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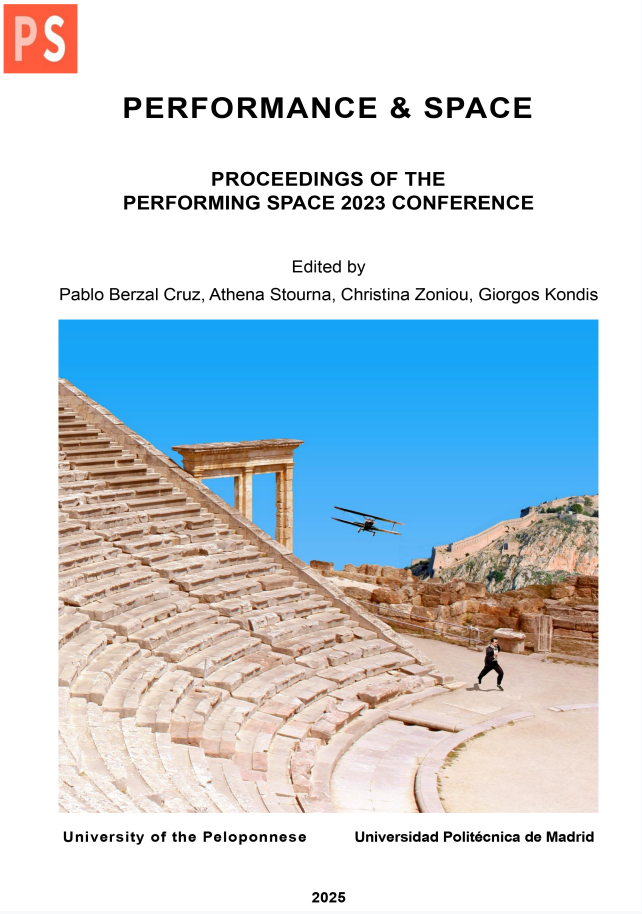

De – form to Re – form. Architectural Preservation as Safekeeping of the Performative Structure of Space

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De – form to Re – form. Architectural Preservation as Safekeeping of the Performative Structure of Space: An Experimental Study for the Temple of Apollo Epicurius at Bassae

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Abstract

The paper discusses how classical Greek architecture can be and has been used as an example of a primordial ontological structure founded on dynamic relationships between the acting human beings and their environment. In this frame we characterize classical Greek architecture as “performative” as its rationale can be described as an articulation of scenes that resonate cultural narratives through the bodily experience of its material presence in a similar sense with the scenes in a performance. Although such an ontological structure was largely articulated and discussed in the philosophy of the 20th century, the paper attempts to identify traces of such conceptions in the 18th and 19th century architectural discourse, especially in the design principles of English gardens and the notion of picturesque. Following texts by Choisy and later Eisenstein we study how classical Greek monuments are used as examples to represent architectural space as a dramatic / performative sequence. From there we move on to show how the common preservation practices (anastylosis) and policies concerning ancient monuments in Greece conceal this dimension and contribute, along with other aspects of modern culture, to the reduction of monuments to mere objects rather than vibrant storytelling material entities. The research concludes with a brief presentation of an experimental design project that takes as a case study the Temple of Apollo Epicurius at Bassae. The project attempts to reconcile the practices of preservation with the scenographic/performative character of classical architecture discussed in the paper. To support this objective, it prioritizes the

“anastylosis” of articulated scenes that occur as visitors experience these spaces, rather than solely focusing on the “anastylosis” of the material form. Simultaneously, it investigates the possibility of monuments reclaiming a vivid place in contemporary culture and everyday life, aiming to engage with active users rather than passive tourists / visitors. The project draws inspiration from the very practices of anastylosis in order to create spatial conditions that can allow the reception of contemporary uses.

Keywords: Performative, picturesque, preservation, anastylosis, classical architecture, Temple of Apollo Epikourios.

The Shift towards the Moving Body in the 18th and 19th Century Architectural Discourse

During the 18th century, a significant shift occurred in landscape and architectural design, particularly evident in the transition from French to English gardens. The French formal gardens emerged as a type during the 17th century following the ideals of the Italian Renaissance gardens emphasizing symmetry and geometric clarity to create visually harmonious compositions. The elements and structures of the gardens were aligned along central axes to create a sense of order and balance. The English garden emerged during the 18th century and signified a departure from the previous formal and geometric designs culminating in the French garden. These gardens created a seemingly natural landscape with gently rolling lawns, curving paths, and strategically placed trees and shrubs. The design principles of English gardens not only represented a new approach to landscape architecture but also signified a shift from the abstract mathematical and geometrical world-structure of the Renaissance, which referred to a divine and absolute order of Creation, to a more anthropocentric, empirical, and relative perspective. This transition led to a heightened emphasis on the role of the body and movement within the architectural discourse of this period.

The composition of an English garden can be described as a carefully curated sequence of scenes that a stroller encounters as he/she moves through the landscape. The material and symbolic arrangement of these scenes resembles the structure of a theatrical performance. One of the first scholars who contributed to the development of such ideas in architectural discourse was the English architect Robert Morris (1701-1754). While Morris's writings primarily focused on the prominence of the site as the primary source of creativity, his design principles and emphasis on context can be seen as an early contribution to the broader understanding of architecture through bodily movement. Morris used the term “situation” to address the

identifiable character of a place that design must respond to (Morris, 1736). He provided a series of design principles that guide the form of the architectural and landscape elements in order to respond to various “situations” based on studies of perspective views following possible routes of visitors. The predominance of eye-leveled perspective scenes aligns with the idea that the experience of architecture is deeply connected to our spatial bodily existence. David Leatherbarrow (1985, 53) comments that “garden design was seen by Morris as the business of structuring controlled views of specific situations. The idea of prospect is implied in the idea of the situation, and situation should be experienced through prospect”.

This transitional epoch for design can be briefly described as a shift from the conception of space through plan to the conception of space through perspective, section and elevation which reflect more the embodied experience of space (Bois & Shepley, 1984, 37). This transition is related and discussed in parallel with the notion of “picturesque” which was introduced in English literature by William Gilpin. Gilpin (1792, xii) defined picturesque as "a term expressive of that peculiar kind of beauty, which is agreeable in a picture". The connection between the emergence of English garden design as a series of carefully studied scenes and the notion of the picturesque is elucidated by Bois and Shepley, who note that the picturesque primarily emphasizes “the importance accorded to the movement of the spectator” (1984, 42).

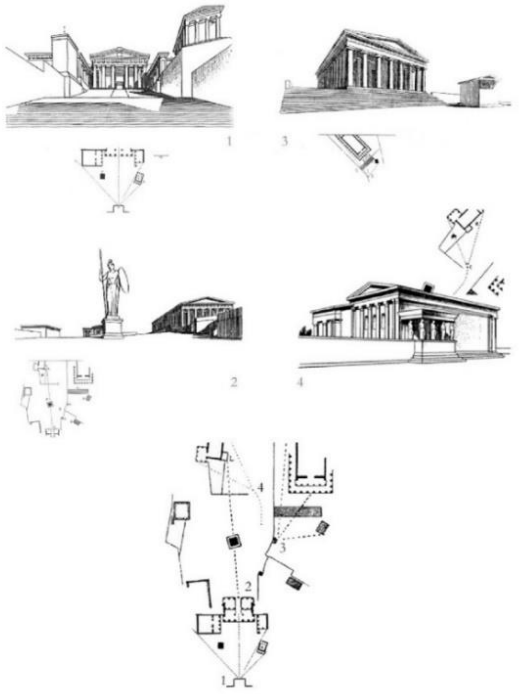
Auguste Choisy's Analysis of the Acropolis

After the establishment of the independent Greek state in 1830, the access to Greek antiquities from Western researchers became easier, facilitating more extensive and detailed studies. During the Renaissance, classical Greek architecture was considered the perfect example of order and balance. However, the closer studies during the 19th century revealed a series of irregularities and asymmetries, particularly evident in the general layout of the structures on a site. Alexis Paccard ([1845] 1982, 351) writes about the layout of the Acropolis of Athens that “one can . . . certify that there never was a general aesthetic arrangement either to relate the buildings together or to arrive in a worthy manner to the different levels on which the temples are built”. Even more unsettling was the discovery that the buildings had no straight lines; instead, their form was defined by convex curvatures. This raised questions about the attribution of principles such as symmetry, balance, and order to classical Greek architecture within the 19th-century architectural discourse.

The discovery of irregularities in classical Greek architecture coincided with the development of the “picturesque” discourse in England. The notion of the picturesque, with its emphasis on human perception, provided alternative definitions of balance and symmetry based

on perspective views, opening the possibility for irregular geometric forms to be conceived as harmonious and intentional. The Scottish architectural historian James Fergusson was one of the first who related the irregularities found in classical architecture with the concept of picturesque. Richard Etlin (1987, 268) notes that “according to Fergusson, “picturesque irregularity” provided the “true principles of design” and constituted the basis of Egyptian, Hindu, Persian, Greek, and Gothic architecture. Irregularity, through articulation of form and massing, asymmetrical grouping, and nonalignment of axes, was a principle common "to all true styles of art”.

The most distinctive and influential attempt to relate the irregularities of classical Greek architecture with the notion of picturesque is Auguste Choisy’s analysis of the Acropolis of Athens. Choisy writes, “the apparent asymmetries are only the means for enhancing the picturesque and making the most skillfully balanced architectural composition that ever was” (1899, 413). Choisy demonstrated that approximately 7.5 meters to the left of the central long axis of the Parthenon, the curved geometries of the steps leading to the temple appear straight due to perspective distortions. Subsequently, he argued that there are four points along the path to the Acropolis that similarly provide a visual balance for the irregularities of the forms and layout when viewed in perspective (Figure 1).



1. Point in front of Propylea, **2.** Point in front of the statue of Athena Promachos right after Propylaea, **3.** Point left of the central long axis of the Parthenon, **4.** Point in between the Parthenon and the Erechtheion.

Figure 1

Auguste Choisy’s Analysis of Acropolis. Choisy (1899, 414 – 418)

Eisenstein's Contribution

Less than half a century after the publication of Choisy's *Histoire de l'Architecture*, somewhere between 1937 and 1940, the Soviet film director Sergei M. Eisenstein wrote a text that would later be discovered and published in 1989 under the title "Montage and Architecture". In his text, Eisenstein discusses examples from the history of art and architecture through the lenses of cinematography and the technique of montage. He argues that genuine perception of these compositions requires an understanding of the sequence of scenes through spatial movement rather than a static, abstract, and geometric analysis. The main two examples he uses are the Acropolis of Athens and the ciborium of St. Peter's Basilica in Vatican City.

In the case of the Acropolis Eisenstein does not provide any original comments on the matter and he quotes uncut Choisy's analysis. The contribution of his text is rather concealed in the point of view and the context that he uses the Acropolis and St. Peter's ciborium as examples of montage theory. By placing these examples in this heterogeneous context, outside the institutional architectural discourse where they have commonly been discussed, Eisenstein implies a swift understanding of the guiding forces behind such compositions.

Despite the performative dimension of the perspective views of a stroller as presented in Morris' design principles and Choisy's analysis of the Acropolis, the concept of the "scene," as discussed by these authors, was nevertheless determined by geometric and mathematical principles rooted in the modern science of optics and perspective. Although Eisenstein does not discard the significance of the geometrical structure of scenes, he mainly focuses on the formation of a narrative that emerges from this sequence within a specific spatial and cultural context. In the introduction of the publication of Eisenstein's text, Bois notes that "Eisenstein's interest in contextualization should be stressed, for it was certainly not a common feat at the time. Until quite recently, art history was content to analyze individual works of art without checking the signification their spatial placement in an ensemble could entail: again, Eisenstein's heterogeneous approach led the way" (1989, 115).

The key idea in Eisenstein's text is displayed in his closing paragraph. Eisenstein (1989, 129) writes that the examples he uses "link montage technique with architecture [and] they vividly underline the even closer, immediate link, within montage, between *mise-en-cadre* and *mise-en-scène*". *"Mise-en-cadre"* as a term refers to the framing and layout of a single shot. It describes the arrangement of the objects that are visible in the scene thus it can be perceived as its geometric structure. "*Mise-en-scène"* is a broader term and refers to the overall visual design and staging of a scene. It encompasses not only the framing of the shot but also other

visible or invisible aspects such as lighting, the atmosphere, the storyline etc. Thus, *mise-en-scène* is the complete "situation" in which the meaning of a scene emerges.

Choisy's perspectival analysis of the Acropolis following the notion of picturesque led to the reconciliation of the irregularities of the form and layout of classical architecture with the abstract principles of geometric determinism instead of proposing an altogether different compositional model. Consequently, in 1936, the Greek architect Konstantinos Doxiadis published his doctoral dissertation entitled *Die Raumgestaltung im Griechischen Städtebau* [Spatial design in [ancient] Greek urban planning] where under the influence of Choisy he suggested a general geometric determinism that guides the design of all cities and acropolises of classical Greece. Here we need to identify a tension between the mathematical explanation of Choisy and its dogmatic expansion by Doxiadis on the one side and Eisenstein's narrating interpretation on the other. The argument of the predominance of mathematical structure of classical architecture falls into an anachronism as it presupposes a modern ontological view as many scholars have pointed out. Konstantinos Tsiambaos (2021, Ch. 3) discussing Doxiadis' theory notes that "the very construction of the subject / observer that Doxiadis introduces presupposes a clear distinction between subject and object, which, Gérard Simon (1988, 32) points out, is not found in antiquity, but is introduced first time with Descartes and his *Dioptrique.*[1]"

Eisenstein's text and Doxiadis' dissertation, written about the same time, can be seen as opposites. Eisenstein provides an alternative compositional model of classical architecture that Choisy missed because of his anachronistic use of modern optics and his insistence to abstract mathematical perspectivism. In contrast to the implied neutral eye obedient to the mathematics of optics, Eisenstein's model renders as the driving force of design of classical architecture the narrative which emerges through the bodily movement and action in a physical and cultural environment. In this frame, the design can deviate from norms and embrace "irregularities" to respond to the "situation" without being driven by mathematical reasoning. Ultimately, we suggest that it is more appropriate to perceive classical architecture through a more primordial ontology founded on dynamic relationships between the acting human beings and their environment. This is an ontology closer to contemporary theories of phenomenology and philosophical hermeneutics where space is articulated within a play.[2] In that sense we will

[1] Translation from the Greek original by the author.

[2] In the 20th century a dynamic ontology was introduced mainly within continental philosophy, going beyond the traditional ontology of substance and objective being. According to Martin Heidegger's "hermeneutic phenomenology" in *Being and Time* (1926) the articulation of world emerges primarily through the interplay of the purposive openness of human existence towards the material environment of life. Ontologically, both the self and the external things, are established inseparable, in mutual interdependency, through the performative acting of (human) life, establishing as primary relation the

characterize the latent ontological structure of classical architecture as “performative” as its rationale lies in the articulation of scenes that resonate cultural narratives through the bodily experience of its material presence.

The Tension between Preservation and Performativity

Moving on, we will examine the extent to which our contemporary preservation practices enable a performative/scenographic interpretation of classical architecture. In Greece, the general approach towards the preservation of monuments follows the principles of “anastylosis”. “Anastylosis” is a term used in the field of architectural conservation to describe a specific method of restoration of historic structures. It involves disassembling and reassembling the original elements of a ruined structure in order to reproduce its original form. The goal of anastylosis is to reconstruct the physical structure accurately using its original materials or accurate replicas of the lost parts.

The evaluation of anastylosis as a legitimate method of preservation is beyond the remit and interest of this paper. What matters here is to unpack its impact over our perception of architecture and space. Dimakopoulos (1985,16) notes that the generic meaning of the word “anastylosis” corresponds “to an attempt to put an end to heretical views and to oblige all to return to 'correct' beliefs, espoused by the majority”. In the context of architecture, anastylosis is searching for the “correct” formal reconstruction of a monument.

The practices of anastylosis are responsible for a lasting transformation of monuments to construction sites. The necessary interventions, intended to temporarily alter monuments, often become rather “permanent” due to the complexity of the required endeavors, making completion within a lifetime unlikely. Additionally, as historical research progresses, new opinions about the “original form” emerge, sometimes evincing errors in anastylosis projects. We should not omit also that this promise of the original is always under the control of modern aesthetics and its discomfort for example about the discovery of the use of color in classical Greek architecture.

Overall, the discourse developed around monuments in the context of anastylosis promotes an institutional discussion of form and style and thus the monuments progressively become dead objects referring only to their past life. To claim a performative understanding of our monuments we need to be able to develop much more vivid relationships with them. It is

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being-in-the world. In *Building, Dwelling,Thinking* (1951) Heidegger sets dwelling as the prototype of such performative action of being-in-the world. H. - G. Gadamer also demonstrates in "Truth and Method" (1960, part I, Ch. 2.1) how the performative nature of a play can serve as a model for a dynamic material articulation of space.

interesting that today the main archeological sites in Greece that remain more actively parts of our everyday life are the theaters. The reasons behind this cannot only be related to their structural preservation but most importantly to the “preservation” of their role in our culture. In cases where the function of the sites is not ingrained in our culture, we face challenges in reimagining a connection between form and meaning that can resonate with our everyday life, fostering a vibrant, performative interaction and experience.

Policies, Commercialization and Monuments

Archeological sites can be “rented” for the accommodation of “cultural events” with an application to the Greek Archaeological Service of the Ministry of Culture (LAW No. 4447, Article 27). Based on the law that describes the specifications of these events, the general guidance is that there must be no interaction with the artifacts on site and thus the material presence of the monuments is outlined as just a backdrop, an inert object in space. Even though hosting events in archeological sites is becoming an opportunity of experiencing a more vibrant relationship with these spaces, the “renting” of monuments as venues along with the implementation of entrance fees in various archaeological sites and the overall tourist exploitation, is manifesting not only a shift in the perception of monuments as mere objects through their preservation practices, but also their political transformation into commodities. It is worth mentioning the debate opened in 2017 when the fashion house Gucci offered 2 million euro to hold a fashion show on the Acropolis which was rejected by the Central Archaeological Council. The main argument of the council was that the Acropolis “cannot be the subject of commercial transactions” (Nazif, 2017). However, there were many voices against that argument supporting that our monuments have already been commercialized and this is a pointless and retrogressive resistance that further disconnects them from the everyday life.

Conclusion: A Design Response

We will conclude our analysis by discussing an experimental design project that we developed as part of the Fall 2022 option design studio “Subverting Heritage” in Cornell University. Taking the Temple of Apollo Epicurius at Bassae in the Peloponnese as a case study, our project attempts to reconcile the practices of preservation with the scenographic/performative foundation of classical architecture, as suggested in this paper following Eisenstein's thinking. To support this objective, the project will prioritize the “anastylosis” of articulated scenes that occur as visitors experience these spaces, rather than solely focusing on the “anastylosis” of the

material form. Simultaneously, we investigate the possibility of monuments reclaiming a vivid place in contemporary culture and everyday life, aiming to engage with active users rather than passive tourists / visitors. The project draws inspiration from the very practices of anastylosis in order to create spatial conditions that can allow the reception of contemporary uses; mainly following the timid attempts happening in Greece today to use archeological sites for performances and events.

Temple of Apollo Epicurius at Basses: History & Design

The Temple was constructed around 420 BC under Iktinos, the architect of the Parthenon, at the slopes of Kotylion Mountain at 1.131 meters altitude. Due to its unique architectural characteristics and its good preservation, the Temple was the first site in Greece that was included in UNESCO's world heritage list in 1986, one year before the Acropolis of Athens. The Temple was well-preserved because of its remote location. Throughout the Byzantine and the Ottoman period, the Temple was abandoned. In the 18th century, the discovery of the site from European travelers brought new attention to the Temple. This resulted in significant raiding and looting of the Temple most importantly the abduction of its frieze, now part of the collection of the British museum.

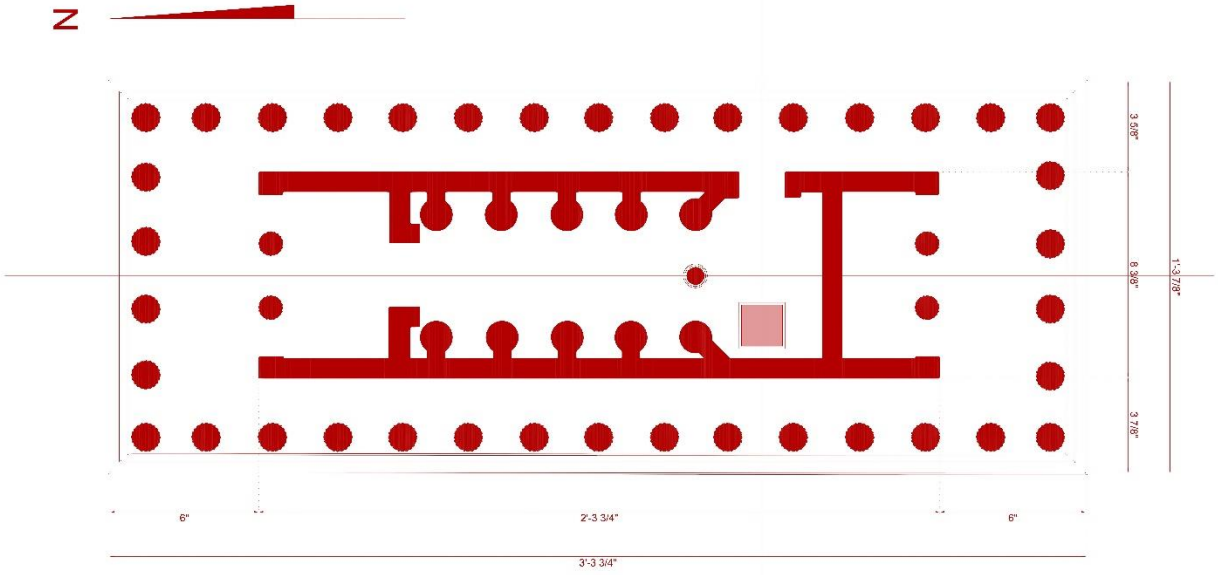
Figure 2

(left) Exterior View of the Canopy (right) View of the Temple Under the Canopy. (Photographs by the authors)

The anastylosis of the Temple began in the early 20th century and had to face numerous challenges including the high altitude, intense weather conditions and the frequent seismic activity. These led to the installation of a metallic anti-seismic system in 1985 and the construction of a canopy in 1987, completely covering the Temple to provide protection from the weather (Figure 2). These interventions fundamentally altered the experience of the monument by significantly disrupting its compositional integrity. Even though the Temple today is open to the public with a rather small entrance fee, its remote location and diminished aesthetic value due to the canopy, have hindered its touristic appeal, making it a relatively obscure monument of Greece.

Figure 3

Plan of the Temple Apollo Epicurius at Basses. (Author's drawing)



The temple of Apollo features a series of “irregularities” in its design that go against the standard principles of classical architecture. The Temple has a doric peristyle of six by fifteen columns not following the common rule of 2N+1 (N = the number of columns in the short side of a temple) (Figure 3). The Temple also deviates from the typical east-west alignment found in most Greek temples, instead being oriented north-south. The floor plan adheres to the standard three-section layout (pronaos, naos, and opisthodomos). However, its design implementation incorporates numerous distinctive elements. The temple is a rare example that combines all three Greek orders: doric (in the exterior arcade), Ionic (for the interior semi-columns), and one Corinthian column at the central axis on the south side of the naos, the earliest example of the order found to date, standing where the statue of the god was usually placed; while, the statue of Apollo was placed on the west side of Adyton facing a large opening on the east wall.

Using Eisenstein’s idea of montage, these irregularities of the design will be interpreted as deliberate spatial decisions that structure a narrative whose meaning emerges from the life, setting and the bodily experience of the Temple. Apollo was the god of sun and thus the interplay of form and light is key to unpack the meaning of the “scenes” of the Temple. The architect staged a spatial performance in which the morning light, entering from the opening in the east wall, illuminates the statue of the god, which is rotated to face the opening instead of the long axis of the temple (Figure 4). The presence of a new type of capital in the Temple supports this interpretation, with many scholars suggesting also that the Corinthian order emerged as an abstract symbolism of Apollo, following the architect’s attempt to reconcile the

traditional placement of the statue on the long axis with the staging of the scene of the statue facing the east opening.

Figure 4

Etching of the Temple of Apollo Epicurius Interior. Cockerell (1860, 59)

Antonios Thodis (2018) who thoroughly studied the lighting conditions of the Temple in his chapter insightfully named “Apollo and the solar drama” proves that even the debate concerning the existence of an opening on the roof of the temple would not have a significant impact in the “staged” lighting of the Statue. Moreover, following the drawings of his study we can see that the most direct light towards the statue from the east opening takes place between the summer solstice and the fall equinox coinciding with the period that Apollo was celebrated in the region. The integrity of this main “scene” was dissolved along with the collapsing of the roof, the walls and the columns of the temple; however, since the construction of the canopy in 1987 the “solar drama” has been officially ended as the temple is permanently shaded.

De-form to Re-form

Our speculative design for the Temple is inspired by the crane systems used in anastylosis to dismantle structures into parts allowing the position of newly discovered pieces in their original place (Figure 5). We envisage a large-scale crane system consisting of four cranes based on

large pillars, that constantly suspends the temple's columns and walls slightly above its plinth (Figure 6). These cranes allow for the vertical movement of the columns and walls, while a grid of I-beams creates a rail system for horizontal movement, enabling the columns and walls to be shifted to the sides and slide inside the designed arcade surrounding the temple. The thick rectangular prism covering the Temple follows the outline of the original and now missing roof providing light and shade conditions similar with these of the original structure while providing partial protection from the weather (Figures 7-8).

In antiquity, the magnitude of the Temple was extended beyond the nearby village of ancient Figaleia as the fests for Apollo taking place in August attracted pilgrims from many major cities of Peloponnese. The idea of an annual event that attracts visitors to the Temple is used to help us reimagine a liveliness of the site today despite its remoteness from modern cities. Following the timid contemporary intention of using archeological sites as performing spaces, we are proposing a summer festival held on site that climaxes in August.

The abundance of spatial alternatives and layouts enabled by the movement of pieces from the cranes and rails system open the possibilities of hosting a plethora of events. The polyvalence of form liberates the space from symbolic burdens and provides a "bridge" between the conflicting aspects of cultural heritage and commercialization. The movement of pieces allows the creation of new spaces that can facilitate uses where the material dimension of the temple’s elements overcome their inherited cultural one (Figures 9 - 10). Ultimately, the temple is not imagined only as a space for hosting performances, but as a performer itself. The movement of pieces is empowered by additional pulleys that extend the possibilities of movement under a vogue fantasy of a “dancing temple” (Figures 11-13).

Figure 5

(left) Crane and Pulley System Used in Anastylosis of Acropolis. (Author's photograph) (right) Anastylosis Works in the Temple of Apollo. Giotis (2020)

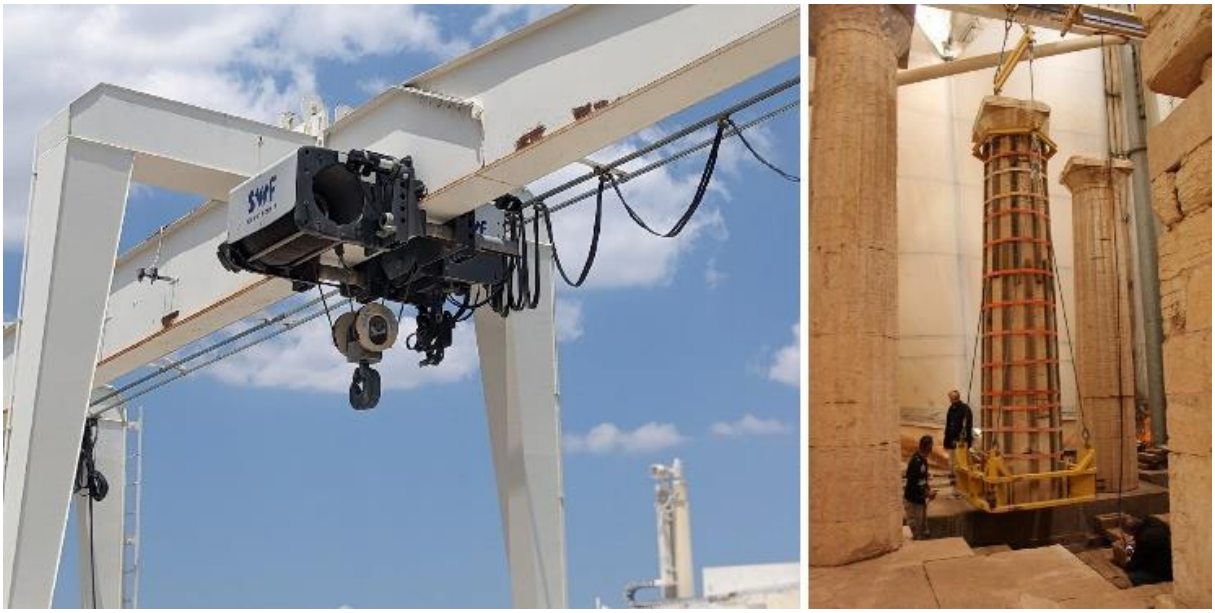


Figure 6

Hybrid Drawing of the Proposal (Author's drawing)

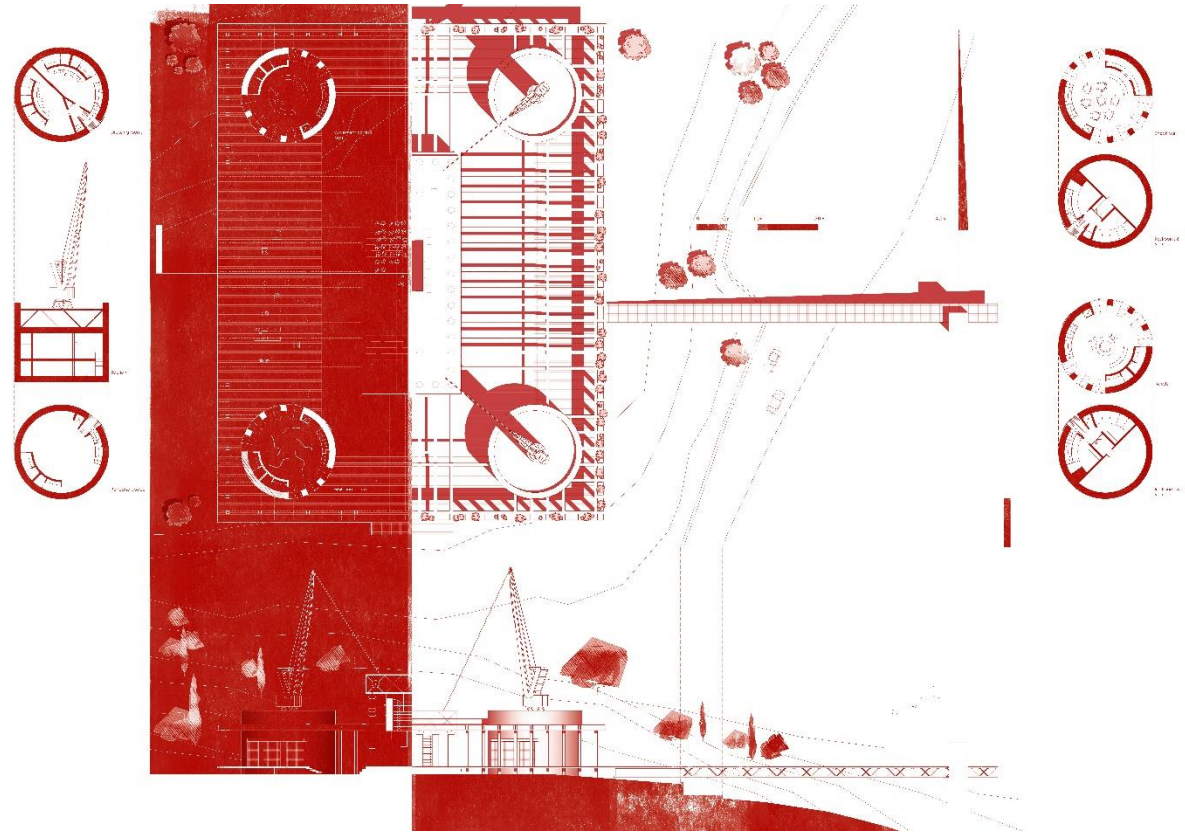


Figure 7

Exterior View (Author's drawing)

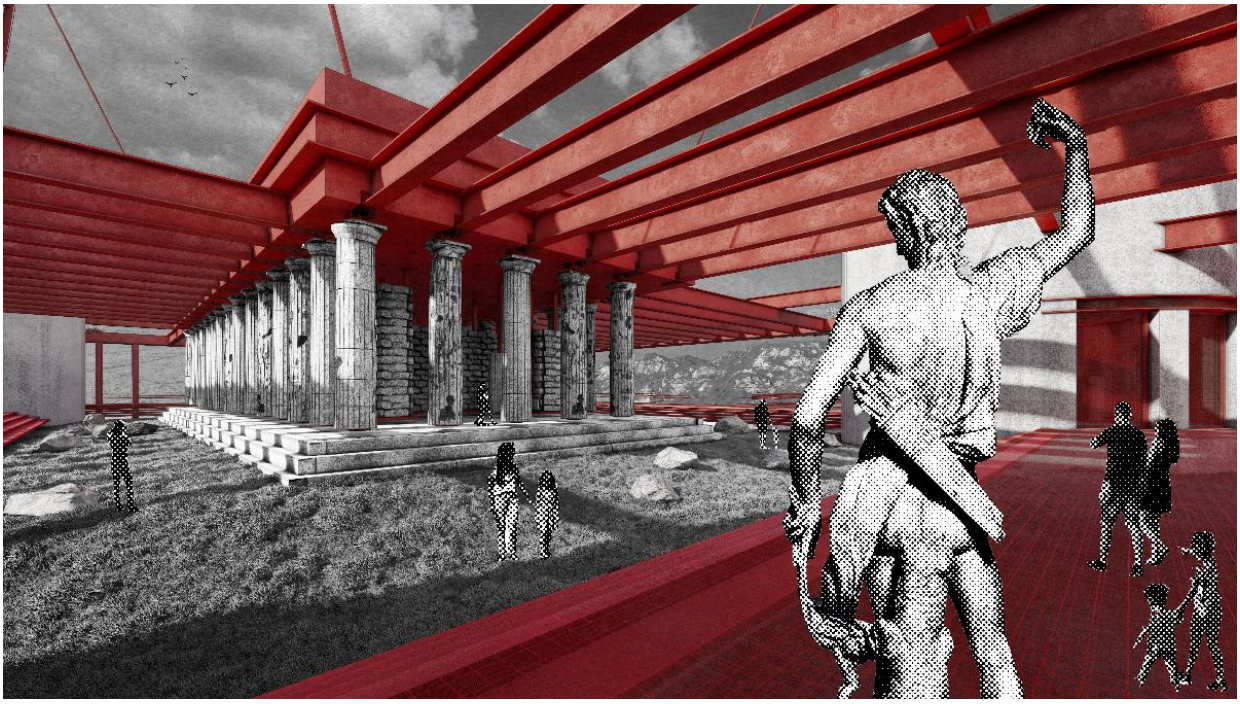


Figure 8

East Opening of Adyton – Recommencement of the Solar Drama (Author's drawing)

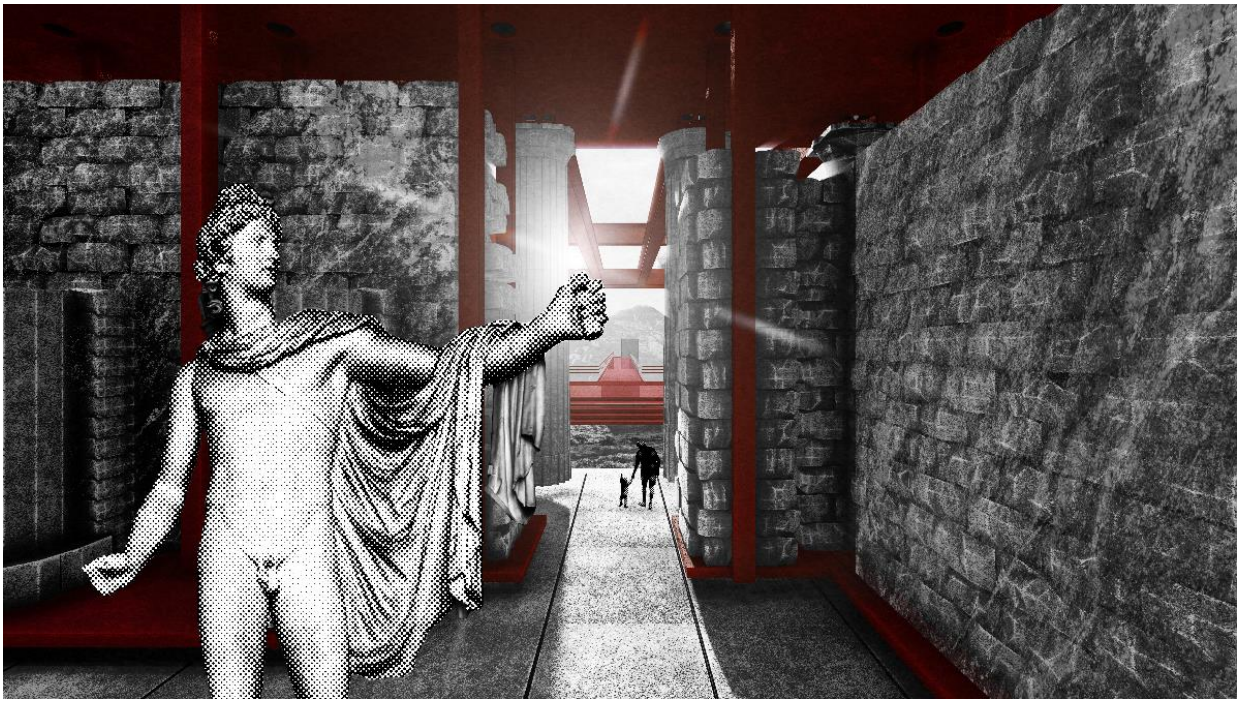


Figure 9

Runway at the Perimeter of the Temple (Author's drawing)

Figure 10

Art Exhibition at the Arcade Surrounding the Temple (Author's drawing)

Figure 11

Concert at the Temple of Apollo & The Dancing Temple (Author's drawing)

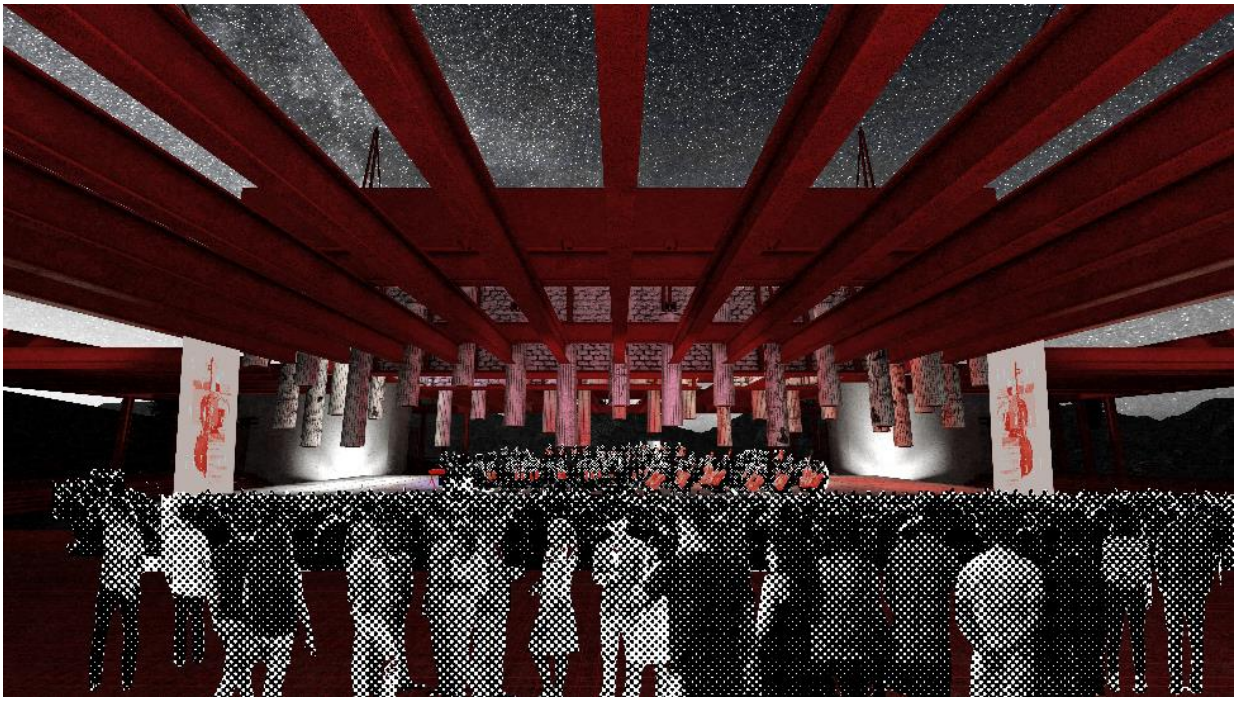
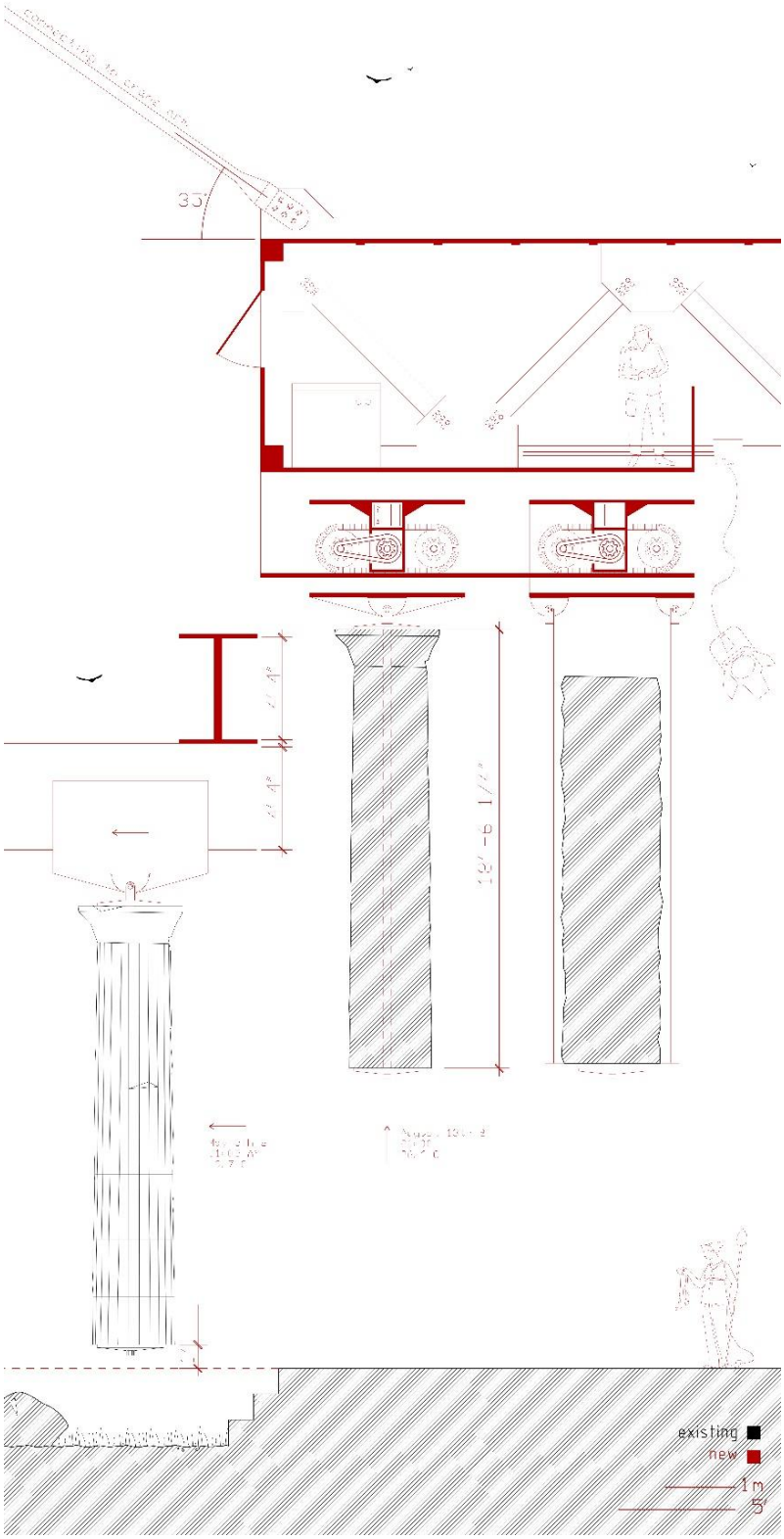


Figure 12

The Temple as a Performer (Author's drawing)

Figure 13

Detail of the Pulley and Crane System for the "transformations" of the Temple (Author's drawing)



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