

# IMPOSSIBLE OBJECTS! SPACE-TIME EXPERIENCE OF ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE

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## Abstract

Rose Seidler House is a particularly impressive house that is witness to the strength of the Modern Movement world wide. The neoplastic reference is obvious and it is a personal construction of the whole architectural space. From the environment the house stands on the articulation of the inner-outer spaces and we may easily realise that we are inside an impressive architectural masterpiece.

Yet, the place where Rose Seidler lived surrounded by the upper most comfortable environment found its new destiny, a museum. Thus, like other architectural masterpieces, its perfection made the place impossible to live in. The touristic attraction now dictates the destiny of the house. And writing about it from a personal point of view may mean that we may treat architecture in general as tourists looking for pure architectural experience.

Thus, tourism does not only frame important issues such as new uses from old buildings and cultural heritage perspectives, but it can also give us a particular view of everything and anything. Thus, we may tend to operate within a world made up of partial limited views that, nonetheless, we read as universal.

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**Keywords:** Art, architecture, heritage, tourism, civilization

## Introduction

This article discusses some aspects of art, architecture, heritage and tourism. It presents civilization as a spatio-temporal construct that is built upon human records that we may fashion and thus recognize civilization as a long-term construct directed to both past and future.

Thus time arises at the centre of the awareness of historical records. The construct of time is evaluated as a key element at the core of the historic artwork. Yet we can say that modern time is our time and thus brings close to us the evaluation of Modern Architecture as a present living object that we can fashion as if it was recently created. This fact questions the sense of

museology that may be interesting but that also must evaluate properly buildings that are close to us in space and time.

Sydney Living Museums presents us a special conscientiousness of living houses that combines into cultural tourism an awareness of Modern Architecture built afresh. Certainly Harry Seidler's Rose Seidler House, built in 1950 for his mother, is only one example among many in Australia and worldwide. Yet, the fact that young countries have a need to build and to present an architectural heritage that the movement of Modern Architecture of the 20<sup>th</sup> century reinforces, highlights that which other countries have dismissed.

Last but not least, the option for the Rose Seidler House to become an 'experiential museum' was not alien to Kenneth Frampton's where the remarkable qualities of the building are summarized and stressed in 'World Architecture. A Critical Mosaic 1900-2000. Vol. 10. Southeast Asia and Oceania'.

## I.

The world we live in and fashion creates a living interaction that develops in us an awareness of both the world and ourselves, and thus creates the conditions to evolve civilization. We thereby have changed nature, created tools and shelters, art and architecture. Art and architecture witness needs that are not utilitarian, but needs that arise from a higher spiritual level. Need by the means of function is synthesized into the Useful and thus the need for shelter becomes a heuristic pretext to create the Beautiful.

The fact that human kind is able to create an Object to pursue pleasure alone, an aesthetic experience, an Object to be seen and experienced that does not arise from the need of bodily nourishment takes us to an upper order of understanding of our relationship to ourselves and to the world we live in and fashion. And tourism may be an approach that enables the pleasurable experience of the aesthetic.

Enlightenment has led to awareness and in a sense a need to experience nature that combines the objectivity of modern science and the need for a sensory experience. It might be surprising that "For over two thousand years [before Jean-Jacques Rousseau] mountains had been considered simply a nuisance: unproductive, obstacles to communication, the refuge of bandits and heretics." and that nature would become a source of worship and pure aesthetic experience. Certainly Caspar David Friedrich's Silesian Mountains would not fit former approaches to nature.

Yet this new way of experiencing nature came along with a similar way of experiencing history and from the ruins to the living buildings, architecture as a witness of a living past soon arrived at a new stage to be

experienced. A sense of worship of building-history was thus brought to the realm of the aesthetic and to the experience of civilization. We could say that a new awareness of civilization arose and a sense of “balance between individual genius and the moral or spiritual condition of a society” could be evaluated and fashioned afresh. We could then see the new emergent tourism as a kind of complete experience, a civilizational experience that places the individual in an extensive spiritual world built from a material world that combines nature, human kind and civilization. It is in this sense that tourism is approached here, as an experience that may provide all the conditions of fulfillment of a perfect existential experience. A perfect adherence of *mind-body-world* as would be stressed within the context of a phenomenological approach.

Awareness of civilization is not crystal clear. The art object is meant to be universal and a key record of civilization but art creations from former civilizations have been rejected and misunderstood by new civilizations. Kari Jormakka asked why is painting an art and questions common assumptions regarding our certainties of classifying art and thus questions the production of art and the nature of the aesthetic experience. Thus a «certain» agreement tells us what art is and there are certainly some strategies such as *ars imitatur artem* and yet the true nature of the art work as embodying an exceptional nature from the context is created, may show some difficulties of reaching that «agreement» even if one is discussing a given art work or «object» among scholars.

Patrick Heelen stresses similar phenomena by making clear the way in which the theory of art actually dictates what we see and inhibits our perception of the artwork to the point of blinding ourselves. V. Molnar and F. Molnar argue along similar lines by demonstrating that the asymmetry of Raphael’s Marriage of the Virgin is fundamental to its aesthetic qualities. Thus we look at the geometric framework of perspective and simply forget light.

Time! Time characteristically bounds the «agreement» regarding the artwork. Raphael’s asymmetry did not belong to the Renaissance theory of art and yet V. Molnar and F. Molnar could stress it in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the argument seems valid in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the long term we may find some «adjustments» to what the main artworks are and to nature of their characteristics. The contemporary exceptional may not be the long-term exceptional and later may not be understood as fundamental to the space-time we live in today. The unique in artwork needs to be exceptional and to be classified as a landmark in history. Further the characteristics of the exceptional in artwork and in architecture need to be somehow defined in a type of agreement which is particularly important when contemporary

interventions deal with architectural heritage and are certainly the centre of discussions in the debate of tourism versus heritage.

An important problem would be that the exceptional has an identity of its own and that it is also a cultural construction as it requires long-term recognition that history is made or easily understood from landmarks that, for instance, may translate the spirit of the age. And cultural tourism uses and abuses this assumption by stressing exceptional aesthetic characteristics of places and objects. Thus cultural tourism presents an ontological character of objects that nonetheless may be questioned. In some sense, they are biased by the same type of phenomena as Patrick Heelan stresses and we hardly can avoid them.

Time is definitely and intricately connected to architecture. Modern architecture has moved time to the centre of architectural thought. Space-time as a universal reality needed to be aesthetically explored and our time is closely connected to that modern time because of this consciousness. The sense of motion, of continuous metamorphosis, of change was to be found in society, politics, art, science, in brief, in civilization and thus time seems to connect all civilizations. Futurist's, departing from the Marinetti's Futurist Manifesto made it "tragically" clear, made time intense both as rational and as sensory experience.

Perhaps it was the sense of short time segments, a lack of stability or permanency, which has taken us to the necessity for short time decisions on the nature of the artwork and the duty of conservation. In this sense, the extreme position such as that of Dada has "exploded" space and time regarding civilization as a continuous construct. Yet, at the end, even Dada was absorbed by the stream of time that civilization constructed and thus constructed Dada itself.

It is exactly twentieth century architecture, in special Modern Architecture, that lays claim to conservation. Yet, the fact that modern architecture belongs to our time means that we can live in it effectively regarding the facilities and spatial organization it provides. Thus, exceptional houses may not claim to be museums, not to be touristically approached and have objects that were left behind in time, in its own time, just to be witnesses of a lost civilization. Wright's Falling Water or Aalto's Mänttä, despite the living atmosphere that has been preserved, have somehow changed by becoming museums.

We thus come to a point in which Rose Seidler House appears to be a good example of reflection on tourism and architectural heritage and does not come alone in the Australian cultural context. Karen McCartney has already published particular comprehensive surveys of Australian exceptional houses and together with Annalisa Capurro has worked intensively on the necessity of keeping these houses alive for the experience

of future generations. Both live in iconic houses that have become iconic by working on their recognition as such. Thus, the «agreement» discussed above is revealed as an actual cultural construction that comes alive.

To live in iconic houses and display them occasionally or periodically, more as a family or friendly visit than as an act of ‘pure tourism’ gives back to the visitor a more intense sense experience of what the building transforms into an aesthetic experience. Thus, there is a sense of fulfillment that cannot be acquired otherwise. The fact that someone actually lives in the house emphasizes a sense of contemporaneity and validity of the Modern House.

We may say that turning Villa Farnese into a permanent residence would validate a modern and contemporary way of life, too. In some sense this is true. But by being true, it stresses the argument regarding the modern house because it already belongs to a time where new civilizational habits were built and where the organization of the house reflects them. The free plan and the flexibility of space are there as heuristic working tools and it is a new approach that, at the end, would give Villa Farnese a contemporary meaning as residence. Metamorphosis of space and time might be the most perfect expressions of the heuristic tools conveyed by the free plan and by the flexibility of space.

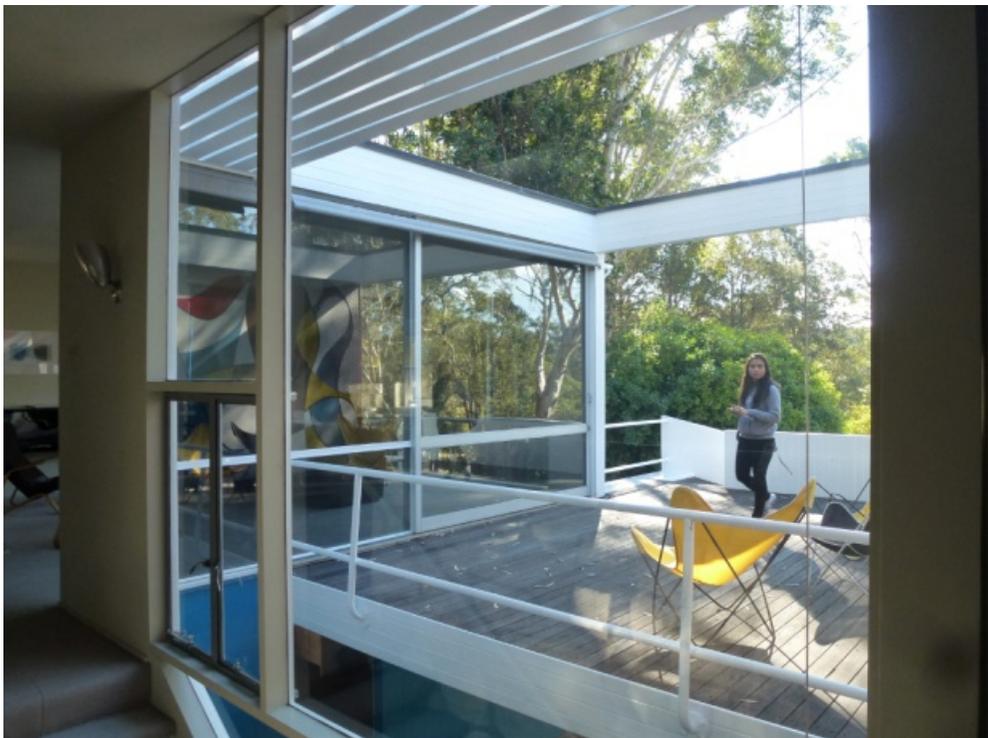
We may say that there is a paradox on visiting Rose Seidler House because the house is not inhabited except for its visitors and yet it belongs to a set of buildings where people actually live. Yet, the person who works there actually lives in such, just as we work in an office or a factory. A “housekeeper” we could say. Yet this way of “keeping” the house directs it to a touristic approach to the Object.

Certainly the space is impressive, but, actually by acting as a tourist that is like visiting the Canova’s Three Graces at the Victoria and Albert Museum, one may ask how far we are being acknowledged with Rose Seidler’s House. In a sense it is like a text that needs an imaginary reconstruction of living within the building. But how far has one lived in such a space as an everyday dwelling activity? Perhaps drinking a tea or a coffee, reading a book, sitting on a chair or sofa, inside or outside, listening to the news, would transport us to a close experience of the house.

How can one demonstrate what it is like to live in such a space that appears to be so clean and free of any human activity? The wonderful chairs seem stuck to the floor. It seems gravity has fixed the chairs perpetually to the floor and it is a paradox that we can move through the space. We cannot move them, they are dead witnesses of a lost past! The fire has stopped burning in the fireplace and the house appears to be stopped in space and time. And yet we can imagine how to move, how to move objects, to choose our favorite place to see the trees, to sit by the fire place...

We seem able to figure out what living in means, we can use imaginary reconstructions of reading, cooking, making laundry, sleeping, playing with children and let them go out to play in the forest outside. Perhaps we can imagine Rose Seidler moving around and going about her daily life. The fact that the house in its architecture is so close to the modern time we share, makes an imaginary reconstruction possible in a way that is more difficult to achieve than with earlier historical buildings, such as a palace or a castle. In the Rose Seidler House, we can simply sit and start living there.









## Conclusion

Living architecture that is actually “live” gives us a new sensory experience and the aesthetic revelation of the Object becomes more powerful in the sense the awareness of living is derived from iconic houses that are not far from our time. In fact they belong to our time and by living them we give the house that meaning. This is particularly intense in the revelation of Modern Architecture afresh and of “young” countries whose architectural heritage is marked by modern architecture, are good examples that give us a special awareness of Modern Architecture as a worldwide phenomenon.

The spatio-temporality that we share with the house and the house with us is strong enough to inform about a duality of experiences. Somehow we are tourists and friends or family visitors and we also feel like we can live with the house or that we have actually lived there. Perhaps architecture, heritage and tourism are synthesized on the Rose Seidler House.

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