 'More on "Big Things"'.
9. Colin Lorne, 'Spatial Agency and Practising Architecture Beyond Buildings', *Social and Cultural Geography* 18, no. 2 (2016): 268–287.
10. Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1968).
11. Ted Nannicelli, 'Instructions and Artworks: Musical Scores, Theatrical Scripts, Architectural Plans, and Screenplays', *British Journal of Aesthetics* 51, no. 4 (2011): 400.
12. In my experience as a teacher in a Department of Architecture, about 80 percent of aspiring architects agree that Notre Dame Cathedral would not survive its meticulous stone-by-stone transfer from Paris to Las Vegas.
13. Sherri Irvin, 'The Artist's Sanction in Contemporary Art', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 63, no. 4 (2005): 315–326.
14. See 'Le numérique ne passera pas par Kundera', *L'Express*, 19 July 2012.
15. I am assuming it to be correct to allow either an identification (if architecture is an art) or at least a homology (if architecture is not an art) between the figure of the architect and that of the artist.
16. Kwon, *One Place After Another*, 1.
17. Ibid., 11.
18. Nicholas Alden Riggle, 'Street Art: The Transfiguration of the Commonplaces', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 68, no.3 (2010): 246.
19. Riggle, 'Street Art', 248.
20. Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 117–118.
21. Ibid., 116.
22. This is what Nannicelli means when he says that musical scores and theatrical scripts – unlike architectural plans – are *work-determinative*. While musical scores and theatrical scripts specify *all* the constitutive properties of their related works of art, architectural plans only determine *part of* them. Nannicelli, 'Instructions and Artworks', 400.
23. I voluntarily ignore the problem that, if one takes a person's essential properties to be (at least in part) psychological properties, these may turn out to be (at least in part) extrinsic by virtue of the fact that some (if not all) mental states may have a broad content – that is, a content that is not completely determined by the

individual's intrinsic properties. See Curtis Brown, 'Narrow Mental Content', in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2016 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, https://plato.stanford.edu.

24. See Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 207.
25. Note that the connective in the above definition is 'if' rather than 'if and only if'. Indeed the reason is that, as I have affirmed earlier, for context *X* at t_1 to be the same as context *Y* at t_2 it is not necessary that every architectural or non-architectural macroentity that is part of *X* at t_1 be the same as one (and only one) macroentity that is part of *Y* at t_2. Consider, for example, Under Pohutukawa Residence by Herbst Architects: it seems sufficient for its outer context to persist that there are many mature Pohutukawa trees all around it, while it is not relevant at all that they are *the same mature Pohutukawa trees.*
26. Riggle, 'Street Art', 245–246.
27. Ibid., 246.
28. Ibid., 246.
29. Ibid., 249.
30. Susan Hapgood, 'Remaking Art History', *Art in America* 78, no.7 (1990): 120.
31. Kwon, *One Place After Another*, 38.
32. Ibid., 38.

Biography

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