

MOVING ARCHITECTURE: AESTHETICS AROUND THE CHANGING CONTEXT AND STATUS OF CONSTRUCTIONS

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ABSTRACT

One of the primary and most typical features of a piece of architecture is its stability, its fixed and anchored state. It is therefore surprising and, at the same time, aesthetically inspiring and intellectually exciting when buildings are moved. In the present study I examine the agency of transportation and the aesthetic consequences of such translocations in three art projects. First, I analyse the work of the Norwegian Marianne Heske, the Georgian Vajiko Chachkhiani, and the Finn Anssi Pulkkinen. I lay out the aesthetic implications of the transformative decontextualization caused by the relocation of the original structure. In the second part of the paper, I present the main aspects that connect these otherwise different projects and explain why the complex and costly transportation of these pieces of architecture is relevant and justified.

KEYWORDS

Aesthetics of Architecture, Transportation of Buildings, Marianne Heske, Vajiko Chachkhiani, Anssi Pulkkinen

INTRODUCTION

– MOVING ARCHITECTURE

One of the primary and most typical features of a piece of architecture is its stability, its fixed and anchored state.¹ While we are generally used to buildings that stay where they are, there can be cases when they are shifted or transported away. This move can happen—as is the focus of this paper—within the framework of an art project. Through the very move itself, the project can raise questions not only pertinent to art, architecture and aesthetics, but also to personal and cultural memory, to individual and national identity, to the changing forms of connection and attachment to space, place, landscape and environment, as well as to social and political tensions. The effect of transporting entire buildings can be significant and striking. Hence the title of this paper (“moving architecture”) can be understood in two ways. On the one hand, it refers to the artistic projects in which buildings are moved from their original location. On the other, it hints at the fact that such action can be “moving,” i.e., it can have an affective, stimulating, and often disturbing, though intellectually and aesthetically fertile, effect on the observer.

Change in the physical location of the edifice has crucial consequences not only because it challenges the idea of “immobility,” one that plays essential role in our perception of architecture; but also because the location, environment or surroundings of a building are inextricably connected to the edifice itself. As a consequence, even though it is the physical structure that is transported, it will also bring the edifice’s original context—or at least some of its aspects—with it. This influences our perception of the piece of architecture, since this complex move of taking out the building from its original context, installing it in a new context, while nevertheless being aware of its strong connection to the original environment, will trigger us to reinterpret our perceived knowledge of this background. Besides the traditional aspects we normally observe when grasping the features of an architectural piece—whether we observe it only for functional reasons or when we evaluate its aesthetic qualities—we now have to pay attention to the reasons and consequences of the transportation, in order to discover the additional characteristics, meanings, and values that this complex process creates.

In the present study I focus on the various implications of the relocations of pieces of architecture. I am interested in their aesthetic consequences and question what is the agency of transportation in these experiments. What are the results? What sort

of transformations can we observe, and how will they modify not merely the building in itself, i.e., its materiality, but also its status and function? How will the observer perceive the work in another context and especially as something other than what it is or used to be?

Three fascinating art projects stand in the centre of my investigation. The first is Marianne Heske's *Project Gjerdeløa/The Tafjord Hut*, originally from 1980, when the Norwegian artist dismantled a traditional forest hut, transported and reassembled it at the Paris Biennial. After a year, it was moved back and reinstalled in its original location. My second case is Vajiko Chachkhiani's work titled *Living Dog Among Dead Lions* (2017), where a wooden house from rural Georgia was relocated to the Venice Biennial, with an important addition: through a water circulation system, "rain" was continuously pouring inside the building. My last example will be Finn Anssi Pulkkinen's *Street View (Reassembled)* from 2016-2017, when the artist bought the rubble of a destroyed home of a Syrian family, and had it carried to Europe on a trailer, stopping in several cities and exhibiting it in public spaces.

Already from this brief introduction, it is evident that we have three different aspects of mutation of a (formerly) stable and functioning building. The three projects also range on a scale: from (1) a temporary suspension of a building's operation to (2) gradual (though intended and artificial) degradation, through to (3) complete destruction.

Although the buildings to be discussed represent three different aspects of the possible alteration of an edifice, there is a similarity between them as artworks, more precisely in their ways of becoming artworks. In all three cases, through relocation and exhibition, pieces of architecture become conceptual artworks, reminding the observer of the Duchampian ready-mades. The basic pattern of them turning into art is similar, in the sense that a formerly functional and functioning object becomes a conceptual artwork presented in an exhibition. They also remind us of the ready-mades because they are truly "found objects," in the sense that all were "found" by the artists, not purposefully constructed or created by them for the exhibition. There are however important differences between the pieces, namely in how and why their functionality was lost, e.g., due to the artist's intervention or independent from him or her—and obviously this also influences the interpretation.

In order to see these aspects more clearly, let's have a detailed look at the pieces. When describing their features, I focus on questions of materiality and tectonics, on the buildings' transformation into works of art, as well as on their relation to their contexts. This also explains their peculiar monumentality, their special way of commemorating the everyday—which I will turn to in the final part of my paper. The investigation of these aspects and factors will demonstrate how the agency of relocation contributes to the creation of a conceptual work of art through such a transformative decontextualization.

Naturally, my three examples cannot make up a complete list, and this study does not aim to be an inclusive survey of each and every such work, but rather to highlight the opportunities of thinking further by putting these projects next to each other and observing them together. They can aid our understanding of the nature of architecture and dwelling, art and aesthetics, memory and identity, and help question why transport pieces of architecture at all, and what aesthetic consequences the move may have. In other words, examining these examples both one by one and taken together can help shed light on several phenomena that would otherwise pass unnoticed. I am therefore focusing on the questions that these projects trigger in connection with the aesthetic aspects and changes caused by the move. This will also give further insights into why such projects matter—and why the significant effort, energy and costs may be justified.

MARIANNE HESKE

– TEMPORARY SUSPENSION OF THE BUILDING'S FUNCTION

My first example is Marianne Heske's 1980 project titled *Project Gjerdeløa/The Tafjord Hut*. Here, an earlier structure served as the physical basis of a conceptual artwork raising thought-provoking questions not only on place, space and landscape, but also on national and personal identity, as well as on (the functioning of) the infrastructure and institutionalisation of art.

The renowned Norwegian artist had dismantled a centuries-old traditional hut, used both for shelter and hay storage, transported it to the Paris Biennial at the Centre Pompidou in 1980, and reassembled it for the exhibition. A year later, the hut was moved back to Norway and reinstalled in its exact original location. The project provokes many questions, not only the obvious one of "why did it have to be transported," but also what happened to the hut during and after being transported away and then re-installed?



- ↑ Marianne Heske's «Project Gjerdeløa» at the solo exhibition tour-Retour in the Astrup Fearnley Museum in Oslo in 2014.
Photo: Marianne Heske. Collection: The Tangen Collection.
- ↶ Marianne Heske's «Project Gjerdeløa» at its original site in Tafford, Norway in 1979, before departure to Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris. Photo: Marianne Heske. Collection: The Tangen Collection.
- Marianne Heske's «Project Gjerdeløa» at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris in 1980.
Photo: Marianne Heske. Collection: The Tangen Collection.

The paradoxical nature of translocation becomes clearer when we consider not only the original structure, but also the radical differences of the original (rural Norway) and the temporary (Paris, Pompidou) contexts, as well as their interrelation. Such shelter-providing wooden huts, with their unpretentious vernacular aesthetics based on their functionality and embeddedness in organic nature played an essential role in the construction of Norwegian identity. The closeness to Nature, despite the harsh conditions, challenging weather, and unclassical landscape scenery became essential features of Scandinavian culture and a source of national pride in Nordic countries. This had, naturally, effected the arts and the modes of representing the region's landscapes from the eighteenth century and Romanticism onwards, and continuing to influence contemporary art production.² Wooden constructions of all types are thus considered fundamental elements in national and cultural history, also evidenced by the fact that several of them were collected in the Norsk Folkemuseum and the open-air museum based on the King Oscar II's Collection dating back to 1881.³

The translocation of the wooden cabin thus enabled a confrontation of the contexts, both of the immediate surroundings and of the larger cultural context. The truly impressive, dramatic and sublime landscapes around Tafjord are obviously different from the pure and confined exhibition space that temporarily hosted the hut in Paris. From this point of view, it is almost symbolic how the hut required the continuity of its accustomed exposedness to natural elements—as if it was experiencing some sort of “homesickness.” As we can learn from Sigrun Åsebø's insightful analysis: as the hut was placed in a temperature-controlled and dry environment, compared to its original one that was humid and where it was subject to changing weather conditions, it had to be regularly “watered” to keep the grass and moss alive and to prevent the timber from drying out.⁴

The act of decontextualization also enabled the artists to question the traditional hierarchies of aesthetic influence and the common patterns of artistic creation. Historically, the (art) centre dominates the periphery, with new forms and styles, influences and motifs radiating out: in Heske's project, this relationship is reversed, with the peripheral taking the centre stage.

We can trace a perplexing and inspiring ambiguity of change and continuity both in the form and the status of the structure. The hut has, naturally, undergone changes as a result of its transportation and re-installation, even if no physical alteration is

easily perceptible in its formal and visual appearance. Going backwards chronologically, we can say that the hut in Tafjord after it came back from Paris and the one before the 1980 exhibition were not the same huts. Besides this conceptual addition, there is also a visual one. Åsebø wrote that whoever used the shelter from centuries ago occasionally left some small signs and drawings on its walls, and the Biennial visitors in Paris were also allowed to do so.⁵ It is not very likely that many of these drawings by the Parisian public would have appeared had the hut stayed in Norway continuously.

Nevertheless, all this seems less important compared to the major shift, when the hut was moved from Tafjord to Paris, since this is the period of its most important change of status. It has lost its purpose as a shelter/storage, and turned into a piece representing not (only) itself, but bringing to the discussion further aspects, such as the aforementioned connection and closeness to Nature, as well as the examination of the classical patterns of influence in art, and the birth of new contexts. This is why we realise that there is more than one context here: (1) the context that the hut brings with itself as a shelter or store from Norway, and (2) the context it creates, and then brings back with itself, as an artwork. It remains the subject of curious theoretical debates whether the re-installed hut can be considered the same shelter that can serve its purpose in the same way, but the addition of new layers of interpretation is undeniable. It is not surprising that this is one of the key questions also for the artist, as stated in an interview with Per Hovdenakk: “By moving it from one environment and culture to another, I wanted to compare the responses of people from different cultures. On the basis of my knowledge of both of these art milieus, I assumed that in Norway the hut would be seen and recognised as a hut, whereas in Paris it would become conceptual art. (...) Personally, I am less interested in whether it is a work of art or not, and more interested in the fact that it was perceived as art in one environment, and not so in another one.”⁶ The artist’s interest in the various contexts of the piece, as well as, on a meta-level, in the creation of these contexts, helps explain the systematic documentation of the entire project. This documentary approach can almost be interpreted as an—perhaps unconscious—attempt to see if it was possible to spot the moments of transformation, i.e., at what point the hut becomes something else, given that the structure remains the same (apart from the short period of its dismantling, transport and reassembling).

In the project and its thorough documentation, Heske investigates the very nature of conceptual art, as well as its reversibility: a hut into an element of exhibition, material into idea, functionality into “pure” (conceptual) art, and then all the way back, when re-installing the cabin in the forest. In other words, as mentioned above, in this project she temporarily suspends the hut’s normal operation, and it is this pausing of functionality that allows her to examine the modes and limits of conceptual art. A temporary artwork that investigates art itself even after it ceased to be an artwork, i.e., after its reinstallation and possible resuming its functionality.

In this way, it becomes even more understandable why it was essential to bring the hut to Paris: to offer the possibility to experience it in its authenticity and physicality, since it is that tangibility that can carry the context with itself, and not merely the (represented) form or idea of the structure. The physical encounter with the real thing is necessary, as this could neither be (re)created, nor imitated by a reproduction or a copy. It is only the actual piece that can carry (literally, carry) all the references—in this particular piece of conceptual art, the material(ity) cannot be substituted. Its change of status—or, in the artist’s words, “identity” –can only be carried through the physicality of the original object: “I believe that such a change of identity, if any, would have to be found in the eyes of the beholder, in a manner of speaking; people know that the hut has been to Paris. But in its familiar surroundings at Taffjord, it still is a hut. Admittedly it would have been quite a different matter if it had been purchased by the Centre Pompidou to become part of the permanent collection, or by the Norwegian National Gallery, for that matter...”⁷

Curiously, regarding the afterlife of the project, it seems that it will, in the end, get in a private museum. According to Sigrid Stenerud Steien, it was sold to the Tangen Collection, and will be shown in the new permanent exhibition from 2022 onwards.⁸ More importantly, there is a further change in the status, as well as in the ways of investigating and (re)presenting the work. In 2014, Heske re-installed the hut in the Astrup Fearnly Museum, this time paired with a life-size resin copy of the original. This time visitors could not only investigate the original work, taken out of its context, but also the very transformation of it into an immortalised work. As Steien clearly summarised the essence of this act: “The material metamorphosis changed *Gjerdeløa* into a permanent, pure art object. The replica does not hold the qualities of the sturdy timber logs and is not able to replace the function of

the hut made in timber; in the change of material, the hut's original function as shelter has been eliminated."⁹ In this way, the work has also, at least partly, lost its conceptual ability to refer to the original context through its materiality. It is a conceptual continuation in a modern reproduction, even if a meticulously handmade replica by a professional craftsman. Thus, the new work is practically its own monument, as well as a monument of the original act of 1980.

VAJIKO CHACHKHIANI

- GRADUAL DEGRADATION OF THE BUILDING

There are several inspiring parallels between Marianne Heske's project and Vajiko Chachkhiani's work titled *Living Dog Among Dead Lions*. Both were first presented at a biennial—Chachkhiani's in the Pavilion of Georgia in Venice in 2017. The material basis of both projects was an average functional structure that had been in use practically up until its dismantling and transport.

However, there are differences. Chachkhiani bought (not only "borrowed", as Heske, in 1980) a recently abandoned house in the Georgian rural countryside, dismantled, and transported it to Venice. When installed in the Biennial, it first looked like as what it was, an old home. Coming closer, however, without being allowed to enter, the visitors could see through the windows that it was constantly "raining" inside the building, thanks to a water circulation system installed in the interior. An electric lamp with a yellowish light made the artificial raining more visible for the observers, while its warm tonality contrasted with the traditionally more melancholic emotional effect of rain.

Regarding the material presence of the work and its transformation, it is easy to see that the strongest aspect of their investigation was the process of the slow decay. The interior inaccessible to the visitors was constantly deteriorating during the exhibition period, because of the non-stop rain. As the objects slowly disintegrated and went rotten due to humidity, biological organisms started to grow on their surface, so the interior was constantly changing, in contrast to the exterior that had remained the same over the six months while the Biennial was open. In this way, as the artist also emphasised: "The installation will create its own narrative over time following a kind of natural dramaturgy."¹⁰

It is interesting how this work's organic features differ from the one we could see in Heske's project. There, as we saw, museum staff had to "water" the building to prevent the moss, grass and timber from drying out, i.e., to conserve it. Here, however,

watering, the pouring of artificial rain becomes the means of gradually destroying the work, at least a significantly large part of it, namely the interior of the building.

This inversion of the normal everyday experience (it usually rains outside our homes, not inside) made the house a popular and often-photographed artwork even among the non-specialised audience. The piece was categorised as a contemporary revisitation of Surrealist ideas and compared to, for example, René Magritte's pictorial world. However, it is useful to go beyond these first associations in order to have a more complete understanding of the project and its potential. The inversion of the inside-outside obviously directs our attention to their very dichotomy and to what (else) can be investigated through this polarity. In other words, what does "inside" and "outside" stand for here, when their reversal becomes manifest? The artist often highlighted his interest in the examination of the connection between the psyche and the external events influencing it. See for example the short statement on the website of the Sydney Biennial, where Chachkhiani exhibited another project in 2020: "What I am trying to communicate through sculpture, installation and film are questions about the way human psyches work, how they are affected by history and by an experience of life. I'm interested in the way history defines psychic tendencies, and the intersection of inner and outer narratives. The world I'm reconstructing in my practice exists in the conflict between one's inner and outer world, in the conflict between past and present."¹¹

In Chachkhiani's work in Venice, the context brought with the building to the exhibition is both environmental and historical. Through this, the impact of history on the individual is established, and we can identify the attempts of profound reflection on trauma, the elaboration of memory, and the shaping of identity. This also explains the choice of where the building comes from. Again, just like in Heske's case, it is from a remote village, close to the manganese mining town Chiatura in Georgia. It does not come from a central or well-known touristic place, or from the capital, but from a region with a turbulent past, that makes it an ideal candidate to demonstrate how the vicissitudes of history, economy, and politics influence the life of the ordinary people, who do not typically enter the history books. As the artist stated: "I'm interested in the lives of average people who are invisible but nevertheless an important part of 'history'. And of course, I'm interested in the traumata that originated in the wars and civil wars, in the dramatic economic and social changes of the recent



Vajiko Chachkhiani, *Living Dog Among Dead Lions*, 2017

Wood and traditional building materials; plastic tubing, water pump, plastic water reservoir, water, electrical lamps, wiring
580 x 1,100 x 560 cm | 228½ x 433 x 220½ in. Installation view Venice Biennale. Courtesy the artist, The Pavillon of Georgia and Daniel Marzona, Berlin. Photo: Sandro Sulaberidze

past. The traumata of different generations form their psychologies and their attitudes towards life and other people. (...) The interior (i.e., of the work—my addition, Z. S.) will change but the exterior will remain the same. Like a traumatic experience changes the interior life of a person.”¹² This duality in manifestation of trauma and its effect was also highlighted by Claudia Peppel: “The performance captures both the nostalgic grip within the process and its ongoing endurance, a landscape of a former life, witness to moments of irrevocable dramatic action that is somehow, nonetheless, withstood.”¹³

This also explains why it was not merely the structure of the house transported and exhibited, but the “rain” installed in it. In addition, there were numerous objects placed in the interior describing and testifying the former use of the building and the actual life lived there until recently. The piece thus presents and documents a simple life that otherwise would have most probably gone unnoticed, a life lived among the turbulences of history, the external events marking and shaping it. However, this display occurs within the framework of a curious and ambiguous monumentalising. The house becomes a monument, but one that destroys itself—the degradation affects the space where the records of life are kept.

The act of relocation implies that the entire context of the original building is also brought to Venice. However, it also has other important consequences. The agency of transportation itself contributed to the ways of the house becoming an artwork. The particularities of the transformation place this project on another point on our scale describing the possible modifications of a building: Here the “birth” of the artwork is not only the result of its temporary suspension of function, but due to the intentional degradation, this suspension of function will not be temporary anymore. Once again, there is a difference with Heske’s piece. Although both had become artworks due to the act of transportation and decontextualization or even de-rooting, and both were artworks only for a limited period, the way in which they ceased being an artwork differs. Heske gave the building its functionality back after bringing it back unharmed and re-installing it, hence reversing the conceptual piece into an operating one, a “ready-made” artwork turned back into being an operational piece of architecture. Chachkhiani however let it be destroyed: not only will the building never again have the chance to be functional, it will no longer even exist. Therefore, in both cases the works are temporary, but their afterlives are different.

The self-destructive feature of Chachkhiani's house further explains the reasons why it had to be brought to Venice. The artist experiments not only with the modes of an everyday object becoming artwork, but also questions the limits of his own intentions of monumentalising everyday life. This is why the house had to be taken away and shown in one of the most visited art events in the world. It had to be arti(fici)alised, letting the old house become an artwork. Of course, one could argue that it could have become an artwork, changing its status from a home to a piece of art, had it simply stayed in its original location, albeit—most likely—significantly less people would have seen it. But it is precisely the institutionalisation, the canonical force of the Venice Biennial that counts this time. The monumentalising of the average and unnoticed had to happen in one of the most respected art events, in order to contribute to the main intention of the work, the commemoration, i.e., the memorialisation of the importance of the often-forgotten. In the aforementioned conversation Julian Heynen formulated it as: "The more things disappear the more they have the tendency to stay in your mind."¹⁴ This can happen through the stimulating dichotomy of highlighting an unknown life in the best documented art event worldwide.

ANSSI PULKKINEN

- COMPLETE DESTRUCTION OF THE EDIFICE

The Finnish artist Anssi Pulkkinen experimented with monumentalising and raising awareness in a completely different manner and almost reversed approach in his work titled *Street View (Reassembled)*, from 2016-2017. In the previous example Chachkhiani investigated how, through the exposed interior of the building, simple life can be commemorated in the eyes and minds of the curious observers, in parallel with, and despite, the gradual deterioration of the physical structure that documents it. In contrast, Anssi Pulkkinen's work practically forces the public to engage in an active reflection on memory and loss. He did this with the help of rubble, un-aesthetic debris that is the result of a violent act of destruction.¹⁵ His project thus marks the final point on the scale showing the possible mutation of a formerly stable and functioning building.

The artist bought the rubble of a family home that was destroyed during the Syrian civil war. The wrecked house was then put on a 13 metres long flatbed trailer and brought through Europe, stopping in several cities on the way, where the debris on the trailer were shown publicly. Crucially, in most cases the

house was not exhibited in museums or galleries, but in public and publicly accessible spaces, where anyone could suddenly encounter the tragic remains of what had earlier been the home of a family. This is why we can agree with Hanna Johansson, “It is both a representation of a destroyed home and an actual destroyed home in itself.”¹⁶

Unlike the previous two examples, the practical purpose or functionality of the former structure stopped before the artist chose for it to become an artwork. Heske’s shelter was in active use until the moment of its first dismantling and then continued to be after its re-installation in the Taffjord forest. Similarly, Chachkhiani’s house was abandoned, but could have been reinstated for further use when the artist bought it for his project. Pulkkinen’s ruined home however was already destroyed, completely independently of the artist’s project.

From all the three art projects discussed here, it initially seems that it is Pulkkinen’s where the actual material(ity) counts the least, and the act of transporting the most. In some ways this is true, but we should not forget that the two (material remains and their moving) are always inextricably connected, and it is only their degree of importance that can temporarily change. In the *Street View (Reassembled)* the physical remnants seem at first uninteresting, partly because the material looks worthless, being an unusable pile of debris (there is no chance of it being a functional building again) and partly because aesthetically and architecturally the original building was relatively insignificant. However, in the process of having the debris transported to another continent, the rubble becomes transformed. If it is possible to locate the time and place of transformation, then Heske’s and Chachkhiani’s pieces of formerly functional architecture have become artworks in the exhibitions space, but Pulkkinen’s house has become so already on its way, before even the first exhibition stop. This is why we can claim that the act of transportation has the strongest role here among the three projects discussed.

One may argue—as Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila did—that there are historical precedents to such a transformation and the increase of attributed value of transported objects, including architectural fragments: “In a certain way Anssi Pulkkinen’s *Street View (Reassembled)* brings back the pre-colonial situation where a worthless object gains its artistic and perhaps also monetary value only after it has been moved to the West.”¹⁷ However, in the referred period of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Western archaeologists and discoverers were aware of the



Anssi Pulkkinen: Street View (Reassembled), 2016–2017, Installation view in Tampere Central Square.
Organised by Tampere Art Museum. Courtesy the artist

value of the pieces they had found and transported well before the ruins left their original location. Thus, the pieces already contained various forms of value, for example architectural-historical importance, aesthetic appeal, etc. Here we can disregard the otherwise important debate about early discoverers justifying the taking of great monuments because locals did not appreciate them—a claim that in modified ways still emerges in contemporary debates on restitution. What is more important here is that Pulkkinen knew that what he buys and transports is, and will remain, worthless in that above sense. In the past, buildings or their noble ruins were commonly transported for their aesthetic importance, artistic value and exceptionality, but here it is the building's "averageness" that is important, even in its destroyed state. This does not mean that the transported rubble will remain worthless, but that the value will be added through and during the transportation, and before being exhibited. Hence, this value will perhaps be more connected to ethics than aesthetics. The Syrian home's debris will not become "beautiful" or "noble" or "sublime" even if exhibited in Europe.

In the previous two cases the visitors go purposefully in a dedicated art space, but in the case of Pulkkinen's project the artist advances this process and brings the work to the "unprepared" public—the casual, involuntary viewers. This is precisely what makes up the essence of the project: to force the general public, not only the sophisticated contemporary art-event-goer, to face, even confront, the reality of war and its consequences on the lives of average people. In the overly mediated and alienated contemporary reality, we can easily become distanced and estranged from even the most terrible human suffering viewed on a screen. When not directly involved, we detach ourselves and become indifferent to, or reluctant to understand, the tragedy of others. As Max Ryyänen stated, the project is akin to "building a material bridge to a war that would otherwise only be present to us as a flat media spectacle. [...] By creating new practices of presentation *Street View (Reassembled)* forces us to see something differently through its novel approach. [...] In Pulkkinen's piece reality comes to visit."¹⁸

As a matter of fact, this critique of the lack of empathy and estrangement can be seen even in the choice of the title of the piece. It reminds us of Google's Street View that allows anyone online to observe distant cities and buildings in great detail, though of course indirectly, on the screen. Pulkkinen reverses the Street View: the mediated becomes direct, the intangible becomes

tangible, the impersonal becomes subjective. Something “out there” (something that still exists and can be viewed on the screen) disappears, but is brought “right here” to be experienced.

Pulkkinen’s transport of the rubbles is thus an attempt to offer a direct, tangible experience of destruction, to trigger discourse on tragedies of human conflicts and loss of lives and homes, and hopefully even to initiate action to help those in need. Needless to prove any further that this directness of the experience would not have been possible without the actual rubble really travelling to Europe.

KEY COMMON ASPECTS EXAMINED

In the last section of my study I propose to focus on some characteristics that connect these projects. I will explain and justify the choice and grouping of the case studies in the hope that this comparative approach provides insights that might otherwise be missed.

Transportation

The main common aspect of all three works is the act of transportation. This is important because it generates the question of why it was necessary to relocate the given piece of architecture to a new destination.

The point of departure for most of the visitors in engaging and interpreting these works is the fact that they are coming from somewhere else. This may be a curious novelty compared to the more common forms of perception, apprehension, and appreciation of works of art. In case of other artworks, we normally start with whether we like it, whether it pleases us aesthetically in terms of form, style, shapes, colours etc., but we rarely start our interpretation with the question “why is this here”?

As we have seen above, our main question in these projects is the agency of transportation, and the resulting aesthetic consequences. Since it is this act that transforms a piece of architecture (or its rubble) into an artwork, the engagement with the work also begins with the observers’ questions on the meaning of the move.

Alterations in function and status

As the structures become exhibition pieces, their function and status change. This holds also for Pulkkinen’s piece, despite it being displayed in public spaces, rather than in traditional exhibition halls or galleries. The changed context and the very act of exhibiting (the result and, in a way, the purpose of the

transportation) challenge the functionality of the constructions. This is particularly evident in the case of Heske, who, as we have seen above, investigates the change of function when taking a still functioning hut, temporarily suspending its functionality as a shelter in the woods, exhibiting it, and then re-installing back it in its original location. Chachkhiani's house was possibly still usable before becoming an exhibition piece, but the artificial "rain" pouring inside the installation made it impossible to consider it as a functional home any further. Both during and after the exhibition it would have been impossible to use (even if the artist were to re-install it, like Heske, in the original location), since by that time it had significantly corroded. Compared to their works, Pulkkinen's building has lost its functionality before the artist decided to use it as the material base of his art project. Furthermore: (1) In Pulkkinen's construction, the former home has lost its functionality forever and irreversibly, unlike for example Heske's shelter. (2) This loss of practical purpose was, in Pulkkinen's case not a result of becoming an artwork and the material form of an art project, but took place beforehand, due to reasons unrelated to Pulkkinen. Hence, while Heske's piece lost its function and purpose while being considered an artwork in the opening months of the Biennial, Pulkkinen's rubble had become functionless before becoming an artwork. As we have seen, this plays a crucial role in the interpretation of his work and is a key point when directing the observers' attention to several questions embedded in the project.

Universalisation (despite the context)

As already mentioned in the beginning of this study, buildings are strongly connected to their original contexts, so when they are moved, this context is brought with them. This phenomenon characterises the above three projects, with their strong references to the original location, environment, as well as their historico-political and socio-cultural context. The challenges and tensions between those contexts play an important role in the works' interpretation. This however does not mean that the importance of the original physical and cultural "surroundings" results in the works having a reduced and limited focus. Nor does it mean that the work cannot provide important considerations for the external observer, i.e., for someone not coming from, or unfamiliar with, the original context. Rather, in all three cases the artists managed to make universalising statements on the questions raised.

Monument(ality)

As already suggested, the three projects are also connected by a peculiar monumentality, and in different ways, can all be read as forms of commemorating and monumentalising peoples' lives. In Heske's work, the questions related to our connection to Nature and the environment are examined through an iconic type of building, with the embedded references to traditional rural life in Norway. Chachkhiani attempts to find a manifestation of the effect of external historical events on the individual's internal life: "I think mostly we consider the impact of history on society, while we neglect the personal inflictions."¹⁹ Pulkkinen focuses on the general human tragedy, in the work that makes a move towards universalisation. The context that is transported here comes from one war, but could have been from any other, since the suffering, the loss of home or, even worse, the loss of life can equally affect the often innocent civilians in any human conflict anywhere in the world. This is why I find it crucial that Pulkkinen decided not to reveal for the press the exact location of where the rubble came from, as it could have immediately led to speculations about "which side" the artist was on.

What becomes immediately clear is that this particular monumentality of all three projects share one important common feature: the commemoration of the everyday life of ordinary people. They do not celebrate particular heroes, exceptional or famous personalities, but make the observer think of those who are just like any of us. This aspect could, *mutatis mutandis*, easily remind us of Orhan Pamuk's renowned "A Modest Manifesto for Museums," in which the author argues against the grand narratives represented by the traditional grand museums. Instead, he places the accent on the presentation of the microstructures of personal experience on smaller scales. As Pamuk wrote: "The measure of a museum's success should not be its ability to represent a state, a nation or company, or a particular history. It should be its capacity to reveal the humanity of individuals. (...) Monumental buildings that dominate neighborhoods and entire cities do not bring out our humanity; on the contrary they quash it. Instead, we need modest museums that honor the neighborhoods and streets and the homes and shops nearby, and turn them into elements of their exhibitions. The future of museums is inside our own homes."²⁰ It is exactly this *home*, the familiar, personal space and individual environment that is at the centre of interest for the three artists.

Tectonic aspects

Here we have another feature that may at first seem surprising to mention, however it bears an important connection to monumentality—namely, the tectonic aspect. Consider the material of the three structures turned artworks: they were all relatively easy to remove, disassemble, re-assemble, and move. Heske's cabin made of wood logs and Chachkhiani's house of wood planks made it easy to dismantle. In Pulkkinen's case, although the original building was of stronger material, as rubble, its removal and transportation was made easy compared to other still-standing concrete buildings. What is equally noteworthy is how beautifully these materials and tectonic features symbolise the characteristics of these "monuments" and their commemoration of people's lives. In other words, the simplicity of materials and forms parallels the ordinary lives that the monuments aim to commemorate or make us reflect on. No pretentious and expensive materials, no delicate elaborations or the overly sophisticated designs and engineering solutions of fancy monuments—instead, the use of the natural materials and a return to basics. Not the exceptional life of top heroes, but the "ordinary, everyday stories of individuals," as Pamuk wrote.²¹

BY WAY OF CONCLUSION

These projects and similar artistic experiments allow us to scrutinise a number of important issues. These critical issues concern not only aesthetics, art and architecture, but also memory and identity, social and political tensions. They can be analysed not only on the level of the singular projects, but taken together, as a particular practice. The power of encountering the original piece of architecture arriving from another land essentially contributes to the aesthetic working and effect of the art piece through the agency of transportation. Knowing that the building was in use before it was translocated and turned into an artwork adds to its aesthetic curiosity and appeal, since the viewer practically becomes a witness of the transformation of the status of the piece. The act of transportation and the accompanying decontextualization results in the multiple transformations of the piece, and the exhibition also contributes to the complex conversion process, where the formerly functional object turns into an artwork. This experience is different from when, for example, a painting comes to the museum out of the artist's studio or as a loan from another museum. Adding to all this, the broader context of the work that may entail not only the physical surrounding but the historical

and cultural environment is necessarily carried together with the logs, stones, and concrete, providing further layers in the reading of the works.

All this clarifies the relevance of such projects, despite the complicated logistics, bureaucracy, and high costs, often covered from public funds. The intricate and pressing questions they raise could not have been possible to pose otherwise, without the viewer's experiencing them directly. Not only the buildings change contexts and status, lose functionality, and become objects of art, but also novel contexts are created to inspire constructive thinking and stimulating insights. Therefore, when architecture is on the move, it also moves the spectator, thus truly becoming *moving architecture*.

- 1 I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers of the first version of this text for numerous insightful comments and for the many suggestions on developing my study. I am also grateful to Éva Farkas and Hugh Clarke for their linguistic recommendations regarding my text.
- 2 See more in an earlier paper of mine: Zoltán Somhegyi, "Mother Nature's Exhibition: On the Origins of the Aesthetics of Contemporary Northern Landscapes," *The Nordic Journal of Aesthetics* 52 (2016): 28-50.
- 3 For the history of the museum and of the collection see their website: <https://norskfolkemuseum.no/en/the-history-of-the-museum>, accessed 6 January, 2022.
- 4 Sigrun Åsebø, "Travelling Huts and Invading Spaceships. Marianne Heske, Tiril Schrøder and Norwegian Romantic Landscapes," *Romantik. Journal for the Study of Romanticism* 3 (2014): 54. <https://doi.org/10.7146/rom.v3i1.23253>
- 5 Åsebø, "Travelling Huts and Invading Spaceships," 54.
- 6 The conversation with Per Hovdenakk quoted on the artist's website: <https://www.marianneheske.no/texts>; accessed 6 January, 2022.
- 7 Quoted from the same conversation: <https://www.marianneheske.no/texts>; accessed 6 January, 2022.
- 8 Sigrid Stenerud Steien, "Norwegian Plastic Wood: On Marianne Heske's *Gjerdeløa*," in *Ung uro. Unsettling climates in Nordic art, architecture and design*, ed. Ingrid Halland (Cappelen Dam Akademisk, 2021), 76, n3.
- 9 Steien, "Norwegian Plastic Wood," 76.
- 10 As the artist stated in a short questionnaire in the ArtReview: <https://artreview.com/2017-venice-19-vajiko-chachkhiani-georgia/>; accessed 6 January, 2022.
- 11 Quoted on the Sydney Biennial's website: <https://www.biennaleofsydney.art/artists/vajiko-chachkhiani/>; accessed 29 July, 2021.
- 12 "Appearance and Disappearance. Vajiko Chachkhiani in Conversation with Julian Heynen." Published in the brochure accompanying the 57th Biennale di Venezia.
- 13 Claudia Peppel, "Enduring Rain. On Vajiko Chachkhiani's *Living Dog Among Dead Lions*", in *Weathering. Ecologies of Exposure*, eds. Christoph F. E. Holzhey and Arnd Wedemeyer (Berlin: ICI Berlin Press, 2020), 287.
- 14 "Appearance and Disappearance." https://doi.org/10.37050/ci-17_13
- 15 About the differentiation between aesthetically attractive ruins and unattractive rubble, see some further considerations in Chapter 1 of my book on the aesthetics of ruins: Zoltán Somhegyi, *Reviewing the Past. The Presence of Ruins* (London - New York: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2020).
- 16 Hanna Johansson, "Ruins, Structure of Dwelling and Remembrance of Violence: Zoltán Somhegyi's Street View (Reassembled) in the Framework of Home Making," in *Home Re-assembled. On Art, Destruction & Belonging*, eds. Aleksí Malmberg and Annuka Vähäsöyrinki (Heijningen: Jap Sam Books, 2017), 20.
- 17 Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila, "Antiques and Merchandise," in *Home Re-assembled. On Art, Destruction & Belonging*, eds. Aleksí Malmberg and Annuka Vähäsöyrinki (Heijningen: Jap Sam Books, 2017), 59.
- 18 Max Ryyänen, "Aesthetics of Distance," in *Home Re-assembled. On Art, Destruction & Belonging*, eds. Aleksí Malmberg and Annuka Vähäsöyrinki (Heijningen: Jap Sam Books, 2017), 75, 76, 78.
- 19 Vajiko Chachkhiani and Claudie Peppel, "Life Never Stops Being Violent. A Conversation," in *Weathering. Ecologies of Exposure*, eds. Christoph F. E. Holzhey and Arnd Wedemeyer (Berlin: ICI Berlin Press, 2020), 291. https://doi.org/10.37050/ci-17_14
- 20 Orhan Pamuk, "A Modest Manifesto for Museums," accessed January 6, 2022, <https://en.masumiyetmuzesi.org/page/a-modest-manifesto-for-museums>.
- 21 Pamuk, "A Modest Manifesto for Museums."