

FORM AND CONTEXT

ON THE ROLE OF AUTHENTICITY IN THE EVALUATION OF MODERN HERITAGE

NOOR MENS

Authenticity is a key criterion in the evaluation of heritage. For example, in the *Guidelines for Building Archaeological Research* (2009), which the Dutch Cultural Heritage Agency (RCE) refers to when making cultural-historical evaluations, the various values that can be assigned to a building or an area are tested against the concept of authenticity.¹ This article sets out to show that this concept is problematical when applied to more recent architecture, particularly when it is linked to the original materialization. The way authenticity is normally assessed can prove especially tricky when it is a precondition for preserving an object or area. Contrary to what one might expect, the preservation of original materials is more challenging with recent than with old architecture. There are several reasons for this. One is the Modern Movement's predilection for using experimental building methods and new materials, which all too often fail to withstand the ravages of time. It is also difficult, if not impossible, to preserve such experimental materials when a building is expected to satisfy contemporary requirements, for example in the area of energy efficiency. Does the use of new materials compromise the heritage value of a renovated or restored building? Using examples in Amsterdam and Rotterdam, I hope to show that this does not necessarily have to be the case.

► 1. Gerrit Versteeg, housing complex (nowadays Koningsvrouwen van Landlust), Amsterdam, 1937 (Stadsarchief Amsterdam)





THE CONCEPT OF AUTHENTICITY

The roots of the concept of authenticity as applied to heritage buildings lie in the nineteenth century. Eugène Viollet-le-Duc (1814-1879) restored many important, mainly medieval buildings, in the process becoming one of the most influential architects of his age. He believed that monuments should represent the period that had produced them as perfectly as possible; restoration consequently amounted to undoing later alterations and additions. For him, unlike present-day heritage experts, authenticity had less to do with the original building substance than with the realization of the building's ideal state. This would remain the dominant view throughout Europe until the beginning of the twentieth century, despite criticism of the reconstruction of an (idealized) image of the past from those who felt that instead of erasing later alterations, heritage buildings should display all historical traces. In 1849 John Ruskin (1819-1900) published *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*.² He denounced the restoration of monuments because it generally led to the loss of the original character and resulted in a dead and meaningless copy of the previously 'living' monument. Although Ruskin clearly could not have been aware of the interpretation of the concept of authenticity in current heritage studies, it is obvious that he associated authenticity with the material character the building had acquired over the centuries. Precisely when the current concept of authenticity found its way into the heritage world is difficult to determine. But it is certainly an important criterion in the influential *International Charter for Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites*, the so-called Venice Charter of 1964. This Charter underscores the importance of the original building substance and stipulates that any materials used in new elements added during restoration should be contemporary and recognizable as such.³ Since then the concept has been part of the thinking on how to deal with monuments and stands for authenticity of material, form or function.

EVALUATION OF RECENT ARCHITECTURE

From the 1980s onwards the government agency in charge of heritage preservation found itself faced with the question of how to deal with more recent architecture, much of which bore the stamp of modernism, a style that pursued a radical break with the past but which now itself belonged to the past. In functional and structural terms a lot of modernist architecture no longer complied with the latest requirements. This was especially true of social housing; a great many of the dwellings are simply too small by current standards. In the 1990s and 2000s the realization grew that not just the pioneering work of architects of the likes of J.J.P. Oud, but also post-war modernist architecture

represented important cultural values. In the context of the Monuments and Historic Buildings Inventory Project (MIP) a 'Subcommittee on Recent Architecture' drew up a list of criteria: the place of the building in the architect's oeuvre, the role of the client, the architectural and technical concept, the use of innovative ideas and techniques, and the building in its spatial setting. This implied a certain broadening of the prevailing criteria, which were based mainly on artistic and historical significance. This widening sprang from the considerable value the subcommittee attached to historical, socio-economic, political and cultural frameworks.⁴ The new criteria in turn required the formulation of corresponding values. In addition to cultural-historical and architectural-historical values, recent architecture would be judged on ensemble values; the latter were linked to the degree of repetition, which resulted in larger coherent units. The additional criteria, for both urban design and architecture, were integrity, recognizability and rarity.⁵ In the aforementioned *Guidelines for Building Archaeological Research*, Leo Hendriks and Jan van der Hoeve identified general historical values, ensemble and urbanistic values, architectural-historical values, building archaeological values and values based on the history of use. They recommended testing the assessment of each of these values against the criteria of integrity (authenticity) and rarity. They regarded the significance of the heritage object in architectural history and in the architect's oeuvre, as well as the pronounced aesthetic qualities of the design, the ornamentation and the interior finishing as important criteria.⁶ The increasing weight given to intangible, cultural-historical aspects is also evident in the revised 2009 version of these guidelines, which suggests that the hitherto fairly theoretical term 'authenticity' was now to be applied in practice. But what does that mean for modern heritage? And how does authenticity relate to the materiality of buildings?

THREE RENOVATIONS AND THE AUTHENTICITY OF BUILDING MATERIALS

From the 1980s onwards the large-scale use of experimental, less sustainable and hard-wearing materials in the housing schemes of the interwar and post-war periods necessitated comprehensive renovations during which the retention of the original materiality proved problematic. Three examples from the practice of modern heritage evaluation show that the concept of authenticity seldom if ever refers to the materiality but more often to the urbanistic values and the architectural expression.



2. Archivolt Architecten, renovation Koningsvrouwen van Landlust, Amsterdam, 2012
(photo Thea van den Heuvel, Archivolt Architecten)

THE KIEFHOEK, ROTTERDAM

The Kiefhoek (1925-1929), a complex of working-class dwellings in Rotterdam designed by J.J.P. Oud when he worked in the city's housing agency, was accorded national listed status in 1985. The RCE's value assessment describes it as a complex of dwellings plus public buildings and collective amenities that unites the characteristics of Functionalism with those of De Stijl. It is also regarded as a milestone in the history of public housing.⁷ A fairly comprehensive renovation in 1986 altered Kiefhoek's external appearance. Among other things, the wooden door and window frames were replaced by plastic frames. One block of eight dwellings was left untouched because of its poor structural condition. In 1988 Wytze Patijn was commissioned to reconstruct this block in what became a trial run for the rest of the complex. Following a post-completion evaluation it was decided to reconstruct the remaining blocks as well given that the poor state of the original structural shell made preservation financially unviable. The rebuilt blocks had larger dwellings, reducing the original 298 dwellings to just 190. The blocks originally had stuccoed facades and wooden floors; in the reconstructed blocks both the facades and floors were of concrete. The Kiefhoek experience is an early example of the treatment of Nieuwe Bouwen architecture, whereby the architectural expression and the urban design values weighed more heavily than material authenticity.⁸

KONINGSVROUWEN VAN LANDLUST, AMSTERDAM

This building block (1937) designed by Gerrit Versteeg, renamed Koningsvrouwen van Landlust during the most recent renovation, was part of the first row-housing subdivision in Amsterdam, masterplanned by Ben Merkelbach and Charles Karsten. It has local listed status on account of the high score given to the urbanistic and architectural design and the use of what were then innovative new building techniques. In the twenty-first century, however, the buildings no longer met current standards for fire safety, energy efficiency and housing typology. In 2012, therefore, the complex was renovated by Archivolt Architecten. It had to meet high standards of energy efficiency, sustainability and architectural character. Insulation followed the box-in-box principle. The new aluminium frames recaptured the look of the characteristic 1930s steel profiles previously replaced by plastic frames. The building services were renewed and the dwellings internally reconfigured (figs. 1 and 2).

BOSLEEUW, AMSTERDAM

Bosleeuw is also one of the first examples of row housing in Amsterdam and contains a block designed by Gerrit Versteeg (1941). In 2014 it was renovated by KAW Architecten. Although the urbanistic integration and the architecture were both highly rated, it just missed out on local listed status. The block was classified as an 'Order 2 project', which allowed for a more far-reach-



3. KAW, renovation Bosceuw, Amsterdam, 2014
(photo Hennie Raaymakers Photographer/DAPh)



De 7de Hemel



Café
De 7de Hemel

De 7de Hemel
Waarsteun

Waarsteun

ing renovation than in Koningsvrouwen. To improve the insulation a new facade with brick facing applied in strips was placed on the outside, adding 12.5 cm to the depth of the outer wall. The new frames were brought forward by the same amount, thereby retaining the original appearance (fig. 3). The preservation of the architectural image and the urbanistic situation were more important here than the authenticity of the material.

These schemes were restored and/or renovated in the 1980s and the last decade respectively. All three demonstrate the weak correlation between the concept of authenticity and the originality of the materi-

als: the appearance and the urbanistic composition were considered more important. This applies just as much to the modernism of post-war housing as to the pioneering work of the 1920s. It appears that in the renovation of modernist architecture, the views of Viollet-le-Duc prevail over those of Ruskin. New materials that allude to the original building substance reinstate the original architectural image and where this has been compromised by later alterations, these are removed. Contrary to the Venice Charter's stipulations, the new materials can scarcely be distinguished from the old. It is clear that modern monuments can tolerate old-fashioned restoration better than the new approach recommended by the Charter.

In this online version of the article a few inaccuracies in the printed version with respect to the attribution and classification of the Bosleeuw project have been corrected.

NOTES

- 1 L. Hendriks and J. van der Hoeve, *Richtlijnen bouwhistorisch onderzoek. Lezen en analyseren van cultuurhistorisch erfgoed*, Amersfoort/The Hague 2002. An English version is available to download at <https://www.cultureel-erfgoed.nl/publicaties/publicaties/2009/01/01/guidelines-for-building-archeological-research>.

erfgoed.nl/publicaties/publicaties/2009/01/01/guidelines-for-building-archeological-research.

- 2 J. Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, London 1849, 194.
- 3 *International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites* (The Venice Charter 1964). IInd International Congress of Architects and Technicians of Historic Monuments, Venice, 1964. Adopted by ICOMOS in 1965.
- 4 C. van Emstede, *Waardstelling in de Nederlandse monumentenzorg*

1981–2009, Delft 2015, 60.

- 5 Van Emstede 2015 (note 4), 57.
- 6 Hendriks and Van der Hoeve 2002 (note 1).
- 7 <https://monumentenregister.cultureel-erfgoed.nl/monumenten/329885> (accessed 2 August 2020)
- 8 C. van Emstede, 'Towards Values-Centred Urban Preservation. Learning from the Reconstruction of the Kieft-hoek', in: S.M. Blas, M. Garcia Sanchis and L. Urda Peña (eds.), *Holanda en Madrid. Social Housing & Urban Regeneration*, Madrid 2014, 164-179.

DR. N. MENS studied architectural history at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and obtained her PhD from Eindhoven University of Technology (TU/e) in 2019 with a thesis on heritage significance assessment of post-war housing developments. Since then she has conducted research at TU/e while also working as an independent architectural historian in Groningen.

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ods and new materials, which all too often failed to withstand the ravages of time. It is also difficult, if not impossible, to preserve such experimental materials when a building is expected to satisfy contemporary requirements, for example in the area of energy efficiency. This raises the question of whether the replacement of authentic building materials during restorations and renovations compromises the heritage value. Using examples in Amsterdam and Rotterdam, the article shows that this does not always have to be the case.