

Vilnius City Taxidermia

Refer to VISUAL ARCHIVE.

Dear Reader

Like layers of a human body, a city morphology consists of not only something that exists on the surface but also hiding something within, something that might be referred to as [lot]. Secretus The essence of real experience can sometimes be hidden in symbolism, aesthetics, or collective mood however, behind every act of hiding lies a driving force.

Carl Jung's autobiography, "Memories, Dreams, Reflections." tells a story about a phallus on a golden throne underground, that he hid in the attic after a rather unique ceremonial practice that he dreamed time and time again. Later, in a letter to Sigmund Freud, he confessed to being sexually abused at an extremely young age. After clinical psychoanalysis and trials, he suggested that the phallus symbolised his repressed masculinity. Jung maintained this symbolic object in the attic of his family's home.

Unconscious ceremonial practices or dreams serve as pathways to what is hidden. This text zooms out of human scale and enters the streets of Vilnius Old Town. My aim is not only to animate the city of Vilnius but to emphasise that Vilnius is a living entity with changing symbolism and psychological existence. In this text taxidermia refers to Vilnius city in the light of cultural preservation, heritage protection and old town restoration just like any other city in the world Vilnius right now is under the scalpel of a surgeon, however, a secret lies within the unchangeable structure of bones and blood of the city. This raises a question about urban identity, shaped not merely by design but by the spontaneous acts of inhabitation, almost as if the streets become a set props in a spectacle.

"The beginning of the universe does not exist in Vilnius. The existence of this city destroys all theories: Greek materialists, Chinese Taoists, and Hasidim. The world of this city is made up in a completely different way; here the beginnings are also different: manure, stench, and boundless, depressing Lithuanian disability. There is no fire here, so you can't be a flame either. Your primal beginnings cry out for freedom of expression, but the universe of Vilnius calms and darkens even the very beginnings. You are condemned not only from the beginning of time but also from the depths. It is true that there is another Rudiment of Vilnius - alcohol" (Gavelis 1993).

Wounds

“During his sleep, he had a dream that on the mountain a large iron wolf was standing and it was howling so loud as if it were hundreds of wolves howling inside him”

(Legend of Vilnius's establishment)

Skapo and Bernardino Street are located in Old town, both of these narrow streets were formed in the Gothic period of Vilnius development when the Gothic church of Ona erupted. Back in 2012 when February still brought Siberian winter cold, my friend and I ran away from our evening French class at the Institute of Paris on top of Pilies Street a minute away from Skapo and Bernardinu Street crossroad. We bought two bottles of wine and indulged in young reckless adolescence. We did not need to find a warm place inside, Bernardinu and Skapo Street crossing gave us all needed shelter. Loud and drunk we recited A poem of Arnas Ališauskas “Pasilieja dangum Dievo sėkla ir gervuokių rašalas... gerk vaikeli taip mažta atsumas ir laikas”(eng. *The sky is filled with God's dew and blackberry dew... drink, child, distance and time are so short*) As i remember this after 12 years I realise that was a crucial moment when I looked inside and trough Vilnius skin. I immersed myself into the hole in the wall which opened far more than broken concrete, it opened broken generations and the unforgettable beauty of a wound. “Tai nebuvo žaizda, o jei buvo sakykim sugijo”(eng. *It wasn't a wound, and if it was, let's say it healed* (A.Ališauskas) However, through the walls, something else bleeds.

This story is not about my adolescent nostalgia this story is about the ongoing Vilnius Old Town restoration, cultural heritage and image formation, the reality of urban citizen, and the poetry of their existence between these walls. This is a story about hundreds of years of taxidermy of an alive sleeping animal with ghastly insides and broken skin in a name of Vilnius. This essay will delve into layers of renovation, - important ingredients for urban mental, physical, and intellectual realities. Furthermore, the act of inhabiting a city opens a new framework for architectural scenography, which I will discuss in a later chapter.

Cities like Vilnius and its old architecture have embedded aesthetic programming in a wider city's architectural paradigm It can be perceived as an image of a city which by default is a product of architects imprints renovating it, and municipalities controlling regulations. However, The material reality can't solely exist without an immaterial urban experience. As a spatial practitioner, I propose shifting our focus away from the perpetual need to design our cities. Instead, we should allow for the spontaneous formation of “*genius loci*”. This can be accomplished by altering our approach to renovations.

As I start to think about Vilnius city Streets as an alive entity that once was Iron Wolfe, HolyHorn, and a jazz-loving cursed female spirit - Kirkė.(Gavelis,1989). One thing always remains broken, worn out, and always with a golden warm hue glistening eyes - that is the architectural layers of streets of Vilnius and especially the Old town. A scratch in the wall, a wound in concrete skin, a mark in every resident's memory circuit. The type of spolia in Vilnius old town becomes an entry point not only to heritage protection, and struggle of restoration but also a point where physical and cultural wholeness of urban life is embedded. The created aesthetic vision of a city is still highly thought of by urban planners and architects who decides what Vilnius should be perceived as. Vilnius's intentional aesthetic is characterised by its scars, wounds/spolia and polychromes (*refer to visual archive*) which become a rather dominant trait in Old Town. Those Rather decorative traces are very often overlooked, as it has become a part of the city. The asperous of the old town and its dark yellow dim lightening became a natural state of habitat. In the light of modernisation, historical documents and planning efforts from the early 20th century reveal a strong emphasis on maintaining the old town's structural integrity and street layouts. However, contemporary urban development often conflicts with these preservation goals. New construction projects, driven by economic and political pressures, have led to densification and changes in the spatial configuration of the old town, sometimes violating established preservation laws.

The preservation of Vilnius' cultural heritage and the maintenance of its architectural character involves navigating between historical authenticity and contemporary needs. This requires addressing the sensory and symbolic values of heritage, managing economic and political pressures, and reconciling modernisation efforts with the preservation of the city's unique historical and cultural identity. Preserving cultural heritage involves a nuanced dance between competing interpretations of what is deemed "real," "worthy," or significant. When there is a feud between architects or residents and what should be culturally preserved or saved, mostly a building but including its exterior aesthetic, both parties argue about what is more fitting or non-fitting. A Vilnius Spirit, Cities character. (Markevičienė, 2003). Restoration and preservation efforts often hinge on subjective assessments by architects or governing bodies, adding layers of complexity. The tension between what is saved and what is erased underscores this complexity, revealing a problematic process that can sometimes be susceptible to corruption and bias.

Despite appearing grounded solely in practical or research-based arguments, these debates delve deeper into the essence of the place. The soul of a city, emerges as a city dweller constructs a collective image, portraying it as the true essence of the locale. In the act of city restoration, it becomes way more visible. Genius loci mediate parts where the city is re-created and elsewhere conserved. There is no doubt that every person senses this phenomenon as it is an inseparable part of urban existence. "Arnold Berleant (2002) states continuing Edward T. Hall and Yi-Fu Tuan: "a physical interaction of body and setting, a psychological interconnection of consciousness and culture, and a dynamic harmony of sensory awareness all make a person inseparable from his or her environment. As environment is constantly penetrates our emotional response The "Traditional dualisms, such as those separating the idea and the object, self and the others, inner consciousness and external world, dissolve in the integration of person and place." (Markevičienė, 2008, pg 2)

Vilnius's urban life was non-homogeneous before the Second World War; it was one of the most multicultural cities in Europe, with especially high Jewish and Tatar Muslim populations. (Snežko 2014) Vilnius still has a large amount of wooden Tatar house architecture intertwined in the city, as well as archaeological remains of many Jewish synagogues. Vilnius' urban life at that time was very different than now. From this period, Jewish writer Abraomas Karpinovičius' book "The Last Prophet of Vilnius" (published and translated in 1998) paints a vivid image of Vilnius. "Vilnius was a very poor city, but people walked its streets with their heads held high. They barely earned enough for dry bread, but they walked around the city with bright faces, not crushed. A well-thought-out word, a good word, an instructive sentence was more important than a hearty meal." This cultural diversity was short-lived in the modern day.

Since I was born in 1997, Vilnius has become much more homogenous. It was predominantly Lithuanian city. Its old cultural relics remain as monuments and memories in the walls of buildings, squares, and stairways. During Soviet rule, the aim was to make the city more homogenous and suppress diversity, in other words, to make a city carrying a socialist image while this worked in later developed neighbourhoods such as Lazdynai. Old town modernisation faced many challenges for example according to a Moscow urbanist specialist - "Vilnius city, in general, is not fit to embed a socialist image. (Markevičienė, 2003) they mention a couple of reasons which are the cities' nature (complicated and dynamic relief) and cities' position in between two rivers. and most of all - an old town which has intricate and confusing dark and narrow street labyrinth" Vilnius old town made Moscow urbanists furious. The old town of Vilnius is comparably well-preserved and did not go through many structural changes in urban planning.

Vilnius old town was indrawn into Unesco cultural heritage protection scheme in 1994 as "the expression of a significant interplay and change of human values in a certain period in urban planning or landscape formation" This very reason for that could be found in Finish architect Panu Kaila (1994) research about the old town of Vilnius restoration realities, he wrote: There is a certain tendency to restore the lost future, by rebuilding and stylistically restoring, but the historic centre of Vilnius, which consists of hundreds of historic houses, churches, monasteries, public buildings and streets... abounds in beauty and authenticity, many buildings still stand untouched... the beauty and richness of a living historical city are very visible on many narrow dark streets. Because of cultural and

architectural resilience to socialist ideals, soviets did not manage to achieve high structural change in the old town of Vilnius. Remnants of that stayed in the urban citizen consciousness, as a way of rebellion. The strong dichotomy in people's experience in Vilnius throughout times influences how even now we see Vilnius in the light of heritage preservation. If we suggest that lived environments shape physical health, action, and neurological pathways (Mallgrave, 2018), Vilnius's old town imaginary represents some sort of Lithuanian mentality. The intimate connection with the rough spolia immerses a citizen into oneself. Therefore, the totality of material and immaterial city is the key that connects the importance of architectural heritage and psychological aspects of urban citizen. The broken surfaces of Old Town somewhat become a part of urban skin.

Urban Skin

Urban skin in this essay refers to urban morphology study of the form and structure of urban spaces and the patterns of their development and importantly - character. It examines the physical layout, as well as human interaction factors. It consists of cultural aspects such as historical, archaeological, ethnological, mythological etc. And urban - infrastructure, city plan, social and aesthetic awareness etc (Markevičienė, 2003).

Building on research by Jūratė Markevičienė, I introduce three types of city perception which help to analyse urban skin in the context of restoration: integrated, fragmented, and defocused. These perception types offer a structured way to analyse the complex processes of urban restoration and/or preservation. These types play an important role into the overall city mode of restoration.

Fragmented awareness Cuts the old town into its solo importance parts consisting of monuments deemed to be important historical relics.

Defocused awareness could be understood as scattered kaleidoscopic parts of a city and objects. For example window seals and building groups on the street.

Integrated awareness Viewing a city or urban environment as a cohesive whole, where the structure's integrity serves as a reference for evaluating and changing individual elements.

Image creation and materialisation of narratives.

While Western and classical European heritage protection forms shifted from fragmented to integrated. In Vilnius, however, we can notice the opposite direction - from integrated to defocused. "this paradox's roots lie in political economic educational and social problematics. Also, Vilnius formation peculiarity is in its synchronic urban formation. (Markevičienė, 2003,pg236). More so, the three types of city perception developed not only at the same time but also in the same planning documents. In the latter case, materialisation conflicts with each other: after all when the goals conflict, it is not clear which image needs to be implemented, and each chosen option inevitably violates the other. The bigger the gap, the more conflict situations. "In Vilnius, where the safety of the historical city is often driven by secondary or external factors, the gap has existed since Soviet times and is now widening rather than shrinking, contrary to global trends in heritage protection and urban planning"(Markevičienė 2003). While this was the case in early 2000, we can still see that municipality did not achieve cohesive materialisation of the narrative. Some modern examples that illustrates present restoration trends are Cinema of "Lietuva" And Wooden Architecture Museum, which I will touch upon in a further chapter.

Defocused and fragmented awareness

The former "Lietuva" cinema in Vilnius, located on Pylimo Street, was a significant cultural gathering space. Built-in 1965, it was closed after 2002 following a controversial audit by the Vilnius City Municipality and subsequent sale to a private company. Despite its closure, the building remained far from abandoned; for another 15 years, it served as a hub for subcultures and underground movements. During this period, its facade became a mosaic of cryptic and literal messages, created

with paint and paper. Although it might have appeared as an eyesore, many Vilnius citizens saw it as an integral part of the city and community.

The building's fate seemed sealed with its privatisation. Despite efforts by architects Nomeda and Gediminas Urbonas to preserve what was deemed a cultural heritage site, the campaign was unsuccessful. The building was demolished in 2017. A year later, a modern art centre, which has since become one of the most visited sites in Vilnius, was constructed in its place. While the new centre contributes to the broader cultural landscape, its architectural style starkly contrasts with its surroundings, making it appear like a modern lump in the historic old town.

The problem of restoration is not a problem by itself however the issue lies with forces that shift Vilnius image-making. Without a concrete vision and honest appreciation for heritage, the power of corruption and globalisation can break and slice the cityscape. "Due to the specific nature, genius loci sites cannot be (re)created intentionally: extended restorations and reconstructions of a historic site usually wipe out its genius loci" (Markevičienė 2012)

The other problem that comes with this type of restoration is the public's dissatisfaction with ongoing change, as their voice of keeping the cultural monument was not taken into consideration. This type of demolition of cultural spaces happens in other Vilnius locations right now.

"Since defocusing manifests itself on all levels, whether as a conscious deconstruction or as the result of accidental jumps of the gaze, corresponding images of the Old Town are also formed, which, when materialised, the ancient town gradually turns into ruins, fragments of history without a visual and meaningful context among new non-contextual forms - modern ones. or anciently stylised barrels."(Markevičienė 2002) It could be understood as scattered kaleidoscopic parts of a city and objects. The awareness shifts from a bigger image to an element, the elements become independent threads which are not compatible with their surroundings.

The other example of fragmented restoration illustrates a good example. In The very centre of the Old town called Užupis is located. In between a river, Vilnia is a secluded area which whimsically promotes itself as a separate republic of Užupis. Which holds the Museum of Wooden City Architecture(refer to visual archive), one of few left examples of this type of building. Because of city fires and safety, these buildings were banned. Many of the existing buildings fell into disrepair. The Soviet regime did not prioritise the maintenance or restoration of historical architecture, leading to a period of decline. However, this period also preserved some of the historical structures from modernisation or demolition, inadvertently maintaining the old-world charm of the area. Wooden City Architecture Museum is located in Užupis which recently went through full-scale renovation. This renovation is a good example of cultural heritage preservation. "During the restoration, the specialists tried to preserve the authenticity of the building as much as possible: 80 per cent was preserved. exterior decor details and 70 per cent authentic walls and structures. Interior wall decoration has been preserved, conserved and partially restored based on polychromy studies"(2023 European Commission) in 2023 this building was included in European heritage protection. The intimate way of restoring work not only breathed new life into this building without changing its soul but also made a space for people to access previous images of fragments of Vilnius.

Integrated Awareness "Scenarchitecture"

But not only modernisation and renovation are responsible for urban skin. The spolia I referred in the previous chapters act as a form of "antirestoration". These elements, often integrated without the intervention of designers, act as cultural and archetypal architectural components. Spolia are not only an aesthetic fragment but a neuroaesthetic that shifts the atmosphere of the city. To better understand this, we can consider the concept of "scenarchitecture" introduced by Andrea Moneta of Nottingham Trent University. In his paper, "Scenarchitecture: A Methodology for Investigating the Role of Genius Loci in the Reading, Understanding, and Interpretation of Architecture and Heritage," Moneta describes a methodology that combines historical research with perceptual and emotional

engagement with a site's Genius Loci (spirit of the place). This approach aims to foster community engagement and place awareness.

In the context of Vilnius and its spolia (*refer to the visual archive*), the city's ambience and architectural details serve as a scenography for interactions. Because these elements are not overly designed, their purpose and meaning become poetic and mentally stimulating for urban citizens. notes that all participants in this process—both performers and audience—become "spect-actors." As defined by Brazilian playwright and activist Augusto Boal, "spect-actors" are spectators who take on the role of actors, actively participating in the performance. (Moneta 2023) The idea of architectural elements and their impact on mental and sensorial stimuli is not new in the architecture field. Researchers such as Harry Francis Mallgrave's work on neuroaesthetics and embodied cognition open further theoretical frameworks.

In the sense of renovation or re-creating this type of approach which Jurate Markeviciene refers to as sensorial and symbolic/integrated awareness serves as an emphatic practice of restoration which tries to merge environment and human cognition. The methodology of scenarchitecture can be applied to any space that possesses architectural character. This approach connects theatrical practice with urbanism. The old town of Vilnius, with its unique antirestoration practices involving spolia in old town walls, serves as a stage with distinct character. These concepts broaden the understanding of urban life and its effects on residents by interpreting architecture through the lens of modern culture and historical heritage.

Conclusion : Taxidermia theatre

As I opened this essay with a story of my youth in an old town street, I observed the connection once again between architectural layers, renovation, and urban experience. This connection integrates restoration, poetry, stage, and neuroaesthetics into an urban landscape, transforming the restoration process into a form of staging. This approach does more than alter aesthetics; it preserves the historical and cultural fabric that Jūratė Markevičienė emphasises, which is crucial to the city's spirit. As the restoration together with gentrification sweeps around Vilnius there is an urgency to understand the urban fabric. This fabric evolves through inhabitation rather than mere design. Viewing heritage architecture as scenography, as Moneta suggests, reveals that architecture and scenography are inherently intertwined with the spontaneous performance of urban citizens in the centre. Vilnius' urban soul thrives in the balance of history and modernity. By honouring its character (*genius loci*) and blending authentic restoration with contemporary life, we ensure Vilnius remains a living, breathing entity, rich with scars and stories.

Reference list

Arnas Ališauskas (1996) "Pasigėrimas rudeny" Prisukama karalystė: Eilėraščiai. – Vilnius, LRS leidykla (Translated by me)

Berleant, A. (2002) 'The Aesthetics of Environment', *Philosophy and Geography*, 5(1), pp. 1-12.

European Commission (2023) Medinės miesto architektūros muziejus Vilniuje pelnė 2023 m. Europos paveldo apdovanojimą Available at: https://lithuania.representation.ec.europa.eu/news/medines-miesto-architekturos-muziejus-vilniuje-pelne-2023-m-europos-paveldo-apdovanojima-2023-06-13_lt(Accessed: 11 June 2024).

Gavelis, R. (1993) *Vilnius jazz*. Vilnius: Vaga.

Gavelis,R. (1989) Vilnius poker. Vilnius. Vaga. (Translated by Elizabeth Novickas)

Jung, C. G. (1963) *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Karpinovičius, A. (1998) *The Last Prophet of Vilnius*. Translated from Lithuanian. Vilnius: Vaga.

Inga Vidugirytė-Pakerienė, Taisija Laukkonen, Julija Snežko and Laimonas Briedis. (2014) "Mapping Vilnius literature" Vilnius University (accessed April 2024) http://www.vilniusliterature.flf.vu.lt/en/?page_id=18

Legend of Vilnius's establishment. Available at: <https://ironwolf.lt/vilniaus-ikurimo-legenda-gedimino-sapnas/> (Accessed: 11 april 2024). (Translated with google translate)

Mallgrave, H. F. (2018) 'Neurological Insights into Architecture', *Journal of Architectural Education*, 72(1), pp. 8-13.

Markevičienė, J. (2008) 'Genius Loci and Homo Faber: A Heritage-Making Dilemma', openarchive.icomos.org [Preprint]. Available at: https://www.academia.edu/115910533/Genius_Loci_and_Homo_Faber_A_Heritage_Making_Dilemma (Accessed: 22 April 2024).

Markevičienė, J. (2012) The spirit of the place – the problem of (re)creating 36(1), pp. 73–81. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3846/20297955.2012.679789>.

Markevičienė, J. (2003) 'Senamiesčio įvaizdžiai Vilniaus kultūros paveldo saugoje XX a.: nuo kraštovaizdžio iki praeities skeveldrų', in *Kultūrologija*, pp. 233–293. Available at: <https://www.lituanistika.lt/content/15590> (Accessed: 22 April 2024). (Translated by google translate)

Moneta, A. (2023) 'Scenarchitecture: A Methodology for Investigating the Role of Genius Loci in the Reading, Understanding, and Interpretation of Architecture and Heritage', *Nottingham Trent University*. Available at: <https://ntu.ac.uk/scenarchitecture> (Accessed: 11 June 2024).

Freud, S. and Jung, C.G. (1994) *The Freud/Jung Letters*. Abridged Paperback edition. Edited by W. McGuire. Translated by R.F.C. Hull and R. Manheim. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press.

