The Value of Transforming: 
Academic building, Faculty of Arts, 
Oriente campus

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An intervention on a heritage building can either increase or ruin its value. Architecture has that power. The fear of affecting the value of what already exists leads many to opt for mimesis. However, such an obvious alternative is not the only one. This building shows that, by means of a careful interpretation of the existing, an intervention can add value to heritage without the need to formally duplicate it.

The intensification of building that is proper of architecture supposes an increase of value in the built environment. The notion of ‘enhancing the value’ is often used in relation to heritage and cultural assets. This underscores the importance of identifying and showing what, in one sense or another, we value from a built-up setting. On the other hand, expanding and completing a Neo-Romanesque complex built in the mid-1920s requires careful interpretation. As has been noted by Gadamer (1997 [1960]), to interpret is not so much about imposing our subjective appreciation of things, but rather about discovering the latent possibilities within them.

The commission for the academic building of the Faculty of Arts was part of a larger plan: to transform an area of the campus into a public program center. It was requested, in this context, to gather in a single building the offices belonging to the professors of the three
schools that make up the Faculty. To do so, a plot was chosen at the end of the campus, one on which Juan Lyon and Luis Otaegui – authors of the original project – had placed a volume that was never built.

The point of departure was precisely that unbuilt pavilion, from which position, bays, and measures proper of the grid regulating the entire campus were adopted. The articulation between the two stories of the old building and the four corresponding to the new one, forced to partially sink the planned volume in order to give continuity to the second-floor circulation. Still, the surface needed required generating a double bay on the first level. The access circulation between these two volumes added to the campus an entirely new element of composition, as Guadet (1905) would say. The same thing happened with the North-South connection that, by going under the building, links the courtyard with the sports area, offering an unprecedented visual
and dimensional extension to the complex. The upper terrace crowning the volume contrasts with the metal gable roofs that dominate the campus, but offers in exchange the possibility of a dialogue with them and the surrounding landscape, enabling, from the heights, a very densely occupied interior space to breath.

In material terms, a sympathetic position was taken towards the original building, which shows – for one of the first times in Chile – the pairing of reinforced concrete and brick masonry that would become essential in the following decades. However, the relationship between both materials – originally one of contiguity – was devised in the form of two overlapping layers that embrace each other generating between them a ventilated, isolated chamber. This favors the building’s thermal performance and allows to adequately solve its structure. Inspired thus by the thickness of the old Neo-Romanesque walls, a construction system with a double wall was proposed, still not frequent in Chile.

The proposal has been conceived as a simple perimeter structure container subdivided by removable partitions with maximum rationality. This allows the building to easily adapt to future functional
requirements. The size and position of the internal circulation allow differentiating each of the plants.

In its silence, its discretion, its material and formal empathy with the context, the building seems to have always been there. However, the double-level patio offers unprecedented possibilities, including that of generating an improvised scene. While maintaining the strict set of measures and sizes imposed by the authors on the original building, the facades offer a degree of randomness that arises not from a formal will, but from managing the requirements of its interior layout. These were the latent possibilities valued by the proposal. In its way, it highlights the extent to which the value of preserving can be mediated by a transformative action capable of granting a new vitality to the building. ARQ
Elevación norte / North elevation
E. / S. 1:250

Elevación sur / South elevation
E. / S. 1:250

Corte AA / AA section
E. / S. 1:250
EDIFICIO ACADÉMICO DE LA FACULTAD DE ARTES EN CAMPUS ORIENTE
ACADEMIC BUILDING, FACULTY OF ARTS, ORIENTE CAMPUS

Arquitectos / Architects: Fernando Pérez Oyarzun, José Quintanilla Chala
Colaboradores / Collaborators: Equipo dese - Mónica Flores, Luis Lucero, Carolina Rodríguez
Ubicación / Location: Av. Jaime Guzmán Errázuriz 3300, Providencia, Santiago de Chile
Cliente / Client: Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile
Ingeniería / Engineering: Sergio Contreras y Asociados

Construcción / Construction: Empresa ghg sa
Eficiencia energética / Energy Efficiency: Waldo Bustamante
Materiales / Materials: Hormigón, ladrillo, vidrio / Concrete, brick, glass
Presupuesto / Budget: US$ 1.780/m²
Superficie construida / Built surface: 1.763 m²
Año de proyecto / Project year: 2013-2014
Año de construcción / Construction year: 2014-2017
Fotografías / Photographs: Philippe Blanc, Juan Purcell, José Quintanilla
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Bibliografía / Bibliography