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Static Illusions: Architectural Identity, Meaning and History

Abstract

The meaning and value, or identity, of architecture is often conceptualised and portrayed as a historically timeless entity. Persisting within certain areas of building design, heritage preservation, architectural history and literature, such traditional notions of the built environment assume that architectural meaning is prescribed by built form; that architectural identity is essentially defined by the intentions of the designer; and that architecture possesses a definitive identity as it historically progresses toward a single, 'perfect' state over time. However, when considering concepts on the cultural formation and historical discontinuity of meaning, discussed by theorists such as Bourdieu, Foucault and Barthes, the basis of existing conventional ideas which promote the permanence of architectural identity become dislodged and questioned. This paper explores this question by drawing on cultural, historical concepts of meaning as a theoretical framework to investigate the transformative nature of architecture and the identity of built examples, in order to critically evaluate present essentialist notions of architectural identity.

Key words: architectural identity, meaning, history, Bourdieu, Foucault, Barthes.

Introduction

It is often assumed that architecture possesses a single identity which remains consistent over time. This notion can be recognised within conventional areas of architectural design, heritage preservation, history and forms of architectural literature which approach the meaning or value of architecture in static terms. Such timeless depictions of the built environment tend to view architectural identity as a physically defined construct; they often privilege and rely on the designer's concepts to define a building; and articulate architectural history as a continuous narrative outlining the historical improvement of built form across time. As such, these traditional ideas and representations of architecture conceptualise and represent architectural identity as an immutable and historically stable entity.

Although conventionally accepted, these notions of identity are problematised when projecting sociological and post-structural concepts on the cultural formation and historical transition of meaning onto the context of architecture. These concepts of meaning, expressed by theorists such as Bourdieu (1977; 1993; 2002), Foucault (1989; 2009) and Barthes (1977), offer an alternative way of understanding built form in terms of cultural, contextual and historically specific relations. In doing so, these suggest that architectural identity is culturally, historically malleable and transformative in nature, as opposed to a trans-historical construct. These concepts challenge timeless depictions of the built environment and question the legitimacy of existing non-transformative notions of architectural meaning and value.

This paper explores these issues by drawing on sociological and post-structural concepts of meaning as a theoretical framework to analyse the historical and culturally mutable nature of built form, and critically assess traditional notions of architectural identity. Taking ‘identity’ as an amalgamation of the meaning and value by which built form is distinguished or defined, the first section of this paper critically analyses specific ideas and practices within areas of building design, heritage conservation, history and architectural literature which commonly approach the identity of architecture as an immutable entity. Flaws in the ideas of identity are brought to surface by applying Bourdieu’s, Foucault’s and Barthes’ theories of meaning to the context of the built environment and select examples, which highlight cultural and historically fluid aspects of architectural identity. The discussion is concluded by reflecting on the problems recognised in existing static notions and representations of the identity of architecture.

Static identity

In conventional areas of architectural design, heritage conservation, history and literature, architectural identity is often conceived and represented as a timeless and historically stable entity. This is reflected in particular practices of building design and heritage conservation that view and portray architectural identity in terms of aesthetics or built form. An invariable impression of identity is also projected via existing traditional depictions of architectural history which describe built form as a progressive product that advances toward a final, definitive state; as well as in literary works on existing buildings that often solely define architecture in terms of the architect’s intentions for its design. Together, these representations and ideas of architecture portray identity as an immutable and historically continuous subject of knowledge.

For instance, within the field of architectural design, an eternal notion of identity is particularly conveyed by current practices of classical architecture. Architects such as Leon Krier (2007; 2009), John Simpson (Sagharchi and Steil 2010, 204; John Simpson & Partners 2008) and Jean-Francois Gabriel (2004), who advocate and practice neo-classical design orders, commonly conceptualise the physical elements of classical architecture as a built 'vocabulary', whereby meanings are considered to be symbolically expressed by their physical forms. In other words, the specific physical features and compositional order pertaining to the classical building style are considered to possess and exude certain meanings and functions, which are believed to be timeless and universally understood (Krier 2007, 33-55, 179-187; Simpson 2008; Gabriel 2004, 12-35, 124-155). Similarly, the notion of built form embodying architectural meaning is also conventionally adopted as a conceptual basis for directing and justifying the design of architecture within other fields of architectural design. For example, architect Daniel Libeskind describes his design of the Jewish Museum in Berlin as an extremely conceptually driven project, as the building's alternating spatial layout and sharp physical appearance were informed by a conceptual network of lines connecting locations considered to be of Jewish cultural-historical significance. Additionally, Libeskind describes the museum's form as symbolically yielding 'reference to the emblems of a compressed and distorted star - the yellow star that was so frequently worn [by the Jews] on this very site' (Libeskind 2010). Hence, in conceptualizing the meaning of architecture as an objective and exhibited property of architectural aesthetics, these theories and approaches of building design view architectural identity as a tangible mode of expression embodied and frozen within built form.

Likewise, this static and aesthetic notion of architectural identity can also be recognized within the field of heritage conservation. For instance, conventional practices of retaining the heritage value of sites in Australia often involve conserving built forms which are considered to be of cultural and historical importance. In other words, the building conservation strategies which are implemented by today's heritage industry commonly aim to protect and maintain particular cultural, historical values associated with certain built forms (Marquis-Kyle and Walker 2004; O' Connor 1999; Australia ICOMOS 2000; Australia ICOMOS 2011; ICOMOS 2007). Such strategies include preserving or restoring the physical fabric and specific past appearance of architecture, in a bid to present and reinforce particular historical aspects valued of a building (O'Connor 2008). Whilst not all heritage practices and efforts in maintaining historic sites centre on this model of architectural 'preservation', these traditional

methods of physically conserving and portraying built form still persist within certain areas of the heritage industry. Such is the case with the conservation of Tranby House in Maylands, Perth, Western Australia, which is revered as a significant historical representation of 19th Century colonial living and early rural development along the Swan River. Additionally, it is also valued for its association with the Hardey Family, whose members had a major influence on religious, political, agricultural and business activities during the early settlement period of Western Australia (Heritage Council Assessment 1995). To retain and preserve the significance of Tranby House, its form and appearance were refurbished and furnished with 19th Century domestic items in 1977, and has since been stylistically maintained to resemble the colonial home occupied by the Hardey's from the 1830's era (National Trust of Australia (W.A.) 2008; Heritage Council of WA 1991; personal visit 2010). As such, in maintaining the form and aesthetic features of a building according to its appearance at a particular moment in the past, these conventional modes of retaining the heritage value of architecture seem to conceptualise and portray architectural identity as a physically defined and preservable construct.

Additionally, current articulations of architectural history which depict the built environment in terms of progression also project a historically rigid impression of architectural identity. Aligning with Hegelian notions of a deterministic progressive history, the meta-histories of architecture depicted in prominent historical works, such as *'An Outline of European Architecture'* (2009) by Nikolaus Pevsner; *'Architecture'* (2006) by Jonathon Glancey; and *'A History of Western Architecture'* (2005) by David Watkin, emphasise a continuous development of architectural styles over time. These histories suggest that built form endures an overall successive process of improvement over time, whereby the physical design and stylistic qualities of architecture are considered to historically mature toward a final perfect state. This is implied in Pevsner's historical depiction of the progressive development of basilicas, describing the form of the S. Apollare Nuovo as a 'final' example of a 'mature and exceptionally perfect basilica' (2009, 16). This same concept is also reflected in Pevsner's description of the development of the High Gothic style in France, as he exclaims that late twelfth to early thirteenth century cathedrals, Rheims, Amiens and Beauvais, 'are the final achievement of an evolution which had begun back in the 11th Century in Normandy and at Durham' (2009, 62). Similarly, Glancey's 'continuous [historical] record of architectural improvement' in *'Architecture'* (2006, 12) describes Beauvais Cathedral as '[representing] the final stage in a direct line of the architectural evolution of the Gothic style that began at St

Denis in 1144' (2006, 252). Therefore, these traditional histories commonly regard the condition of built form in the past as a stage along a historically linear pathway of improvement, whereby architecture is assumed to continuously progress across time until it reaches a definitive perfect state. By defining past built form in terms of a specific 'final' state of architecture in the future, these depictions of architectural history insinuate that architecture essentially has an underlying single identity across time.

This same eternalistic notion of identity is also suggested among current forms of architectural literature and reviews which define architecture according to the intentions behind its design. In other words, these articulations of the built environment tend to accentuate, refer to, and rely on the architect and their specific design intentions when defining a building. For instance, the Walt Disney Concert Hall in California, designed by architect Frank Gehry, has been featured in numerous reviews which consistently describe the building according to Gehry's concepts for its design. Examples of these include reviews by architectural journal, 'UME', which emphasize Gehry's sculptural references to fish and sailing (Beck and Cooper 2005, 2-11); as well as media reviewer, Sheila Hagen (2003), who exclaimed the concert hall 'was designed to look like a ship at full mast'; and likewise with architectural critic, James Russell (2003), who refers to Gehry's vision of the hall as 'a sailing ship in a shoebox'. This spotlight cast upon the architect and their intentions for a building is also echoed in certain architectural texts, such as Frankel's *'Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim Museum: An Architectural Appreciation'* (2008); Lahti's *'Alvar Aalto 1898-1976: Paradise for the man in the street'* (2004); and Drew's *'Utzon and the Sydney Opera House'* (2000), which predominantly describe architecture in terms of its design concept, and the architectural 'genius' of the designer (Frankel 2008). These literary depictions of the built environment tend to define and portray architecture with a fixed identity by consistently attributing a building's meaning to the intentions of the designer. Thus, these particular theories, practices and articulations of architecture, found active within existing fields of architectural design, heritage, history and literature, appear to commonly view and represent built form as a historically consistent and immutable condition of knowledge.

Meaning, identity and historical change

Set against these conventionalised notions of architectural identity are sociological and post-structural concepts on the socio-cultural formation and historical transition of meaning. When applied to the context of architecture, concepts from the works of Pierre Bourdieu,

Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes, highlight cultural, highlight historically shifting aspects of architectural meaning and unveil a more dynamic notion of architectural identity. Furthermore, by using these concepts as a framework for critically analysing the transformative nature of the meaning and value of built examples, architectural identity is revealed as an intangible and unstable entity, rather than an aesthetically prescribed, trans-historical construct. In this regard, these theories and historical transitions recognised in the identity of architecture challenge current timeless definitions of built form, and suggest that these traditional representations of the built environment are permeated with flaws.

For instance, Bourdieu's (1977; 1993; 2002) sociological concepts and notion of '*habitus*' discusses how the ways in which people interpret and respond to their environment are framed by their knowledge, familiarised ideas, and personal habitual experiences within the socio-cultural context of their surroundings. He elaborates that the knowledge which people hold and the practices that they exercise are informed by their own past encounters and everyday experiences of being within the socio-cultural conditions of their environment. That is, from their individual experiences, people develop a tacit familiarity, or 'feel', of socio-cultural norms and accepted ideas practiced within the particular context of their environment. In doing so, people unconsciously internalise aspects of prevailing norms and practices through their habitual encounters or experiences. Bourdieu claims that it is this familiarity and internalisation of existing contextual norms, ideas and practices, intertwined with knowledge held and shaped from past, personal socio-cultural encounters, which influences the particular way people react and make sense of their environment (Bourdieu 1977; 1993; 2002). Therefore, Bourdieu's concepts suggest that people's interpretation of the reality of their surroundings, and the meanings which they perceive of it, depend on individual aspects of experience and perception, which are related to particular social, cultural and contextual conditions of their experienced environment.

Casting Bourdieu's ideas onto the context of architecture implies that the specific meanings which people interpret of the built environment are shaped and limited by what they know from their own socio-cultural background of experiences and past encounters, as well as their familiarity of accepted ideas, practices or conditions prevailing within their contextual surroundings. An example of this can be recognised with the Taj Mahal in Agra, India (Fig. 1), which has been rendered with numerous meanings by different socio-cultural groups. According to Tim Edensor's research at the Taj in '*National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life*' (2002), the value and meaning of this globally recognised landmark differs

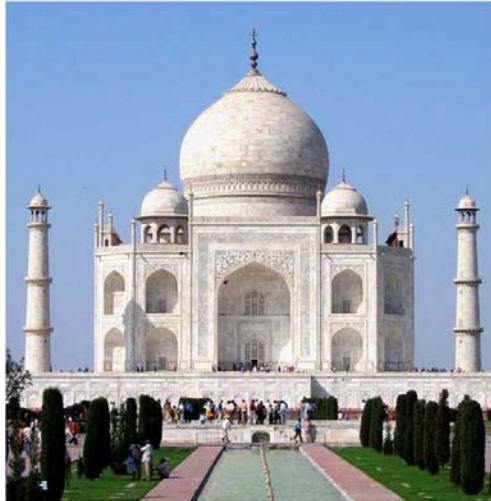


Figure 1. The Taj Mahal, Agra, India.



Figure 2. *above*, Tourists visiting the Taj.



Figure 3. *right*, Muslims praying inside the Taj Mahal's Mosque.

among various groups of people from dissimilar socio-cultural backgrounds, with different ideas and encounters of the site. For instance, from the tourist's perspective (Fig. 2), the meaning of the Taj was generally articulated according to media or tourism based ideas concerning the 'mystiques' of the 'exotic East' and romanticised themes relating to 'the (untrue) story of how the emperor cut off the hands of the workers who built the Taj'; 'the tomb's ethereality'; and 'Oriental despotism or the pleasures of the flesh' (Edensor 2002, 47). On the other hand, for the majority of Indian visitors to the site, the Taj is proudly perceived as a national symbol, whereby the building's value is associated with '...the interweaving of diverse ethnic, religious and cultural traditions which are believed to signify the Indian 'genius' for cultural synthesis...' (Edensor 2002, 47). Alternatively, Muslim visitors viewed the Taj with religious importance, as the mosque and Koranic carvings depicted on the building walls were associated with Muslim sacred ideas, as well as significantly held religious rituals carried out at the site (Fig. 3). In contrast, for 'fundamentalist' Hindus, the identity of the Taj has negative connotations relating to past destructions of sacred Hindu buildings in India by the Moghuls, as the site of the Taj is believed to be where a former temple dedicated to Shiva was located. Hence, for this group, the meaning of the building is contentiously perceived as a Hindu temple adapted to Muslim beliefs and '...a symbol of Moghul disrespect for Hindus' (Edensor 2002, 48). Extending on Bourdieu's concepts, these multiple examples of the meanings and significances perceived of the Taj demonstrate how its identity varies among different socio-cultural groups bearing dissimilar forms of knowledge, familiarised ideas and experiences of the site. This infers that architectural

identity is influenced by specific social, cultural and contextually informed ideas familiarised by individuals and their particular encounters of the built environment.



Figure 4. Broad Arrow Café, 28th April 1996, Port Arthur.



Figure 5. Demolished remains of Broad Arrow Café.

Additionally, the role of people's past experiences, memories and ideas in shaping architectural meaning is also reflected in the demolition of Port Arthur's Broad Arrow Café in Tasmania, during December, 1996, following a tragic murderous rampage that occurred within the building earlier that same year (Fig. 4) (Montgomery 1996; Wainwright, Bearup & Pitt 1996). Prior to the massacre of twenty individuals inside the café on the 28th of April that year, Broad Arrow was considered '...a thriving hub of Port Arthur' where visitors and tourists would dine for meals and drinks, or casually browse through the store's gifts area. However, following the fatal incident, the Café transformed from a popular visitors' setting to a site that was considered to be dark, disturbing and embedded with 'unspeakable horrors of the past', such that it was unanimously decided by the local community to be demolished and left as ruins (Fig. 5) (Doherty, 2006). The dramatic shift in the identity of the café, and the sudden change in the locals' response to the building after the massacre, suggests that Broad Arrow was demolished because it became *associated* with socially held, negative connotations relating to the event of the murders, rather than because of the physical structure itself. In other words, the built form of Broad Arrow became perceived as a physical reminder of the dark incident which the locals preferred to forget, whereby the horror, memory and knowledge of the massacre was socially attached to the building and not actually exhibited by its form or aesthetic appearance. As journalist and visitor Ben Doherty describes, 'There is nothing inherently sinister about the building, but the fact that twenty people were killed in cold blood within its squat, brick, walls, makes it a haunting place.' (Doherty 2006). Drawing on Bourdieu's notions of the formation of meaning, this example reveals how people's memories, past experiences or ideas, and their socio-cultural association

with the built environment, play a pivotal role in the construction and transformation of architectural identity.

Bourdieu's theories, and the examples of the Taj Mahal and Broad Arrow Café, suggest that architectural identity is a transitional entity which is culturally, perceptually and contextually malleable. Furthermore, these theories and examples draw attention to the role of people in forming and altering architectural identity, by highlighting how people associate built form with socially and culturally constructed meanings, values or ideas. As such, this challenges and exposes flaws in conventional practices of building design and heritage conservation which approach architectural identity as a timeless property of built form.

On a similar note, Michel Foucault's (1972; 1989) post-structural theories and particular notion of discourse emphasizes the cultural, historically specific formation of meaning and ideas. In *'The Order of Things'*, Foucault explains that people make sense of reality and 'the wild profusion of existing things' (1989, xv) by 'ordering' or assigning it with meaning that has been discursively shaped within the specific context of their time. He asserts that a particular socio-cultural context produces its own specific 'order' of knowledge, or 'discourse' (all forms of knowledge, accepted ideas, meanings and practices), which informs, entails and limits the possibilities of what ideas are thought; what meanings are perceived of things; and what is considered to be 'true' within a certain historical period. In this regard, Foucault stresses that particular meanings, ideas and practices do not form or exist in isolation, but rather, their construction and existence are made possible through their relation to a web of other prevailing forms of knowledge or practices, which inform and rationalise them within a given historical context (Foucault 1989; 2009; Mills 2004, 10-47; Kendall and Wickham 1999). As such, Foucault exclaims that certain meanings and ideas exist only within the specific historical context and discursive conditions which inform and allow them to be possible. In particular, he argues that the meaning of things are not historically continuous since they are specifically formed and rationally understood according to particular discursive, contextual conditions at a given time.

By applying Foucault's theories to the built environment, these ideas infer that architectural identity is unstable over time, as it is shaped according to historically specific discursive and contextual conditions. This historical instability is exemplified by comparing the socio-cultural, contextual conditions and significance of Piazza della Signoria, in Florence, during the 15th to 18th century, to that within the present. Throughout this period, western urban



Figure 6. Execution of Girolamo Savonarola in Piazza della Signoria, 1498.

squares such as Piazza della Signoria were commonly associated with cultural rituals of punishment, as human tortures and executions were often dramatically showcased and observed within the communal setting of the town square (Fig. 6). These punitive and symbolically infused rituals of death were rationalised and informed by a discursive web of socio-cultural ideas, beliefs and values surrounding notions of crime and punishment; Christian ideas of sin, evil, the soul, bodily pain, suffering and reconciliation, as well as spiritual purification; and political means of behavioural control prevailing at the time (Foucault 1995; Rey 1995, 49; Dean 2001, 126; Olson 2006). As such, western public squares were a significant socio-political tool, as well as an urban stage for such accepted ideas and customary practices to be exercised and dramatically presented to the community. Much like other urban squares in the west, Piazza della Signoria was thus an integral part of the system of punishment during the 15th to 18th century, as it allowed the inclusion of the public to engage as an audience to the spectacle of torture, death and the penalties of crime, in order to deter acts of criminal activity and control social behaviour (Foucault 1995; Basson 2006; Dean 2001, 126-7; Spierenburg 1984; Benveniste 1993, 28). Furthermore, public executions were regarded as a cultural norm during this period, such that the square also operated as an urban 'theatre' which served communal gatherings of people who often flocked to leisurely observe or even participate in the performative acts of punishment showcased before them (Foucault 1995, 57-60; Landucci 2000; Dean 2001, 136-7;

Spierenburg 1984, 84-91). Therefore, the identity of Piazza della Signoria during the 15th to 18th century was associated with civic, political functions of capital punishment and strategies of social control, and linked to socio-cultural, communal experiences of the urban environment at the time.



Figure 7. Tourists and visitors at Piazza della Signoria.

Comparatively, Piazza della Signoria's contemporary significance within a changed present context of norms, values, practices and ideas has shifted, as it is now commonly regarded as a place of cultural and heritage value. Today, people no longer leisurely gather in the square to participate in the cultural rituals of public executions, but instead, engage in different popular activities such as gazing at the open-air gallery of sculptures displayed, and admiring the historical architectural remnants associated with Florence's past (Fig. 7) (Lonely Planet 2011; Lamarre 2010). The identity of the square has now transformed and become associated with contemporary ideas and values which celebrate particular cultural-historical aspects of Florence. Taking on a Foucauldian perspective of meaning, this disjunction recognised between the identity of Piazza della Signoria during the 15th to 18th century, to that within its contemporary context, suggests that architectural identity is discontinuous across time as its formation is influenced by prevailing ideas, practices, or discursive conditions, that are specific to a given historical period.

In considering Foucault's theories and the historical transition of the identity of Piazza della Signoria, these suggest that interrelated factors of existing cultural norms, practices, accepted

forms of knowledge and perception play significant roles in shaping the meaning or value of architecture at a specific time. In particular, these also reveal how architectural identity culturally and contextually alters across disparate contextual periods, as opposed to being historically continuous or stable over time. As such, this undermines and contradicts teleological or definitive notions of architecture advocated within existing traditional meta-histories of the built environment.

Similar ideas concerning the discontinuity of meaning are also expressed by Barthes in his essay '*The Death of the Author*' (1977), which criticises the assumption that an *Author* has *authority* or ownership over the meaning of their textual work. Barthes argues against assigning text with a fixed 'ultimate' meaning which constantly relies on the intentions and identity of the author, exclaiming that the meaning of text is not exclusively determined nor produced by the writer. Barthes explains that text does not prescribe, maintain, nor exhibit meaning, but rather, it is the reader who attaches it with ideas and concepts through their personal interpretation. Thus, text is 'actualised' with meaning upon a reader's interpretation of it, regardless of the writer's personal intentions and position in constructing it. Barthes reinforces this by asserting that textual meaning is not definitive, nor can it be fixed by the writer, because words can have different connotations depending on the context of norms, socio-cultural ideas and conditions from which a reader interprets it. For instance, the word 'I' can take on different meanings depending on the way it is perceived and used: it could mean the reader, it could take on the meaning of another reader who interprets the text, or it could mean the subject within the text (Barthes 1977). Therefore, Barthes emphasises that an *Author's* intentions does not determine nor dictate the meaning of their literary work because the meaning of text is composed by readers and their particular interpretations, which will alter as socio-cultural conditions change over time.

By conceptualising the architect as the writer, and architecture as text, Barthes' views in '*The Death of the Author*' suggests that the architect and their design intentions have a limited role in determining the meaning of a building. This can be recognised with 'Farnsworth House' in Plano, Illinois, designed by Mies van der Rohe; a building predominantly associated with Mies and identified as one of the most iconic examples of Modernist architecture. The design of the building was based on the concept of allowing inhabitants of the house to experience the silence and changing seasons of the natural landscape of the project's site. Its design was an exploration of Mies' ideas of 'clarity', 'simplicity' and 'unpretentiousness', by excluding



Figure 8. Farnsworth House, Plano, Illinois.

any ornamentation of its form and stripping the building to its bare essentials. As such, the physical outcome of the house resembled a transparent glass cube with a white steel framed structure, suspended above the ground on steel pilotis (Fig. 8) (Blaser 1999, 38). Despite Mies' intentions, however, his design concepts for the house were not equally interpreted or appreciated by its original inhabitant, Dr Edith Farnsworth. Contrary to Mies' design aspirations and concept of 'less is more', Farnsworth publicly complained that the house was 'false sophistication' and impractical to live in, exclaiming '...less is not more. It is simply less!' (Gordon 1953, 126-131). Farnsworth frustratingly announced that the house's entire external perimeter of glass walls meant that she was uncomfortably exposed to the peeping eyes of curious visitors, whilst at night, the interior glow of light attracted swarms of insects which infested the building. Aligning with the ideas implied in Barthes' *'The Death of the Author'*, the dramatic contrast between Mies' and Farnsworth's interpretations of the house demonstrates that architectural identity is not strictly perceived nor essentially defined according to the architect's aspirations or concepts for the design of a building.

This example of 'Farnsworth House' and Barthes' concepts of meaning indicate that architectural identity is not ultimately determined by the architect, but rather, it is formed and influenced by people's own socio-cultural interpretation of built form, and the prevailing contextual conditions within which they perceive the built environment. Therefore, this opposes and problematizes current literary depictions of buildings which privilege or exclusively rely on the designer and their concepts when defining architecture.

By projecting Bourdieu's, Foucault's and Barthes' concepts of meaning onto the context of architecture, and analysing the cultural, historical changes in the identity of the built examples discussed, these highlight architectural identity as an unstable, contextual construct that is culturally malleable and historically discontinuous across time. In this regard, these not only draw attention to the significant roles of people, perception, socio-cultural conditions

and context in constructing and distorting architectural identity, but they also infer that existing static notions or representations of the identity of architecture are problematic and flawed.

Conclusion

The identity of architecture is often conceptualised and portrayed as an immutable or historically continuous entity within certain existing areas of architectural design, heritage conservation, architectural history and literature. Although conventionally accepted, such traditional concepts are unmasked with flaws when considering cultural, historical aspects of meaning advocated in the works of Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes. These ideas of meaning open up a dynamic notion of the built environment which allow architectural identity to be understood as an unstable construct that forms and alters according to historically specific socio-cultural, perceptual and contextual conditions across time. Drawing on this notion, the cultural, historical fluidity of identity can also be recognised in shifts in the meaning and value of built examples analysed throughout the discussion of this paper. In this regard, these ideas and analysed changes in identity not only contradict current trans-historical depictions of buildings, but they also suggest that in approaching architectural identity in absolute terms, 'timeless' notions of built form seem to discount significant socio-cultural, perceptual and contextual aspects of architecture, and project idealised impressions of the built environment. This implies that conventional static concepts and representations of architectural identity are actually misleading illusions of the built environment that have been taken for granted, and highlights existing gaps in the current state of knowledge surrounding architecture and the nature of identity. This suggests that further studies on the cultural, contextual and historically transformative aspects of architectural identity are necessary in order to obtain a more critical understanding of the built environment.

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