

The ideas are summarised as follows:

Define enduring lines and volumes.

Take a position on the relationship between colonial and Chilean architecture- history is not neutral.

The authenticity of the building and the authenticity of the building strategy influences the authenticity of the new use.

Durability is only ever in relation to use – fragility only matters when it is tested.

Determining the horizons of use should determine the extent of intervention.

Avoid the commemoration of fragmentary edges, rather seek to communicate their unification.

State high level intentions that frame smaller scale judgements – for example ‘false’ surfaces are not acceptable’. Visual simplicity requires technical intricacy. This makes technical decisions more complex, but so they should be.

Content and container

As a team we believe that one of the greatest values of this state initiative is the opportunity it provides to lay the foundations for a process of urban renewal in an area that, due to the tremendous degrees of decay and abandonment, is extremely fragile. It is likely that what is achieved at Subercaseaux will operate in some way as a pattern of behaviour for future interventions. For this reason we are obliged to respond responsibly to the challenge that this project, in this part of the city and in this urban piece specifically implies.

Defending and protecting the urban profile seems to us to be of the utmost importance. The pressure to densify historical sites has generally meant a process of reducing the dimension of heritage protection to a process of emptying density and meaning (facadism), where the historical, cultural and material thickness is reduced to a shell, or exterior skin to give rise to interiors in which real estate and urban pressure raise volumes that definitively break with the heritage values that the original urban volumetry contains and preserves.

We are at a moment of transition between the colonial city of continuous facades and the city of self-defined island buildings. Subercaseaux is a vessel without content – a cup incapable of holding the quantity of liquid programme required, its style, material and form at odds with that programme. This dilemma forces a new approach to the ‘building as façade’.

The retention of the façade and the street it frames fulfils the fundamentals of the Venice Charter and the presumption is ‘what remains will remain’, but when ‘what remains’ is only the surface and not the substance of architecture, a new approach is necessary. The inherent risk within the site and the brief is facadism – the retention of historic, ill-fitting clothes to conceal a contemporary body in disguise. This creates a dual negative, whereby the new is embarrassed, the old is meaningless.

Exemplary European strategies for the re-inhabitation of the ruin include Scarpa’s Castelvecchio and Fehn’s Hedmark Museums. At Castelvecchio a crafted, continuous intervention weaves a whole out of the existing, the fine detailing used throughout creating a tracery that binds the rough stonework, so well in fact that the new work provides more visual fractures than are left within the existing – visual and spatial reminders are required to reconfirm that one is in an historic ruin.

At Hedmark the ruin was less spatial, simply walls. The new construction bridged and connected events located within the ruin in a sympathetic but clearly modern materiality, used to orchestrate a sequence of appreciation that makes the new architecture into historic architecture - together a vehicle for storytelling.

What these examples teach us is the value of weaving – materially and programmatically - as a way to bond the new to the old.

Description of the Project:

From the original typology of the palace - which created a central ‘third’ of the volume between two principal facades flanked by two side volumes that address the side passages, key programmes are located. The basement, infilled with debris becomes, when excavated and revealed, the only opportunity to walk within the original Palace interiors. The basement therefore provides the opportunity for all visitors to walk its corridors and experience its material nature when visiting the auditorium and public venues.

The new interior fills the space liberated by the destruction of the original. The supporting function between the new interior and the existing, frail façade is ambiguous. Is the original masonry façade supporting the lean, technical spaces of the archive, or does the archive retain and restrain the façade?

We don’t want to answer this question, because to do so would render either old or new more status than it deserves. In having no priority, only the relationship between them, we have one building, not an excuse for two.

The façade and its interior are woven together structurally without quite becoming Semper's 'Bekleidung' or curtain wall. This structural connection offers both an ephemeral fineness and layered density that resembles a drawing by Cy Twombly. By positioning the solution consciously between 'either' and 'or' we achieve both – conservation and contemporaneity, connection and discretion, past and future.

The façade itself documents its own history. Who are we to re-write it or erase it? That would mean defining the life of the street which the building serves to be without significance. Can we say people and what they do is insignificant? What we can do now is to show care. What is durable we sustain, what is integral we retain, what damages (such as plasticised paint retaining water within the masonry) we replace with sympathetic material. We are also pragmatic. Just as necessities of the street made changes to the façade, so we install a fire exit, create a vent, deliver services – but with grace and sympathy.

The street is to the facade what the façade is to the interior – bound together so as to refute their separation. The consistency of the colonial city is at odds with the codes allowing height to dominate horizon. The first priority for the team is not to rise, to concentrate the program as much as possible to maintain a relationship of measures and proportions that allow the historical piece to be the one that defines the character of the new entity in which the past and the present will coexist seamlessly. Obviously this implies sacrificing the interior performance of the building. It implies betting on a compact and dense building, which responds to the requirements of the client, but always prioritizing urban volumetry

On the urban level, the building is developed in 3 layers: a first one that connects with the historic city in a clear way, continuing the Serrano level towards the interior of the property, and organizing there all the office programs of the Regional Archive. The second, which occupies much of the height of the historical remains, where the deposits are located, organized in 3 free floors and the third, which, like the hills of Valparaiso, is related to the geographical and territorial scale and where the offices of the Regional Heritage Service are located. In some way, the building represents the two ways of being in Valparaiso: in the plan, in the hills. on the scale of the city, on the scale of the landscape.

We make an architectural proposal that articulates all these scales and that responds to the contemporary requirements defined by the client according to the specific program (new technologies, new requirements, new times). Subercaseaux demands a strong negotiation, in which we must take sides.