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ABSTRACT

How dare to allude, in an architecture conference in Athens, to the term caryatids? Some superbly underdeveloped case studies -Dahomey, Dogon, and Basque Caryatids- help tackle the task. The “JAI TEK tecnología feliz” (witty technology) case studies, an initiative that we have been developing at our School of Architecture since 2005, fulfil just one premise: they raise technology to culture, they merge community and architecture. Impossible to avoid the illiterate action, in culture and architecture, that separated one of the caryatids of the Erechtheion from her 5 sisters. This paper, a personal review of the concept, *museum pieces in our eyes*, is divided into five sections:

- Safeguard and Disseminate (Mijares, C.; Rudofsky, B.)
- Pervert and Loot (Mercouri, M.; Kipling, R.; Huston, J.)
- Collect and Think (Smithsons, A+P; Malraux, A.)
- Update and Question (Breton, A.)
- Draw and Vindicate (Picasso, P.; Pikionis, D.).

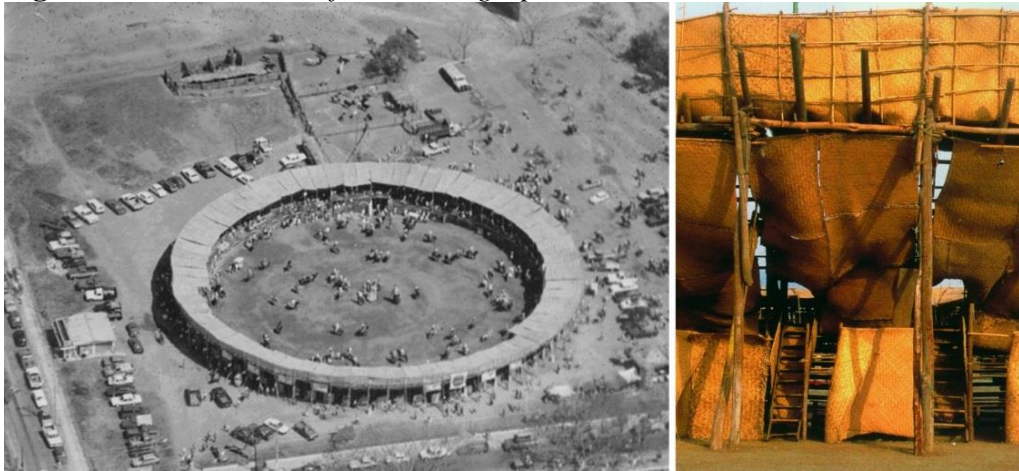
The conclusions proffer a superbly underdeveloped wooden caryatid next to our School of Architecture and a vindicating Bring Them Back idea.

Keywords: modern art, wood, caryatid

Introduction

A photograph on display at an ethnographic museum in Mexico D.F. in 2005 was the starting point of the “JAI TEK tecnología feliz” research line. My research colleague, Roberto Villamayor, asked his travel host about a black and white photograph (Figure 1). “It’s a festival square that they build every year in Villa de Alvarez, Colima, using traditional methods. If you’re interested in learning more, Carlos Mijares Bracho, the architect, published a book about it in 2000. I’ll get you a copy.” Sure enough, on his return from that trip, we received the book, “La Petatera de Villa de Álvarez en Colima. Sabiduría decantada” (Mijares, B. 2000).

Figures 1 and 2. *Picture from Ethnographic Museum/La Petatera*



Source: JAI TEK archive/Mijares, B. 2000.

We contacted its author to invite him to take part in the inaugural conference. He, who would later be presented with the Fine Arts Award of Mexico 2013, apart from delighting us with a fantastic lecture, supported our initiative by writing the epilogue of the publication that compiled the contents of the entire cycle.

Safeguard and Disseminate

It was not Carlos, but other speakers who met him during his stay in Madrid, who revealed the scope of the exemplary praxis of the Mexican architect. The community of Villa de Alvarez contacted him and asked him “to properly build, in concrete”, the ephemeral square that they, every year and using traditional methods, fabricated for their festivals. He not only rejected the request, but he also committed to disseminating the know-how of those people who believed they were ignoramus about architecture, because the Petatera is a real lesson of extremely beautiful architecture, which, apart from being sustainable, is anti-seismic (Figure 2). It amasses technical knowledge placed at the service of a community, which has organised itself to carry out: the setting out, the construction by phases, the dismantling, the storage by modules and families, the maintenance...

The ethnographic museum did a good job of safeguarding and disseminating just the image of the Petatera. Obviously, the square does not belong to it; it is a piece of architecture that belongs to a community. A community that is identifiable in it, that has appropriated it; a demonstration that technology can be a happy event. When this occurs, technology becomes culture. In Euskera, our language in the Basque Country, *jai* means festivity. The play on words, JAI TEK, which is the name given to our initiative, is completed with its explanation in Spanish, the co-official language in the Basque Country: “JAI TEK tecnología feliz” (Mujika, M., Villamayor R. 2007).

Figures 3 and 4. *Dahomey and Dogon Caryatids*



Source: Rudofsky, B. 1964.

Bernard Rudofsky, curator of the exhibition “Architecture Without Architects” held in 1964 at the Museum of Modern Art of New York, offered a great diversity of exotic and suggestive pictures -only pictures- originating from any continent, as a cultural heritage and source of inspiration; a selection of spontaneous, anonymous, vernacular and tribal architectures. The interest of the exhibition and the catalogue not only lies in the aesthetic beauty of the images. The interesting series of architectonic concepts according to which they were organised and grouped, also represented a new theoretical contribution.

The last two pictures in the catalogue (Figures 3 and 4), showing some wooden African caryatids, provoke Rudofsky's next reflection: “These two pictures, therefore, merely hint at the intimate architectural aspects; the anthropomorphic pillars at left support the roof of the palace at Ketou (Dahomey), the one at right stands in a communal rest house of the Dogon. Less distant perhaps and less ladylike than the Kore of the Erechtheion, they are linked to

modern Western art. Museum pieces in our eyes, they represent rather common fare in some superbly underdeveloped countries.”

At the end, this paper contributes with a case study of a wooden caryatid next to our School of Architecture.

Pervert and Loot

Carlos Mijares carried out his work as an architect in an exemplary manner. What belongs to him is the authorship of the book published, not the square. He refused to pervert it. By accepting the request, he would have appropriated it. Likewise, Bernard Rudofsky’s exhibition at the MoMA, which we have also referred to, was also exclusively based on architectural photographs.

Perhaps the financing of the reproductions used to replace the original pieces, retained by the British Museum, should be claimed from Lord Elgin’s descendants. The aristocrat considered that the fees, demanded by Turner to pictorially reproduce Greek architecture and sculptures, which his architect had suggested to decorate the new country mansion they were building, were exaggerated. It seems that, for certain aristocrats, the elementary difference between original and reproduction is reduced to an insignificant nuance.

A nuance that Melina Mercouri emphasised during her memorable speech to the Oxford Union in 1986: “the Parthenon Marbles they are. There are no such things as the Elgin Marbles.”

They did not, nor do they belong to the British Museum. An institution that should be renamed: “English Institute for Looting”, for example. It has been wrongly named, as it exhibits and defends plunder as a legitimate act. There is no better way of illustrating this peculiar way of engaging with the rest of the world than by quoting Rudyard Kipling, or John Huston, for that matter, in “The Man who would be King” (Martinez, R. 2007): “not gods, Englishmen, which is the next best thing.; if a bloody Greek could do it (referring to Alexander the Great), what can’t two Englishmen do”.

This issue of the British Museum may be nothing more than a new paradox that Zenon, from Parmenides’ School, wants to continue, to entertain us with: “Aristotle, in the “Politics”, in an intimate dialogue with Alexander the Great during the eight most important years of his life, defended the superiority of the Greeks, and their natural right to govern other peoples...” (Hall, E. 2015).

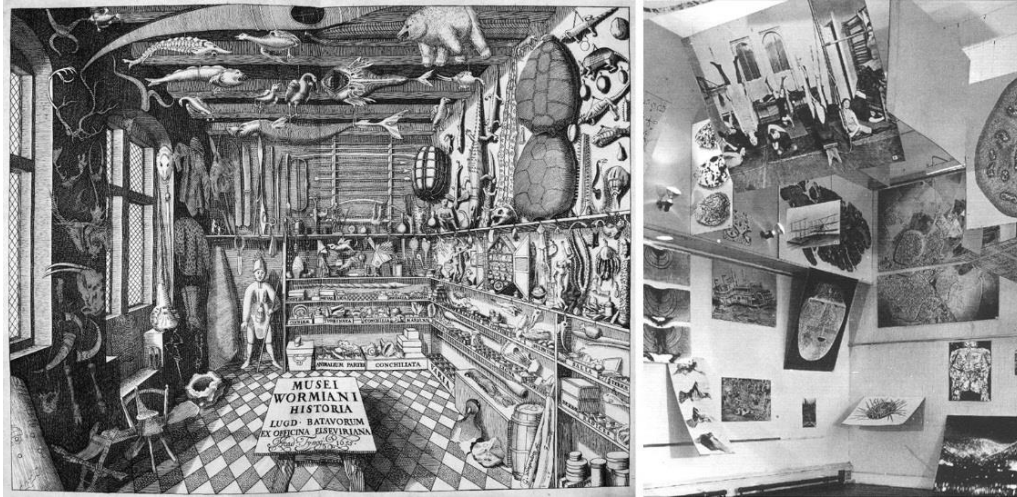
It is worth pointing out that, paradoxically, I have just quoted a magnificent British scholar close to -another one- the Bring Them Back movement. In addition to those quoted by Mercouri: Horace Smith, Lord Byron, Thomas Hardy, the British Committee for the Restitution of the Parthenon Marbles, the International Council of Museums...

Collect and Think

Let’s return to Rudofsky. It is obvious that, underlying, in his expression *museum pieces in our eyes*, is a criticism of western ways. The concept of museum

as an institution, closely linked to the ideas of the Enlightenment, had other precedents that evidence humankind's natural tendency to collect. Noteworthy among them are the cabinets of curiosities (Figure 5), private enclosures belonging to European aristocrats, scientists, aesthetes or scholars in the 16th to 18th centuries that contained collections of objects of different natures and origins.

Figures 5 and 6. *Musei Wormiani, 1655 / Parallel of Life and Art, 1953*



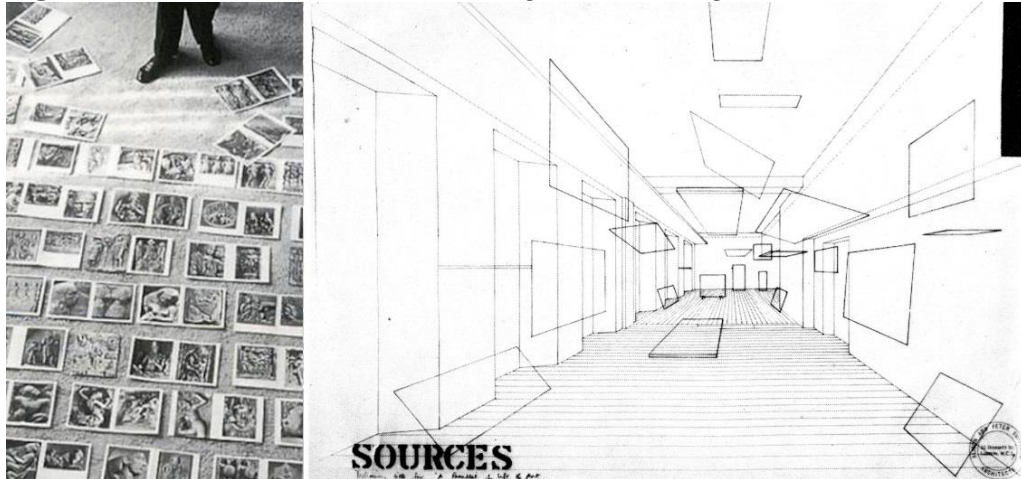
Source: Wikimedia L0000128.jpg / Nigel Henderson, Tate 1953.

It seems that The Independent Group had firstly considered another title for the 1953 “Parallel of life and art” exhibition (Figure 6). The graphic proposal on how to display the images in the room (Figure 8) was initially entitled “Sources”, and it has the hallmark of the architects that formed the quartet, Alison and Peter Smithson. They were probably inspired by the idea of the motley interiors of the cabinets of curiosities.

More than one hundred images in black and white encouraged reflection, establishing links between different disciplines -biology, sport, aerial photography, archaeology, geology, primitive cultures, modern art- cluttering the room of the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London -which, by the way, is half an hour on foot from the British Museum- from floor to ceiling.

The group was well-aware of the artistic avant-gardes, especially, of what was coming out of Paris, thanks to the close contact of Nigel Henderson with Peggy Guggenheim. The photographer, at the inauguration of the exhibition, referred to the concept, *musée imaginaire*, by André Malraux, to explain the aesthetic method that they had used to select images. The first version of the essay, “Le Musée imaginaire” came out just six years before the ICA exhibition, and posed an unavoidable question (Figure 7): “The history of art for a hundred years is the history of what is photographable” (Malraux, A. 1947).

Figures 7 and 8. André Malraux Choosing / ICA Showing Room



Source: Wikimedia_ Maurice Jarnoux / A+P Smithson.

Update and Question

I must acknowledge that after being able to fantasise with the idea that “Parallel of life and art” was an updated version of a cabinet of curiosities, that it was not something radically novel, I have felt quite relieved. I have always considered the installation, both in terms of its graphic presentation and its subsequent execution, to be fantastic. It was an extraordinary precedent that amalgamated the concepts of cabinet of curiosities and imaginary museum. By comparing microscopic images and aerial photographs, they encouraged a reflection on the era, theirs. In the same way as the current global pandemic also requires updating. The image is no longer a printed one; it is virtual. We are witnessing the birth of the *virtual museum*.

Figures 9 and 10. Rue de Fontaine 42, André Breton



Source: revuesdesdeuxmondes.fr / nybooks.com.

But, let's continue with the precedents. The interior of the house of André Breton, at number 42 rue Fontaine, Paris, full to the rafters of museum pieces in

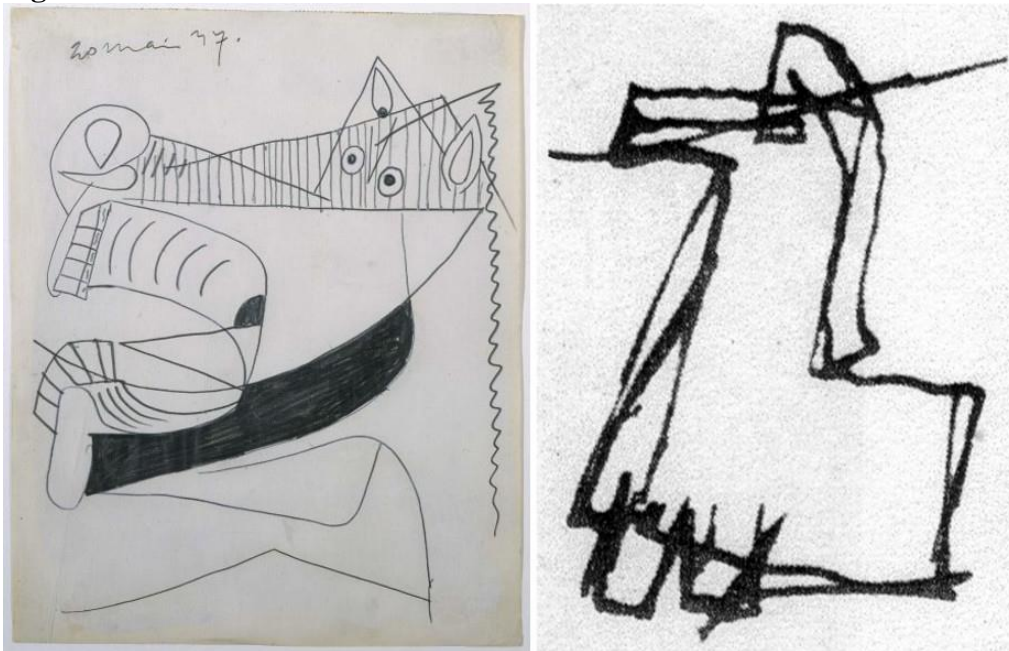
our eyes, was not an absolute novelty, either. The house is like a cabinet of curiosities. I assume that Breton acquired all the pieces in properly agreed transaction conditions; nothing to reproach. What interests us is that, as this personal museum includes primitive pieces in western eyes, it is the perfect illustration of the expression, *museum pieces in our eyes* (Figures 9 and 10).

Since 2003, the Musée National d'Art Moderne Centre Pompidou, has been exhibiting “le mur” a re-composition of the wall behind André Breton’s desk. The preponderance of primitive objects from Oceania, Amerindian and African, can be understood as a questioning of the aesthetic and cultural values of the so-called western world (Ottinger D. 2003).

Draw and Vindicate

A critical attitude shared by the main exponents of modern art, including, among others, Dimitris Pikionis (Figures 11 and 12).

Figures 11 and 12. *Horse’s Head, Picasso 1937 / Horse, Pikionis 1940*



Source: Reina Sofia Museum, DE00076 / Quetglas, R. 2017.

But, let’s narrow down that return to the primitive. Ancient Greeks, in temporary terms, were rather more primitive than the African and Basque wooden caryatids of this paper. It is obvious that the historical time does not match. So, if Greek caryatids were, in Rudofsky’s eyes, ladylike, we will use both terms just to differentiate the meanings:

- primitive: popular, symbolic, non-pedigreed (jai tek)
- ladylike: precision, virtuosity, expertise (high tech)

The horse drawn by Pikionis, in one of his Attica landscapes, is primitive. It evokes his thoughts as a child when he saw a ceramic horse: “the horse's legs are thick and ugly, but somehow I wouldn't like it to have thin legs. For some reason they have to be thick... these are the kind of legs a clay horse should have.” And also what happened to him while he tried to draw a donkey with his uncle, who he described as humble, to which we would add non-pedigreed: “I produced a picture, which won me much praise, yet I was left with the suspicion that for all its verisimilitude, it lacked the quality, which expressed the essence of a donkey. The lesson was not long in coming. 'Now let me draw a donkey for you', my uncle suggested, and I saw that his drawing, though less accomplished than mine, glowed with that very quality I had unconsciously sought” (AA-Pikionis, D. 1968).

With the term, modern art, this paper wishes to refer to the interest that early 20th century European avant-gardes showed when they returned to non-academicist artistic forms of expression (Abott Miller J., Lupton, E. 2004). The participation of Pikionis, together with other Greek artists in the number of the magazine, “The Third Eye”, that includes Klee's pedagogical notes at the Bauhaus (Furlong, A. 2004), or his answer to the minister of public works, who urged him to pave the pathways to the Acropolis (Alvarez, D. 2011), show how his work amalgamates with the European avant-gardes: safeguard, disseminate, collect, think, update, question, draw, vindicate. He is forced to explain to the minister that there is no place for the concept of architectural inspection in his work, and that the work must be carried out without deadlines, in total freedom; an essential procedure to obtain a sensitive and genuine result. An ideal that the historical context in which he works forces him to vindicate. And he vindicates it, not as a subjective condition, but as an objective premise that exists anywhere and in any era with true cultural meaning.

Kandinsky had already written in “Spirituality in art”, 1912, that the attempts to emulate other eras, other cultures, only produce inanimate forms. And he gave the example of Ancient Greece.

Conclusions

The Petatera belongs to a non-pedigreed community that amasses a true cultural meaning. Mijares was aware that emulating it in concrete made no sense. That that option was neither sensitive nor genuine, nor therefore, architectural. It would have been an equivocal attempt which, in addition to destroying the identity of a community, would only have produced an inanimate construction.

The play on words, JAI TEK, only aims to point out the existing link between architectural works and the communities that they serve, because they are identifiable in them. Hence, the case studies may be either vernacular or contemporary architecture, or anonymous or signature architecture. But always under the premise that the community appropriates the architecture, that technology becomes culture.

The term, *jai*, on evoking the festive meaning, refers to the group, to the community. A meaning that is lacking in the term *high*. For the specific cases that concern us, we could specify that neither the African caryatid nor the Basque caryatid we provide (Figures 13 and 14) are, in terms of execution, either specialised or virtuous, but rather they adhere better to the name *jai*. And that the ladylike caryatid alluded by Rudofsky, *high* in terms of expertise, are also *jai*. What matters is that all of them belong to communities, and that they are the expression of eras with a real cultural meaning. And that they amalgamate art and architecture. They are not *museum pieces in our eyes*. The support function they undertake rejects any other interpretation. They cannot be removed from that place. It is their place.

Figures 13 and 14. *Caryatid Supporting the Ridge of Arrillaga Haundi Farm*



Source: <https://www.guregipuzkoa.eus/es/> KO:73035:39x KO:73035:44.

The caryatid exhibited in the British Museum, which, together with her sisters, supported the frieze of the tribune, used to face the Parthenon. The argument that the Greeks are not capable of preserving the art that they inherited from their ancestors is not upheld. They should have taken all of them, with the Erechtheum. And the entire Parthenon, not just the friezes. So that the caryatid would have something to look at. What sort of stupid argument is that? Surprisingly, reality surpasses fiction. According to Mercouri, they thought about moving the entire Erechtheum. “Lord Elgin asked for a ship to be sent, but at that moment no ship was available. (Imagine if it had been).”

The heritage protection acts, in Greece and elsewhere, are unfortunately, recent. They are alright, but they do not have a retroactive effect, they have nothing to do with art. Near our School of Architecture we have a case study of a *superbly underdeveloped caryatid*. Since 1740, a wooden caryatid supports the ridge of the roof of the Arrillaga Haundi farm. In Basque Country farms, the medium used to carve ornamentation and decoration was wood. Although the human figure is very scarce, there are some interesting exceptions from the 17th and 18th centuries (Santana, A. 1993). The farm owners cannot make any

transformation without authorisation from the technicians from the heritage department of the Regional Council of Gipuzkoa. Our caryatid is untouchable.

However, although generally speaking, the situation regarding the preservation and protection of architectural heritage has improved, isn't it disturbing that this paper, and any other presented at international conferences, has to be written in English? Mercouri, during her speech to the Oxford Union, actually apologised for her accent, even joking about the subject she was talking about! "Even a voice with my poor accent. I hear it and I wince. I am reminded of what Brendan Behan once said of a certain broadcaster: He speaks as if he had the Elgin Marbles in his mouth". Should we laugh? What "mur" would André Breton design to question this invasive, and not just linguistic but allegedly cultural, fact?

We could compose a "mur" emulating a panopticon of crosses, Union Jack, sticking photographs to the galleries of the looting of other cultures, painting the background with the colours of the flag, and hanging the next number of the magazine, *The Third Eye*, from the centre sight, with its inside pages blank. And a pencil, of course.

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