MUSEUM OF ART VERSUS THE CITY AS A WORK OF ART
A Case of the New Acropolis Museum in Athens

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Abstract
This study is concerned with the New Acropolis Museum, which was opened in June 2009 in Athens. The New Acropolis Museum, out of all of the world’s new museum structures of the past century, has dramatically intensified the issue of the relationship between parts and the whole, between the building and its integration into the setting, between the museum function and the historical city, which is a protected heritage site, one treated as a museum exhibit. With the New Acropolis Museum as an example, the study would like to highlight the complexity and the ambiguity of the present-day relationship between the heritage protection, the museumisation of art and the design of our environment. The particular attention is focused on the vivid debate about the building and the distinguishing the differences between traditionalist and modernist views of architecture manifested in this debate. These differences are deeper rooted than many people have been willing to admit.

Keywords: theory of architecture; museology; architectural conservation; traditionalism; modernism; the Acropolis Museum; Athens.

INTRODUCTION
At the beginning of the third millennium, museums certainly rank among the most prestigious architectonic themes. Unlike any other building type, the museum has retained its privilege to be a piece of art. Apartments, offices and shops, athletic facilities, cinemas and other entertainment facilities, even town halls and churches – all of these were able to be placed into the simplest aluminum or concrete boxes, thrown about open landscapes, while new buildings for museums were always given special attention and care. Because the construction of museums is so closely observed and so often commented upon, during these discussions opposing desires and conceptions of artistic values of architecture are exposed, to an extent and clarity which is unusual elsewhere.

This study is concerned with the New Acropolis Museum, which was opened in June 2009 in Athens. The building became the new, and controversial, feature dominating the cityscape. In its dimensions and shape, it challenges the key icon of the historical centre of Athens – the Parthenon temple on the holy mount of the Acropolis. The New Acropolis Museum, out of all of the world’s new museum structures of the past century, has dramatically intensified the issue of the relationship between parts and the whole, between the building and its integration into the setting, between the museum and the historical city, which is a protected heritage site, one treated as a museum exhibit. The story of the museum invites to an examination of the ambiguous relationship of the art museum institution and its architecture toward the urban structure which serves as its backdrop and which is itself regarded as an artwork. With the New Acropolis Museum as an example, the study would like to highlight the complexity and the ambiguity of the present-day relationship between the heritage protection, the museumisation of art and the design of our environment. The particular attention is focused on the vivid debate about the building and the distinguishing the differences between traditionalist and modernist views of architecture manifested in this debate. As we will see, these differences are unfortunately deeper rooted than many people have been willing to admit.
THE NEW ACROPOLIS MUSEUM IN ATHENS

Here are the facts: the Acropolis Museum was founded in 1865 with the goal of housing and exhibiting the archaeological finds from the Acropolis, its slopes and foothills. The museum building, situated directly on the Acropolis, was rebuilt in the 1950s by the Greek architect Patroklos Karantinos in an unobtrusive modernist style. Its capacity was soon exhausted. There was a call for new spaces, also caused by another motive, this time a political one – a hope for the return of what have come to be called the Elgin Marbles. The British, who have been exhibiting these sculptural fragments from the Acropolis in London since 1817, had so far refused the requests of the Greeks for their return, claiming that Greece was missing an appropriate space in which to exhibit them.

Thus in 1974 the Greek prime minister, Constantinos Karamanlis, called for the construction of a new, larger, and more impressive museum. Its required size would rule out placement directly at the Acropolis; however the building should be connected visually with the hill. The Makrygianni parcel was suggested, an extensive trapezoidal plot used by the military, with various constructions along the southeast foot of the Acropolis (a hospital, barracks, churches, several family homes and apartment houses from the XIXth century and the interwar period of the XXth century) (Loukaki, 2008, pp. 284–287). It was not until the fourth competition for the project, which took place in 2000, that a design led to actual construction. The new museum was supposed to be opened in 2004, the year in which the Olympic Games took place in Athens. Similar to the architecture of the athletic stadiums planned for the games, the architecture of the museum was supposed to express the progress and the dynamism of Greek society and of the metropolis. In both cases thus a futuristic design was proposed. Only avant-garde, mostly deconstruction-oriented star architects were approached – and the Swiss-born American architect Bernard Tschumi was selected.

Figure 1: Bernard Tschumi – Michael Photiadis, the New Acropolis Museum, Athens, 2000–2009. In the foreground behind the big trees there is the pair of houses once intended for demolition (Source: Author, 2009).
Tschumi joined up with Greek architect Michael Photiadis. They designed a colossal building in the centre of the parcel, made up of an irregular two-storey prism on the trapezoidal plot, on which a rectangular block is placed with orientation copying that of the Parthenon and with similar dimensions to the temple. A smaller trapezoidal, two-terrace sandwich is connected with the basic body, narrowing to point in the direction of the Acropolis [Fig. 1]. The lower terrace, with a cut opening looking out onto the archaeological excavations, functions as the entrance to the museum [Fig. 2]; the top terrace is used as a café with a view. The entire structure is raised above the terrain on pillars, set into the foundation so as to reduce damage to the excavations and also so that the structure could better withstand earthquakes. The museum was opened to visitors on 20 June 2009. It expected to attract about two million visitors yearly and to significantly increase the tourist trade, which employs roughly one-fifth of the country’s inhabitants (McGrath, 2009). In fact, approximately 1.3 million visitors came in 2010 and then again in 2011. Although the estimate was higher, the museum became the most popular tourist spot in Greece, even frequently visited than the Acropolis hill (The new Acropolis Museum, 2011).

Figure 2: New Acropolis Museum, entrance, with view of uncovered excavations (Source: Author, 2009).

Simplicity and transparency characterize both the ground plan of the museum, and also the exhibition concept and the materials used (exposed concrete, corrugated metal, and glass in huge, undivided spaces). A ramp and a moving staircase lead the visitor from the ground floor with services to the first floor with exhibitions of pre-Classical and Classical artifacts in one continuous space, circling the perimeter of the building and segmented only by the rhythm of concrete load-carrying columns and neutral pedestals. The path culminates in the second storey, where there is a replica of the Parthenon entablatures, with sculptures which are original (owned by the museum), or plaster casts (from those in the British Museum, occasionally from other world collections). The plaster casts are presented as a temporary solution, until the originals are returned. The entire glassed façade makes possible the visual confrontation of the exhibits with
their original environment. At night the illumination transforms the museum into a gigantic antique shop display window.

Out of the existing buildings on the parcel the former military hospital (in Byzantine style, from 1834) was preserved, also one small church and a part of another church, three one-storey Classicist homes facing the street and two three-storey apartment houses from circa 1930. Another 25 buildings were dispossessed and demolished and the plot was surrounded by a wall about 1.5 meters high, topped with a metal fence. The above-mentioned two apartment houses, with marble Classicist and Art Deco façades with sculptural and mosaic decorations (D. Areopagitou street, nos. 17 and 19), partly obscure the higher part of the museum. Their preservation was a condition agreed to by the Central Archaeological Commission regarding construction of the new museum. However in 2007, when the basic building structure was in place, the Greek Ministry of Culture struck the buildings off the list of cultural monuments in view of the fact that they were blocking the view from the museum to the Acropolis. An initiative launched by one of the owners showed that the buildings only partly obscured the view from the museum restaurant on the first storey, not the view from the higher floor with the exhibition of the Parthenon [Fig. 3]. A petition for saving the buildings, with the help of the internet, garnered 48,000 signatures from Greece and abroad, and also the support of international heritage conservation agencies (ICOMOS, INTBAU) and the International Union of Architects. In 2009 the Greek High Court of Appeals declared the Ministry of Culture decree to remove the protected status of the apartment buildings invalid. A citizens’ initiative strives for an architectonic cultivation of the rear façades of the houses, now within view of the museum, and eventually covering them with greenery; a prominent architect of vertical gardens, Patrick Blanc (CaixaForum in Madrid, Musée du quai Branly in Paris), was mentioned in the discussions (Campbell, 2007; Kitsos, 2007–2008; A Monument in Danger, 2009). The revealed sidewall of the house at no. 17 is used by the museum as billboard space to promote its events. The construction was subsidized by the European Union; costs came to EUR 129 million.

Figure 3: New Acropolis Museum: view from the highest floor of the exhibition onto the Acropolis. In the center of the frame there are the rear areas of the houses once intended for demolition (Source: Author, 2009).
How does the author explain his work, and what do the critics and the public thinks about it? The project provoked intense and contradictory reactions. Many archaeologists, architects and laymen criticized the form of the building and the proposed demolitions on the site. What about the architect? “I always say that I did not want to imitate Phidias, but to think like Pythagoras,” said Bernard Tschumi on the New Acropolis Museum.

Architecture is the ‘materialisation’ of a concept. It is always very much about a logic, as well as the simplicity and the clarity of the expression. So if La Villette and this building have something in common, it is the clarity of the concept. It is never about fancy shapes… In a way this case is the opposite of Bilbao. (Stathaki, 2008) [Fig. 4]

As opposed to the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, which, after Tschumi, did not have to take a given structure into consideration, in Athens it was necessary “to establish a dialog with that masterpiece of ancient architecture” – i.e., to the Parthenon. This meant above all to permit the viewer visual contact between the exhibits and their original placement on the hill, and to evoke the lighting in which the sculptures were originally perceived. Thus the highest level of the structure is oriented in accordance to the temple, and is all glass, so that the sculptures receive the sun’s rays in the same intensity and color range as if they were in place on the metopes and entablatures of the Parthenon. The architect does not say much regarding the exterior: “We had to consider the sensitive archaeological excavations, the presence of the contemporary city and its street grid.” (Tschumi, 2009) The architect was not engaged in the controversies and the one hundred and four judicial proceedings which were brought about by citizens’ initiatives and archaeologists concerned with the future of the site: “We stood at the side, protected by Professor Pandermalis. (...) I had no doubt that the design was the right one; that it was possible to build something at the site in a beautiful manner” (Atkinson, 2009). Dimitrios Pandermalis, Professor Emeritus of Archaeology at Aristotle University, and Museum Director, became the defender of the project. The result was after him successful:

The design was chosen for its simple, clear, and beautiful solution that is in accord with the beauty and classical simplicity of the Museum’s unique exhibits and that ensures a museological and architectural experience that is relevant today and for the foreseeable future (Atkinson, 2009).

Figure 4: Bilbao, on the right the Guggenheim Museum designed by Frank Gehry, 1993–1997 (Source: Author, 2010).
The New Acropolis Museum is one of the largest museum projects of the first decade of the XXIst century, and as such was carefully scrutinized and held in the spotlight of the media, even during its construction phase (Werner, 2006). Professional critics were divided into three camps. The first expressed unequivocal appreciation. According to Nicolai Ouroussoff (The New York Times) the museum was “a building that is both an enlightening meditation on the Parthenon and a mesmerizing work in its own right” (Ouroussoff, 2007). The popular British critic Jonathan Glancey declared the museum “a geometrical marvel dedicated to the celebration of antiquity” (Glancey, 2007). Perhaps the greatest praise given to it was by the critic in Sculpture magazine: “A building of such singing grace, that calls attention to its contents rather than itself, is like a gift from the gods.” (Durell, 2009) The museum became one of six finalists of the 2011 Mies van der Rohe Award (selected from 343 entries), a prestigious prize awarded by the European Union for the best European work of architecture in the past two years.

In addition to those critics who definitely liked the building, there were those critics who admired the interior, but were taken aback by the exterior. According to Hugh Pearman, an influential critic on modern architecture, the museum was “good inside, disappointing outside”. Pearman was not afraid to base his argument on his own experiences:

> From outside, these do not create the spark, the lift of the soul, that great public buildings achieve. (…) I walked round it time after time and never got a sense of visual coherence. It’s big, it’s fairly clumsy … lacking a level of detail. (Pearman, 2009) [Fig. 5]
The museum “evokes High Modernist commercial American buildings of the 1970s”, wrote Suzanne Stephens in the *Architectural Record*. According to her, “Tschumi rightly resisted pressure to use the Parthenon’s Classical vocabulary”, but he did not maintain the whole – there were some blind spots: “The Herculean columns ... create an odd lack of coherence between pieces and parts, proportions and scale.” And some sloppy work carried out in the exposed concrete detracted from the whole (Stephens, 2009).

Finally, according to a third group, the building represented a fiasco, primarily for the reason that the architect chosen, whose consistent deconstructivist attitude foreclosed any successful solution to the problem of building on this historically important site. According to these critics, the client was to blame, that is the museum management and the Greek government. Alexandra Stara, in *The Architecture Review*, confronting Tschumi’s rhetoric with his result, found empty sophism:

> As with *la Villette*, the abstract geometric constructs that generated the project have little effect on the actual experience. The geometry of the Acropolis suggests a precise understanding of architecture as experienced event, as movement and measure of temporal rhythms – its drawings tell you little of its reality and meaning. With the New Acropolis Museum it is almost exactly the opposite.

The scale was not properly solved, nor the interior space (the entryway evokes “a used-car dealership”), nor the details and the materials used.

> But Tschumi is Tschumi, with a considerable oeuvre, both written and built, that makes his position on architecture abundantly clear. The real question is what were the great and good of this glorious city hoping to achieve when they sat down with him (and long before him) to develop this project, and how can they still stand before us, before this very building, and rehash the same sophistry about light and clarity and you-name-it, as if they have never seen well-made architecture in their lives, and as if this isn’t all happening in the shadow of a certain Acropolis. (Stara, 2009)

The acerbity of this criticism is also surprising because *The Architectural Review* is a journal otherwise inclined toward (neo)avant-garde architecture. The desired qualities (especially the consistent preference for quality of experience as opposed to the concept, and the absence of temporal relativism in the comparison between the museum and the original Acropolis) bring the reviewer close to the arguments of Nikos Salingaros, the leading figure of contemporary traditionally-oriented theory of architecture. According to him, as well, Tschumi “did what he does”; while the Greeks showed how easily one could fall prey to political manipulation, and how easily they sacrificed the authentic values of their art in favor of trendy, imported affectation. The project was supported by the government without heed to right-wing or left-wing orientation; the citizens believed in the futile hope of the return of the Elgin Marbles; lovers of modernist art hoped one powerful gesture would improve the fame of Athens, lacking an interesting new building; advocates of the demolition of the original buildings wanted to show the world that the nation was marching forward into a future without nostalgia for the past. Greece however in all this showed that it remains “still part of the Third World”. Obviously from the commentaries on the catastrophic economic situation of the country at that time, Salingaros was not the only person of Greek origin living abroad who considered his countrymen naïve and irresponsible. Not even the inhabitants of the two buildings which were threatened protested when the Church of St. George was demolished on the parcel. They defended their passivity by higher public interest. Salingaros also underlined his thesis on the incompatibility of deconstructivist and minimalist architecture with permanent, sustainable development and a healthy lifestyle; he pointed to one argument in Tschumi’s written, declarative attempt (in the text *Architecture and Disjunction*, 1994) to transform the feelings of “schizophrenia” and “madness” into architecture (Salingaros, 2007; Salingaros, 2004, pp. 149–155, 170–171).
CLASH
The exploration of the relationship between museum architecture and the cityscape on the basis of this controversy can be broken down into the following five parts:

1. Athens is one of the cities which has its period of most important historic significance behind it. A certain part of the population of such cities, both educated and common, is frustrated by this situation and welcomes radical steps, promising quick reinforcement, or even renaissance, of its former fame. The cultural sphere seems to be the arena for more realistic hope in success than the economic or political spheres, upon which local initiatives have a minimal influence in the globalized world. It proves that spectacular museum buildings can bring about the desired effect.

The monument assets of cities are by their nature limited and visually stabilized. This stability is – usually by the same group of inhabitants mentioned above – perceived negatively, as proof of stagnation. The strategy, when the standard new building by its qualities saturates the need for change by the locals, and at the same time increases credit and creates an attractive goal for visitors, is used minimally. While *the picturesque old town* asserts itself as a product on the marketplace with cultural attractions, a picturesque new town does this rarely, usually just when holiday visitors are taken into account from the start (such as Port Grimaud in the south of France, 1963–2009) [Fig. 6]. However, the main reason is that constructing a town tissue to be as attractive as old towns requires the complex cooperation of town management, private firms, citizens and artists – which in the last half-century has been rare. A single action – such as a launching a large museum – thus represents a relatively simpler way to achieve the two desired goals, which are to reduce the feeling of stagnation for locals, and to be attractive to strangers. Cultural content for a project receives more support among the educated circles, which otherwise would rather distance themselves from the principle of tourism and its economic benefits.
2. The city center of Athens belongs to the first historical areas in the world relatively strictly protected because of its architectural heritage. Under the rule of the Bavarian Wittelsbach dynasty in Greece (1832–1862) and thanks to German architects, a preserved zone of an archaeological park was established around the Acropolis and the Agora. The new, tightly regulated building in Classicist style, increased the feeling of the city as a total work of art, considered one of the most beautiful in Europe (Tung, 2001). However, the Greeks, who during the previous Turkish rule could not own property, fought against the regulations and considered them an expression of German imperialism. With the expulsion of the Germans they ceased to take care of the new development. Especially in the waves of immigrants after the First and Second World Wars, Athens underwent land speculating and building which was not officially sanctioned. Mainly in the 1950s and 1960s, a large portion of the Classicist buildings were demolished and replaced mostly by modernist buildings some five storeys higher in average over the one- or two-storey houses of the XIXth century [Fig. 7].

On the other hand, thanks to the American archaeologists from the American School of Classical Studies, the archaeological park was expanded onto part of the earlier built-up plots of the Agora. Moreover, a reconstruction of the Stoa of Attalos (1953–1956, John Travlos project) was built as a museum and depository for the excavations at the Agora (Thompson, 1992) [Fig. 8]. The complex of the Acropolis, Agora and Philopappos Hill today represents the largest urban pedestrian zone in Europe, where there are fragments of Classical buildings and Byzantine churches presented as a collection of monuments, basically acting as a picturesque park of the
XVIIIth century. The rest of Athens is made up mostly of artistically inferior buildings; a small portion is valuable individually. Nevertheless, it has kept its traditional street layout, which makes the city coherent as a whole.

Figure 8: The Agora from the slopes of the Acropolis: on the right the Church of the Holy Apostles from the eleventh century reconstructed by John Travlos in 1956, and the Stoa of Attalos reconstructed by John Travlos in 1953–1956. (Source: Author, 2009).

Basically the historical city center is understood as a separate zone with a specific functional content, oscillating between a downtown and a museum in situ. In Athens the museum function has prevailed. It has increased the feeling of stasis in relationship to this place and the need for a radical gesture of innovation, paradoxically again connected to the museological function. The institution of the museum as a collection is the result of the same way of thinking as is a conservation area – the modernist idea of zoning, i.e. the idea that it is possible, or even necessary, to concentrate in one place objects of one particular type, in this case pieces of art, aesthetically and historically valuable artifacts. For them a special zone is created – with the contemporarily acknowledged status that outside this zone such objects may not be. The French art theorist Antoine Chrysostôme Quatremère de Quincy at the turn of the XVIIIth and XIXth centuries expressed his opinion that artistic artifacts should be transported from their original locations and put into museums in those cases when being left in situ would damage them (for instance in the case of the Elgin Marbles being taken to London), otherwise he was opposed. He was concerned that in an artificial environment the works would lose their meaning. Quatremère preferred art in situ, integrated into ordinary life. For example, regarding the Roman Campagna he stated that "the landscape itself is a museum" (Sherman, 1994).

3. Quatremère also wrote on art history, that arranging artifacts into chronological order was a method leading to the anesthesia of art itself (Sherman, 1994). Modernist architectural historiography, adds the contemporary British architectural historian David Watkin, encouraged
the replacement of lovely old buildings with unattractive new ones, and defended their appearance by the theory of developmental inevitability of a style not yet seen, a true and contemporary style (Watkin, 2001, pp. 148–149). Its rhetoric often used the notion of “dialogue” in the meaning of dialog of epochs (let us compare it with the statements of Bernard Tschumi and Nicolai Ouroussoff quoted above). Robert Jan van Pelt, the American historian and philosopher of architecture, in observing the architectonic transformations of Chicago, pointed out the destructive role of architectural historiography: “My involvement in the local citizen-based preservation effort revealed to me the destructive role orthodox architectural history plays in our cities.” (Pelt, 1991)

Architectural historians have defended the Athens project. It is difficult to find them mentioning any destructive intention. On the other hand, it should be relatively easy to demonstrate why the new museum building is in disharmony with its surroundings. The building lacks an adaptive design, a hierarchical structure of scale, patterns in common with its neighboring buildings (Salingaros, 2008; Horáček, 2013) [Fig. 9]. The whole conception is deliberately opposite to context and the existing complexity of a historical setting. The patterns that lead to cooperation were ignored in order to make a building stand out instead of blending in. Biophilic elements of traditional architecture in the surroundings are undone by the industrial anti-biophilic forms of the project. Why all that? As Nikos Salingaros answered, because of the modernist paradigm, not for any basic need – it’s just an image and a specific will to form, an intolerant one of the surroundings and the culture and history of the place.

Figure 9: An anti-pattern: the New Acropolis Museum against the former military hospital (Source: Author, 2009).
What does this so-called modernist paradigm include? The emphasis on the *contemporariness* of the outcome was mentioned. It is coming from the obsession with chronology – each year (month, day?) one must have one’s own style, so that everyone the next year (month, day?) could distinguish when this or that thing was made. It is a sort of historicism turned on its head: while the traditional supporter of historicism in architecture (let us say in the XIXth century) borrowed from forms already discovered (because their period identification was less important for him), modernist historicism places the emphasis on the first period of existence of a phenomenon. Thanks to modernist historicism of art historians, authors of disharmonious artefacts were integrated into the *history of art*. The American urban historian Donald Olsen wrote in his famous book *The City as a Work of Art: “The antihistoricist practice … is based on philosophically historicist assumptions.”* (Olsen, 1986, p. 308; Michl, 2013) The Czech conservationist Břetislav Štorm mocked “the art-history science” in his essay on *Art and Art History*:

*It can be said without exaggeration that … dating is the only joy in the ascetic life of art historians. Such joy and pride gushes from the paragraph where the scholar in question arrives at the correct date… It is a certain kind of spiritual sport.* (Štorm, 1941)

Let us leave it an open question, how much the fixation on time is connected to the religious orientation, or more precisely, to the absence of its Christian form.

4. The emphasis on *concept* (which temporally precedes the design and its realization, and which cannot be seen) differentiates the logic of supporters of the New Acropolis Museum from the logic of opponents. The latter group considers what is basic is that which can be seen, or respectively that which they must, willy nilly, look at (above all, the façades). The authoritative idealism of the initiates is thus confronted with the aesthetic pragmatism of the public. Part of the former is also consideration of buildings as models on the drafting board. Supporters do not mind that a building facing busy pedestrian zone is missing any interesting detail at the critical eye level, for they are delighted with the building’s ground plan.

Adversaries and advocates of the project did not manage to find common ground and it is unlikely they ever will. Both groups are working with very different ideas of successful architecture, using different terminology, modes of interpretation, and *styles* for processing and evaluating information. Traditionalists and modernists assume here their typical positions. The former do not care about the concept unless it leads to a harmonious result, while the latter praise the intellectual gesture and the audacity of the project and regard evaluation based on the façade’s appearance as superficial and populist. Traditionalists demand elegantly structured space (a building seamlessly filling the empty space); the modernists demand clearly visualized time (an expression of the *Zeitgeist*). Emotional factors enter the game and rationality loses its last chance for success: collective frustration and the hope of overcoming it; faith in the redressing of historic wrongs; closing the gap with the West.

Professional criticism follows a similar duality. Modernist critics (often also historians) see themselves primarily as interpreters of the architect’s (allegedly original) conception. Conversely, non-modernist critics imagine themselves as well-educated visitors whose refined taste comes from knowledge of the historical canon.

5. In any case, in Athens two museological concepts collided: the museum of buildings (a protected heritage site), and the museum of transferred artifacts. The non-adaptive design of the new building disintegrates and obscures the aesthetic relations between individual parts of the city, which in and of itself constitutes a kind of contextual exhibition and is simultaneously a complex work of art – *civic art*. Modernist thinking abandoned this idea of a city, just like modernist
museology abandoned the idea of contextual exhibitions in order to intensify the aesthetic effect of individual artifacts, in the name of some metaphysical truth and not in favor of the educative function of the environment.

However, just as creating a contextual exhibition in a museum does not cease to be creating – writing a textbook on the truth, in no way a copy or an image of truth itself – neither does the town monument reservation show how it really was. The case of Athens is striking. Classical Athens was beyond a holy mount and the public space densely and unrestrainedly built up (Tung, 2001, pp. 249–250), not as it is presented to tourists today – quite paradoxically – in the manner of a Le Courbusier’s city in greenery. Those interested in history of places are constrained from the start. Their knowledge and understanding are shaped by the contemporary constellation of aesthetic and political preferences. This decides how the past is presented – and consequently what image of that past will be evoked in the viewer.

German, American and Greek archaeologists and architects in the XIXth and XXth centuries created a new artwork from the ruins of ancient Athens and their imitations. Athens’ archaeological park fulfills the assessment of a museum and at the same time living, or contemporary, art. The fact that Athenians supporting Tschumi’s new building do not perceive this could support arguments for their naïveté and manipulability. Nevertheless, the diligent researcher is rather forced to question: what exactly has changed in their perception? Athenians abolished their city as a total work of art roughly half a century ago. Now they have disrupted an image of the archaeological park; they supplemented it by an aquarium for its sculptural details. There is no question that the valuable originals would be damaged if left to remain in the open air. The problem is that their replacement home visually collides with their original home. It is as if one erected a concrete orang-utan run in the middle of the Indonesian jungle [Fig. 10].

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Figure 10: Athens from the Philopappos Hill: on the left the Acropolis, on the right the New Acropolis Museum (Source: Author, 2009).


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