

# ***Authenticity* and Architecture**

## **Representation and Reconstruction in Context**

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door

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**Cover Images (top to bottom):**

**Fantoft Stave Church, Bergen, Norway**

*photo by author*

**Ise Shrine Secondary Building, Ise-shi, Japan**

*photo by author*

**King Håkon's Hall, Bergen, Norway**

*photo by author*

**Kazan Cathedral, Moscow, Russia**

*photo by author*

**Walter Gropius House, Lincoln, Massachusetts, US**

*photo by Mark Cohn, taken from: UPenn Almanac, [www.upenn.edu/almanac/volumes](http://www.upenn.edu/almanac/volumes)*



## **Abstract**

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Architecture is about aging well, about precision and *authenticity*.<sup>1</sup>  
- Annabelle Selldorf, *architect*

Throughout human history, due to war, violence, natural catastrophes, deterioration, weathering, social mores, and neglect, the cultural meanings of various architectural structures have been altered. This continuous change in our social environments is evidenced by the destruction of countless cities during WWII, the terrorist attacks on the *World Trade Center* in NYC, and in recent memory by the damage and loss created by the earthquake and tsunami in Japan and the Philippines, to name just a few. Our environments are constantly being altered, and these changes contribute to the disruption of our sense of continuity, our memories, and our shared meaning. Our reactions to these changes and the subsequent construction of multiple

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<sup>1</sup> David Netto, "The Form Mistress", *Wall Street Journal*, April 28, 2011, [online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052748704495004576265481351056202](http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052748704495004576265481351056202), (accessed on September 3, 2013).

narratives also vary according to the layers of cultural, historic, and artistic identity that have been disrupted. Among the various aspects of life, that have been challenged, are our perceptions of the *authentic*. We ask ourselves: What is now the “*real*”? What is the same as it once was? What has been made false? What has been erased? What is fantasy or fiction? What is our shared history?

What do we mean when we look at buildings and claim them to be *authentic*, real, or original? In asking this question, we begin to challenge the notion of *authenticity* and its various interpretations. Furthermore, what we come to identify as *authentic* in architecture and culture is rarely very original, and more often comprised of reconstructed narratives and a collusion of collective memories created to serve certain cultural, political, and artistic purposes. These competing claims and definitions are especially important to understand the multiple perspectives presented, and in challenging biases, fixed constructs, and preconceived meanings.

While collective memory and archival evidence may be primary sources for constructing the meanings of architectural structures and settings, sometimes repression and forgetting are required. In such cases, people reduce or omit portions of their complex histories to a single narrative for many reasons, including touristic appeal. Their traditions, history, and cultural events may be selectively omitted or marginalized, thus, suppressing the richness that came before.

Of particular interest to this research are the varying layers of relationships found in collective memory, archival evidence, and *invented traditions*. This research examines how they intersect in the creation (and re-creation) of the target’s identity,

history, and significance. To what extent does the target achieve *authenticity*? In considering these complex issues, the preliminary focus will be on a number of architectural examples in America, Europe, and Asia that address varying aspects of *authenticity* through reconstruction and restoration. This initial investigation will then culminate in an in-depth exploration of the notion of *authenticity* in relation to the *Fantoft Stave Church* in Norway and the *Ise Shrines* in Japan.

By studying these seemingly disparate examples, I hope to generate a discourse in the design community, primarily, as to both the merits (and lack thereof) of various representations and reconstructions in their respective contexts, and the nature of *authenticity*.